Collaborative Practices Between Law Enforcement and Secondary School Administrators Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

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Abstract
The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the level of collaboration and preparation between school administrators and police officers relating to trauma-informed practices with secondary school-aged students, including those students with traumatic histories. This study explored the perspectives of police officers and school administrators when working to address disciplinary situations of secondary school students. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) "Four Rs" of trauma—realization, recognition, response, and resisting retraumatization—were used as a framework to inform the study. Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews of secondary school principals and the corresponding police officers affiliated with their schools. Three major findings emerged from the study. First, principals and police work together differently in suburban, rural, and alternative education settings. Second, training related to trauma is absent in preservice learning and limited in existing training opportunities. Third, school administrators and police officers operate in distinct roles with principals assuming sole disciplinary responsibility and police acting as a mentor/counselor. This study provides recommendations for future research. The study also includes practice recommendations relating to collaboration around student needs, providing comprehensive trauma-informed training, and formalizing roles and responsibilities of administrators and police officers in schools.

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Collaborative Practices Between Law Enforcement and Secondary School Administrators

Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

By

Ellen Howe

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Marie Cianca, Ed.D.

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Donna Riter, Ed.D.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

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Dedication

I first must thank my remarkable dissertation committee, Dr. Marie Cianca and Dr. Donna Riter for their support and guidance throughout this process. Dr. Cianca’s constant calm and push for excellence was a driving force in this journey. Her kind words and faith in me helped propel me along the doctoral path. Dr. Riter’s insight and experience were crucial to completion of the study. I had the privilege of attending Dr. Riter’s workshops many years ago in my first years of teaching. She was incredibly influential on my career and having this opportunity to work with her was amazing.

To my cohort members, you truly are fabulous! A special shoutout to Amanda, Carm, Diane, and Theresa…thank you for the camaraderie, words of encouragement when they were desperately needed, and many laughs!

I wouldn’t be the person I am today without my parents. While they’re no longer with us, the lessons they taught me and the work ethic they instilled in me were essential to my success. It is because of them that I remain a lifelong learner and I know they would be so proud of this accomplishment.

Thanks, love, and appreciation go to my partner, Steve. He provided constant, unwavering support and believed in me without question. His work in law enforcement and our professional partnership when I was a school principal planted the initial seeds of thought that led to this study. It would not have been possible to do this without him and I am eternally grateful to have him in my life.
My daughters, Lacy and Morgan, are a constant source of pride for me and I thank them for their patience and understanding during the times I was distracted, in class, doing schoolwork, or in any way absent to them during this journey. They are my whole world and amaze me every day.

To the men and women of law enforcement and to school administrators everywhere, thank you for the hard work you do to support communities, families, and students. Navigating our world today is complicated and the responsibility you bear is extraordinary. The commitment and dedication you give to your work is seen and appreciated.
Biographical Sketch

Ellen Howe is currently the Assistant Director of Human Resources at Monroe #1 BOCES. Ms. Howe’s prior professional experience includes classroom teaching and school-building-level administration. Ms. Howe attended Monroe Community College from 1993-1995 earning an Associate degree in Liberal Arts. She then attended State University of New York (SUNY) at Geneseo from 1995 to 1997 graduating with a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Elementary Education and Special Education. She continued her education at SUNY Geneseo and graduated with a Master of Sciences degree in Advanced Teaching in 2004. Ms. Howe subsequently attended SUNY Brockport earning a Certificate in Advanced Study in Educational Administration in 2008.

Ms. Howe came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2019 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Howe pursued her research in the Collaborative Practices Between Law Enforcement and Secondary School Administrators Through a Trauma-Informed Lens under the direction of Dr. Marie Cianca and Dr. Donna Riter and received the Ed.D. degree in 2021.
Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the level of collaboration and preparation between school administrators and police officers relating to trauma-informed practices with secondary school-aged students, including those students with traumatic histories. This study explored the perspectives of police officers and school administrators when working to address disciplinary situations of secondary school students. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) “Four Rs” of trauma—realization, recognition, response, and resisting re-traumatization—were used as a framework to inform the study. Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews of secondary school principals and the corresponding police officers affiliated with their schools. Three major findings emerged from the study. First, principals and police work together differently in suburban, rural, and alternative education settings. Second, training related to trauma is absent in pre-service learning and limited in existing training opportunities. Third, school administrators and police officers operate in distinct roles with principals assuming sole disciplinary responsibility and police acting as a mentor/counselor. This study provides recommendations for future research. The study also includes practice recommendations relating to collaboration around student needs, providing comprehensive trauma-informed training, and formalizing roles and responsibilities of administrators and police officers in schools.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Police departments across the United States are currently responding to increased societal attention and debate regarding their policies and practices. Communities are seriously examining the issues with police response and decision-making when interacting with minorities and people of color (Sanchez, 2020). The appropriateness of police training is also being examined, as well as the possibility of a potentially negative influence of law enforcement in school settings. As a result, many communities have responded to recent events by calling for the defunding of police departments and the removal of all officers from school grounds (Belsha, 2020; Goldstein, 2020). Despite the debate regarding police practices and their relevance in schools, the history of police in educational settings is rooted in the premise of having increased safety and security for students and faculty and making provisions for education opportunities in the community.

Increased Law Enforcement in Schools

Recent data indicate an estimated 17,000–20,000 law enforcement officers work in United States schools (Watts, 2019). Multiple factors have contributed to a rise in police presence in schools, including school shootings such as those that occurred in Columbine in 1999 and Sandy Hook in 2012. These events created a sense of urgency regarding school safety, and they fundamentally altered the way schools operate (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). After the shooting in Columbine, the physical safety of school buildings gained attention. Many schools locked doors and restricted access, video surveillance increased, and metal detectors became more common (Chrusciel et al.,
In the wake of the Sandy Hook incident, President Barack Obama issued an executive order incentivizing schools to hire school resource officers (The White House, 2013).

The increase in school policing, however, predates these two events. As early as the 1980s, law enforcement officers adopted a more educational role in schools. This was partially the result of the 1986 passage of the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (McKenna & Pollock, 2014). Adding to this were the increased school-based drug-prevention programs developed such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program. DARE was originally a partnership between the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District, but it quickly spread to all states (McKenna & Pollock, 2014). For most schools, DARE was the first experience with an armed, uniformed officer present in the school building (Watts, 2019). Despite inconsistent reviews of the DARE program and the subsequent reductions in the initiative, law enforcement presence in the schools remained (Lucas, 2008).

The Safe Schools Act of 1994 also increased police presence in schools (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010). This act allocated federal funds to schools that had severe crime problems. The funding was intended for schools to hire security or law enforcement officers thereby promoting school-police partnerships (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010). The objectives of the Safe Schools Act correlated with the National Education Goals of 1993. Specifically, the act was linked to Goal 6 that stated that all schools in America would be free of drugs and violence by the year 2000 (National Education Goals Panel, 1993).

Since the passing of legislation specific to school safety and officer availability, the role of law enforcement in schools has continued to evolve. Community policing
initiatives and an expanded presence of school resource officers are both examples of the targeted shift to increase connections between law enforcement and educational settings.

**Community Policing**

Community policing is one program that seeks to narrow the gap between law enforcement and schools. Community policing has become a prevalent initiative in creating connections between law enforcement, schools, and communities. The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) was established in 1994 (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; McKenna & Pollock, 2014). The program was the result of the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. This act appropriated funds to develop and expand crime prevention programs including increased prison spending, improved grant assistance focused on domestic and workplace violence, and an increase in offenses that qualified for the death penalty (Wade, 2017). The COPS office assumed the task of aiding local law enforcement agencies by hiring over 100,000 officers. The intent of this historic shift was to encourage community policing practices and establish connections with the public (Wade, 2017).

The philosophy of community policing focuses on organizational strategies to support the systematic development of partnerships and problem-solving techniques. Accomplishment of that goal allows community partners to “proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime” (COPS, 2014, p. 1). An example of community policing adopted by an entire department occurred in Camden, New Jersey. In 2010, the Camden Police Department faced significant budget cuts resulting in half of the police force being laid off. In the absence of replacement support for the community, a spike in violent crime
occurred. In 2012, Camden was ranked the most dangerous city in America evidenced by a murder rate more than 18 times the national average (Breslauer et al., 2020). The Camden Police Department was formally disbanded in 2013 and replaced with a larger, but lower-paid, force. The police chief asserted that all officers would interact with residents in a peaceful manner and build relationships within the community. This shift, paired with explicit policies relating to low-level offenses and use-of-force techniques resulted in a 63% decline in homicides by 2019 (Breslauer et al., 2020). Recent concerns regarding inappropriate police responses and uncertainty about the continued role of police in schools have led to more law enforcement agencies and communities actively pursuing community policing relationships (Rockrohr, 2020).

When applied to a school environment, a community policing approach draws from the basic assumptions seen through its community-oriented lens. These beliefs include focusing on proactive strategies, repairing communication with the public, and engaging in situational problem-solving (Higgins et al., 2019). In the late 1990s, the mission of the COPS program shifted to include more oversight of efforts to place officers in schools (Wade, 2017). Federal funding supported the addition of over 6,500 law enforcement personnel to schools by 2005 (Coon & Travis, 2012). The additional funding and commitment of the COPS program led to increased momentum of officers being specifically assigned to schools. These officers are typically referred to as school resource officers (SROs) and their prevalence solidified the merging of law enforcement with schools (Coon & Travis, 2012).
**SROs – School Resource Officers**

SROs significantly help to meet the requests and needs for a law enforcement presence in schools. SROs’ focus includes addressing crime and drug activity that is occurring in the vicinity of the schools and in educating school-aged children regarding crime prevention and safety (Javdani, 2019; Theriot, 2009; Thomas et al., 2013). Additionally, SROs ideally develop or expand community justice initiatives for students. Closely related to community-oriented policing, community justice projects in schools include specifically involving the students in crime prevention and justice activities (Karp, 1999). SROs also train students in conflict resolution and restorative justice (Watts, 2019). Through these approaches, SROs build relationships and promote trust with the students. Building relationships allows the officers to develop a better understanding of the students’ cultural backgrounds and daily experiences (Kubena, 2019). Additionally, students are more likely to report crimes when trust has been established with the SROs who exist and when students’ perception of safety is increased (Kubena, 2019).

There are several definitions for an SRO with some common elements. Sources of the definitions collectively agree that SROs engage in community-oriented policing (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; McKenna & Pollock, 2014). The sources also agree that the primary objective of an SRO is to work collaboratively with the schools and the community-based organizations. Comprehensive functions of an SRO are generally understood through a “triad model” (Canady et al., 2012; Chrusciel et al., 2015; McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Thomas et al., 2013). The three roles that structure the SRO position in the triad model are as educator, counselor/mentor, and law enforcer. Duties
associated with each of these unique positions form the foundation for an SRO’s responsibilities and impact.

The first explicit role of SROs in the triad model is that of educator. The SRO educator role was widely introduced and solidified during the DARE initiative (McKenna & White, 2018). This role has since expanded from instruction solely focused on drug-use prevention to include the expectation that the SRO teaches staff, students, parents, and community members about a variety of topics. For example, the SRO may teach staff by providing in-service trainings related to crime and justice issues. SROs may also provide training to focus on crime prevention and intervention (Javdani, 2019; Theriot, 2009; Thomas et al., 2013). SROs can also work with school administrators to teach and provide resources specific to environmental design relating to building safety and security perspectives. For example, topics might include surveillance and building-access control. Focus may also be placed on emergency preparedness and crisis management. Instruction for students can encompass gang resistance education, anti-bullying messages, as well as drug awareness and prevention. Information about criminal investigation and careers in law enforcement may also be included. Information on topics provided to staff and students can similarly be provided by the SRO to community members (Thomas et al., 2013).

The second SRO role in the triad model is that of counselor/mentor. This role expands the scope of the SRO’s impact in schools. In this capacity, the officer guides students on a multitude of law-related issues (McKenna & White, 2018). SROs are available to assist students with legal issues, and they may offer advice relating to community services and resources (Fisher & Hennessy, 2015; McKenna & White, 2018).
Relationship development is the key aspect of the counselor/mentor role. Building rapport through formal and informal interactions may allow SROs to identify at-risk youth and provide early intervention (Thomas et al., 2013).

The SRO law enforcer role is the third element of the triad model. As it applies to officers working in schools, this role most closely aligns with traditional police responsibilities. Enforcement includes campus patrol, crime prevention, and handling criminal incidents. Protection from and response to threats of violence are also key components of the law enforcer role. An added benefit of the physical presence of an officer on a school campus is a decreased response time to critical incidents that occur on school grounds (Thomas et al., 2013). Paired with the protective obligations of SROs, the law enforcer role focuses on the application of the law and legal discipline for those violating the law (McKenna & Pollock, 2014; McKenna & White, 2018).

As school law enforcement interactions and presence become more common, responsibility for discipline may shift to the SRO—even if an infraction is not considered criminal in nature. Consequently, a minor school altercation may be addressed by the police as a criminal offense (Theriot, 2009). Therefore, in a school context, the law enforcer role of the SRO triad model contributes to the perception that student behavior is more frequently criminal than it might be without a police presence in the schools (Coon & Travis, 2012; Fisher & Hennessy, 2015; McKenna & White, 2018). Prior to a police presence in schools, school administrators were primarily responsible for deciding the disciplinary action for most student infractions. However, through the decision-making of school administrators or the role in which SROs see themselves, a law enforcement presence in schools may lead to a formal school discipline process involving more
frequent engagement with the criminal justice system (McKenna & Pollock, 2014). As a result of this shift in response to infractions, “the presence of police officers has increased student arrests on school grounds between 300% and 500% annually” (Mallett, 2016, p. 20). The majority of these arrests are for nonviolent offenses such as unruly behavior or disobeying school rules (Mallett, 2016).

**Decreased Tolerance for Threats**

Increased presence of law enforcement in schools in the 1990s coincided with less acceptance of student misbehavior at the state and federal level, evidenced by increased legislation and restrictive policies (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). One legislative example of decreased tolerance is the Gun-Free Schools Act passed by Congress in 1994 (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The legislation required states to mandate both a 1-year school expulsion and referral to the juvenile justice system for any student found in possession of a gun on school grounds. Federal funding was contingent upon states’ implementation of the act. Amendments to the bill expanded the weapons expulsion requirement from guns, specifically, to any instrument that could be used as a weapon (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The ambiguous definition of “weapons” often caused unexpected results. For example, a seventh-grader brought a homemade rocket to school that was constructed from a potato chip canister, and he was suspended for 4 months for violating the school’s weapons policy. Another example is the high school junior who accidentally hit a school personnel member with a paper clip launched with a rubber band. The student was arrested, spent the day in jail, and was expelled from school (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). An additional example of extreme response to a perceived weapon involved a 10-year-old girl who found a small knife her
mother had placed in her lunchbox. The child immediately gave the knife to her teacher but was expelled from school for weapon possession (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Despite inconsistent interpretations, as the previous examples demonstrate, all states were compliant with the requirements of the Gun-Free School Act within 2 years of passage of the legislation (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

The shift in school policy to a more punitive response is commonly referred to as “zero tolerance” and is now generally understood to be an ineffective response mechanism (Fabelo et al., 2011; Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Mallett, 2016; Monahan et al., 2014). This education policy forced a response from schools that created more of a demand for police intervention. Zero tolerance policies mandated strict predetermined consequences for any student behavior deemed improper or unsafe (Mallett, 2016). As zero tolerance evolved, discipline for possession of weapons changed from specifically focusing on weapons to including less severe infractions (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Suspension or expulsion occurred for behavior such as fighting, assault, indecent exposure, and destruction of property. Zero tolerance policies were also applied to nonviolent student behaviors such as verbal harassment, disobedience, obscene language, and truancy (Mallett, 2016). Therefore, the zero tolerance policies sent a message that all offenses, no matter how minor, would be punished severely (Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

Zero tolerance contributed to an educational environment that relied on extreme responses to student misbehavior regardless of the evidence suggesting the negative impact on students. While it was believed that a more punitive approach would deter student misbehavior, the opposite occurred. As school suspensions and expulsions
increased so, too, did student misconduct, which lead to school failure and recidivism (Mallett, 2016).

Research indicates that zero tolerance policies resulted in multiple negative outcomes for students (Fabelo et al., 2011; Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Mallett, 2016; Monahan et al., 2014). A single suspension or expulsion doubles the risk that a student will repeat a grade (Fabelo et al., 2011). Being retained a grade is a strong predictor of dropping out of school thereby having a negative impact on successful high school completion (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Mallett, 2016). Additionally, a correlation exists between suspension and/or expulsion from school and increased subsequent negative behaviors including drug use and future suspension (Monahan et al., 2014). These forms of school discipline increased exponentially with the introduction of zero tolerance policies and an increased presence of law enforcement in the schools (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

Predetermined consequences for student behaviors as dictated by zero tolerance policies do not take into consideration individual student needs or backgrounds. For example, suspensions and expulsions are often implemented in response to first-time infractions (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Furthermore, school administrators and law enforcement may not consider the motivation behind the behavior or the history of the student involved. The student may, in fact, pose little to no threat of harm to other individuals or the school community. However, imposed discipline disregards factors such as mental health needs, developmental delays, cognitive deficits, and traumatic histories (Mallett, 2016). This failure to factor in individual student needs reflects two areas of concern for students. First, administrator and law enforcement
responses may be disconnected from the evidence-based best practices for student interactions. Second, educators may feel compelled to relinquish decision-making to law enforcement even with a recognition that their response may not be desirable. Administrators and law enforcement’s lack of understanding of the educational and developmental approach to students may particularly impact students with potential trauma exposure (Mallett, 2016).

When paired with zero tolerance policies in secondary schools and a lack of understanding by police officers, responses to trauma manifestations may result in negative outcomes for students. Trauma may be experienced as situational, such as a natural disaster or school shooting, or it can be chronic such as ongoing emotional, physical, or sexual abuse (Howard, 2019). Regardless of the cause of the trauma, the manifestations of those experiences can be profound for school-aged children. These students are frequently misidentified with diagnoses such as attention deficit disorder or oppositional defiant disorder (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). Children who have experienced trauma also may demonstrate maladaptive behaviors and responses including the inability to emotionally self-regulate or relate to others in an appropriate manner (Howard, 2019). Therefore, when police interact with youth who are engaging in negative behaviors, regardless of the underlying reasons, they may utilize a strict law enforcement response. This response may result in the juvenile justice system involvement. The long-range implications of involvement in the juvenile justice system are overwhelmingly negative (Ko et al., 2008).
Trauma History and Juvenile Justice Involvement

A correlation exists between a history of trauma and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Branson et al., 2017; DeCandia & Guarino, 2015; Gill et al., 2016; Ko et al., 2008). Research indicates that 75-90% of youths entering the juvenile justice system have encountered at least one traumatic event in their lifetime (Ko et al., 2008; Lujan & Fanniff, 2019). Specific categories of negative childhood experiences were delineated and documented in the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study (Felitti, 1998) conducted from 1995 to 1997 at Kaiser Permanente’s San Diego Health Appraisal Clinic. These categories of negative events included abuse (i.e., psychological, physical, and sexual) and household dysfunction (i.e., substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, and criminal behavior/incarcerated family member). The results of the study indicated a correlation between childhood abuse and negative experiences with long-term adult risk factors such as health concerns, quality of life, and mortality (Felitti et al., 1998). Recent research indicates that when considering the lifetime prevalence of abuse or neglect for children up to the age of 18, one in four children are exposed to these negative experiences (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Juvenile offenders were 13 times less likely to report zero ACEs than the respondents in the seminal ACE study. Rather, these justice-involved youth reported experiencing four or more ACEs prior to entering the juvenile justice system (Baglivio & Epps, 2016).

Multiple departments comprise the juvenile justice system and include law enforcement agencies, courts, schools, and detention centers (Donisch et al., 2016). The complexity of the juvenile justice system contributes to the likelihood that interactions with trauma-exposed youth may be inconsistent and ineffective. The goals and desired
outcomes of these service systems are often in opposition to each other (Ko et al., 2008).
For example, schools have been identified as an ideal entry point for necessary mental
health supports for youth with traumatic histories. However, a police viewpoint may
focus on strict enforcement of rules with little attention to trauma exposure and
manifestation (Na & Gottfredson, 2013).

Research supports the probability of increased referrals to the juvenile justice
system when police are more actively present in the schools (Javdani, 2019; Thomas et
al., 2013). Adolescent behavior may be criminalized when viewed through a law
enforcement lens versus a trauma-informed lens—despite potential unseen causes for that
behavior such as traumatic history or mental health needs (Javdani, 2019; McKenna et
al., 2014; Theriot, 2009). This punitive perspective is in opposition to a developmental
and educational focus on student needs (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016). Interactions with
police and subsequent juvenile justice involvement may also result in further trauma
responses and re-traumatization (Ko et al., 2008).

Re-traumatization occurs when an individual is reminded, consciously or
unconsciously, of a past traumatic event. The re-traumatization is likely triggered by an
incident that replicates the dynamics of the original trauma (SAMHSA, n.d.; Zgoda et al.,
2016). When this occurs, a stressful environment is created that interferes with the
recovery of the trauma-exposed individual (SAMHSA, 2014). While this re-
traumatization may be inadvertent, it is possibly driven by the law enforcement lens
through which youth with traumatic histories are viewed. Juveniles in secondary schools
may respond to trauma and re-trauma in a manner that can be considered hostile or
inappropriate. Because of this response, law enforcement may approach these students
with a perception that something is wrong with the child, warranting a punitive
disciplinary response (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). This lack of understanding may
partially be caused by an absence of collaborative practices and trauma-informed
educational opportunities between the systems serving youth, including schools and law
enforcement.

**Systems Collaboration**

One approach to promoting shared practices between law enforcement and the
schools is incorporating multisystems collaboration. The need for more collaborative
practices is evidenced by the development of organizations with common goals for
supporting youth, such as The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).
NCTSN is a group of treatment and research centers from across the United States,
founded in 2000, committed to providing a comprehensive approach across service
sectors to support the success of students who have experienced trauma (NCTSN, 2016).
This network is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Administration (SAMHSA)’s Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). The purpose
of this group is to integrate best practices from clinical research with the practical
knowledge of community service providers (Hanson & Lang, 2016; Ko et al., 2008).
NCTSN (2016) asserts the need for all providers in child- and family-serving systems to
consistently recognize the impact of traumatic stress and respond according to established
best practice.

Recommendations for a service system approach to trauma have been further
developed in the research. Ko et al. (2008) posited that there is a widespread need for a
systematic approach for evidence-based strategies within systems to meet the complex
needs of childhood trauma victims. Aligned with the mission of NCTSN, research supports an increased focus of service systems on awareness and sensitivity to the potential impact of trauma (DeCandia & Guarino, 2015; Hanson & Lang, 2016). This goal has not been met due to a lack of formal trauma-informed training opportunities and curricula for both school personnel and law enforcement officers (Ko et al., 2008). As resources emerge related to trauma, service systems will need to develop mutual recognition of the importance and application of the information across service systems.

**School Administration Mindset**

A potential barrier to effective systems collaboration for secondary schools and law enforcement is school administrators’ approaches to student discipline. School administrators historically relied on traditional discipline and punishment, such as suspension and expulsion, to address student misconduct. These responses to negative actions were often the only means attempted to modify behavior with the intended outcome that future adverse conduct would be mitigated (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2016). Increased police presence in schools and adherence to zero tolerance policies exacerbated the use of exclusionary discipline in secondary schools (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). However, in recent years, some school administrators’ responses have evolved to incorporate more innovative approaches. These techniques include approaching student behavior through a trauma-informed lens and engaging in restorative practices. Methods, such as restorative practices, involve engaging an understanding that student behavior may be the result of underlying trauma. These practices focus on repairing relationships that may have been harmed by the misconduct (Fallot & Harris, 2008; Rainbolt et al., 2019).
The evolution of potential responses to negative student behavior has created a challenge for school administrators. Individuals in administrative positions may have divergent opinions on the effectiveness of police in schools and the appropriateness of rehabilitative approaches (Collier et al., 2018). Some administrators cite the presence of police officers in secondary schools as the most effective safety measure (Chrusciel et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2016). Some may believe that the student perception of zero tolerance approaches and police involvement has a deterrent effect on student misbehavior. However, evidence suggests that administrators do not uniformly prefer more punitive actions. Rather, some administrators have indicated importance in engaging in collaborative, trauma-informed measures (Collier et al., 2018). As a result, contradictory approaches to student misconduct have emerged.

Secondary school administrators face an additional challenge when considering available strategies and systems to address childhood trauma in the school setting. School systems often implement multitiered approaches to address behavioral needs such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and response to intervention (RTI) (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2016; Plumb et al., 2016). These systems utilize interventions that become progressively more individualized or intense depending on a student’s response. Students’ emotional and behavioral needs often take precedence in these approaches, but consideration is not given to the underlying cause of the exhibited behaviors or the impact of trauma on a student (Plumb et al., 2016). As a result, school administrators may be ill-equipped to support students with traumatic histories effectively and comprehensively. Therefore, administrators may resort to traditional discipline practices (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2016).
Balancing the reliance on police and zero tolerance policies for school safety with the development of a trauma-informed partnership with law enforcement may cause confusion for administrators and police when working in tandem to serve students with traumatic histories. Additionally, administrators may convey contradictory intentions when they utilize intervention programs that do not necessarily meet the needs of students and consequently revert to more punitive measures.

**Law Enforcement Training**

Potentially unclear expectations from secondary school administrators may be paired with insufficient police training relating to working in schools. Even with a significant increase of a police presence in secondary schools, training provided to officers does not necessarily focus on effective youth interactions (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). Police academy curricula typically concentrate on traditional subjects such as firearms training, defensive tactics, arrest procedures, and officer safety. Little to no attention is given to best practices for working with youth. Other topics frequently absent in police academy training include problem-solving and peer-group conflict mediation. In matters relating to juvenile justice and policing in school environments, there is a significant gap in the instruction provided to officers (Buckley et al., 2013; Chappell, 2007; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016).

While only one state mandates a juvenile justice training component for recruits in police academy training, 44 states offer some level of juvenile justice training. However, for most police academies, the percentage of time spent on this training averaged 1% of all academy hours (Buckley et al., 2013). Additional information on child development and behavior is not evident in police training topics (Kubena, 2019).
When child-specific training occurs, officers primarily learn to interact with youth in the role of victim or perpetrator (Thurau & Or, 2019). This perspective does not translate to the role officers must adopt in the school setting. Information regarding training specific to trauma is absent in existing literature.

Evidence suggests that SROs do not necessarily receive training more relevant to their role in school settings beyond the training that a road patrol officer receives. Only 12 states mandate SRO-specific training beyond typical police academy training. That training, though, does not focus on evidence-based interventions for youth. Rather, it may primarily consist of responding to situations such as hostage or active-shooter scenarios (Kubena, 2019). The lack of standardized training that includes knowledge and preparation for working with youth contributes to the likelihood that SROs will respond to students in an authoritative manner regardless of the potential ineffectiveness of that approach (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016).

New York State (NYS) has limited mandatory requirements for the training of SROs. State education law includes a statute that school safety officers should be adequately trained to de-escalate potentially violent situations and engage in nonviolent conflict resolution (NYS Regulation By Boards Of Education Of Conduct On School District Property, NY Educ L § 2801-A, 2018). However, specific components of that expectation are not articulated. Beyond the statute in NYS education law, there is no mandatory SRO training or curriculum beyond active-shooter training and school crisis planning (Thurau & Or, 2019). Rather, standards for law enforcement youth interactions are typically developed at the local police department level and may lack input from the state, community, parents, educators, or youth (McKitten & Thurau, 2017).
In NYS, SROs have the opportunity to optionally attend a 1-week Basic School Resource Officers Course offered by the State of New York Police Juvenile Officers Association (n.d.). However, the core topics identified in the course syllabus focus primarily on the history of school-based policing, school law updates, SRO roles and responsibilities, legal aspects of school-based policing, crime prevention strategies, and school violence (State of New York Police Juvenile Officers Association, n.d.). Based on this research, there is an apparent lack of focus on children’s developmental needs or the identification of potential traumatic experiences and responses.

**Problem Statement**

There is a critical need for information regarding how police and secondary school personnel collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of students—particularly those with traumatic histories. Increased reliance on law enforcement in schools has led to unintended consequences for students who have experienced trauma and for the schools serving them. Attention needs to be given to the level of collaboration between officers and secondary school personnel relating to the integration of police in school settings. Without established partnerships, a disconnect may develop between law enforcement and school personnel operating together in a school environment. Potential discord can result in inconsistent integration of law enforcement into school environments. As a result, it is difficult for law enforcement and schools to approach students in a collaborative and cohesive manner. Therefore, decision-making and interactions by law enforcement may differ from school expectations resulting in varying responses (Olafson et al., 2016). Multisystem collaboration promotes the success of students who have experienced trauma (NCTSN, 2016). However, there is limited
information on the extent to which school police officers and secondary school administrators collaborate for a shared understanding and agreement on the SRO roles and functions within school environments (Chrusciel et al., 2015; Curran et al., 2019).

Despite the commonly accepted triad model to structure the role of SROs, ambiguity exists regarding the actual function of SROs and road patrol officers in school settings. This uncertainty exists for both the officers and the school personnel. For example, administrators and teachers may relinquish control of decision-making to officers for conduct that traditionally warranted only school discipline. Additionally, officers may resist engaging in problem-solving and interactions that expand beyond a traditional law enforcer role (Canady et al., 2012; Chrusciel et al., 2015; McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Thomas et al., 2013). Lack of clarity for both school administrators and police contributes to inconsistent and perhaps detrimental responses to students with traumatic histories.

An additional factor to be considered when examining school administrators and police working with students who have experienced trauma is a lack of training for both groups. A gap exists in law enforcement officers’ formal training for working with children with traumatic histories and the impact on their behavior patterns. Even with a police presence in schools increasing significantly in the past 20 years (Watts, 2019) and general improved awareness of trauma and its impact on middle school and high school youth, training opportunities for all law enforcement personnel have not evolved to address typical child development. This dearth of training applies to both SROs and road patrol officers (Curran et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018; Theriot, 2016; Zhang, 2019). When focusing on SROs, in particular, the qualifications,
experience, and training to be considered for the position are not delineated on any level. As a result, law enforcement responses to adolescents with traumatic histories may be contrary to established best practices of a trauma-informed approach. Similarly, for school administrators, research does not indicate structured, evidence-based training opportunities relating to student trauma. Studies specific to administrator training regarding trauma-informed practices are absent in the current literature. The shortage of training and education for both administrators and law enforcement may result in a lack of recognition or misrecognition of the indications and manifestations of trauma. Consequently, youth may then experience re-traumatization.

**Theoretical Rationale**

In examining the factors in this study, trauma theory is an appropriate lens, for multiple reasons, through which to consider the impact of law enforcement on secondary school-aged youth with traumatic histories. First, it establishes a recognized need for trauma-informed responses across a variety of service systems including law enforcement (Harris & Fallot, 2001). Second, trauma theory promotes better conceptualization of the impact of negative experiences on individuals. The evolution of trauma theory has altered an historic perception that reactions to trauma were the personal weakness of an individual (Herman, 1992). It is now understood, which is partially attributable to trauma theory, that responses to trauma are physiological and neurological (Zaleski et al., 2016). This continued evolution of researcher regarding trauma removes blame from the victims for trauma responses and supports the frameworks of trauma-informed strategies.

A key contributor to current trauma theory is SAMHSA. SAMHSA works within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to lead public health efforts to
advance the behavioral health of the nation (SAMHSA, 2014). A component of the mission of the agency is to reduce the impact of mental illness in communities. On a more particular level, SAMHSA champions the need to collaboratively address trauma across multiple sectors. Organizations that potentially interact with traumatized children include education, child welfare, law enforcement, health care, and juvenile justice. SAMHSA’s framework establishes the goal of creating a mechanism that promotes systemic communication, employing common language and expectations. Through this collaboration, personnel working within systems may develop the capacity to become trauma informed (SAMHSA, 2014).

Through a trauma theory lens, SAMHSA has developed a comprehensive framework of trauma applicable to multiple service systems. Understanding of trauma can be developed through the application of four key assumptions to trauma-informed approaches: realization, recognition, response, and resisting re-traumatization. SAMHSA (2014) refers to these principles as the “Four Rs.” This framework provides an appropriate structure to investigate the role of law enforcement personnel in schools and their understanding and interactions with trauma-affected youth.

The first of the assumptions to trauma-informed approaches is realization. Everyone in an organization should possess a basic awareness of trauma and its impact on those they serve. This realization is crucial across all service sectors, and it ideally eliminates potential barriers to appropriate interventions. The second assumption, recognition, moves from realizing trauma exists to recognizing the signs of trauma. All members of an organization may encounter an individual struggling with trauma. Therefore, strategies to aid in the recognition of trauma are important. These tools may
include screening and assessment protocols. Professional development and supervision practices may also enhance recognition of trauma across sectors (SAMHSA, 2014).

Response, the third assumption in a trauma-informed approach, entails responding to trauma in a well-informed manner. Adherence to trauma-informed principles is key in the response. These principles are safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues (SAMHSA, 2014). Accomplishment of this task is challenging because of the involvement and perspectives of many individuals, and it requires commitment by staff members in every part of an organization. The likelihood of achievement is increased by staff training, budgetary planning, and informed leadership. Further success is promoted through the establishment of a physically and psychologically safe environment paired with a culture of trust, fairness, and transparency (SAMHSA, 2014).

The fourth trauma-informed approach assumption focuses on the need to resist re-traumatization of individuals. While not intentional, the possibility exists that a toxic or stressful environment will be created for someone with previous traumatic experience (SAMHSA, 2014). Maintaining a broad understanding of potential trauma manifestations is critical. Explicit efforts to guard against re-traumatization should be a consideration of all service systems including law enforcement and schools.

SAMHSA’s (2014) framework development includes a comprehensive definition of trauma to inform the work of various service systems. Multiple descriptions of trauma exist in the literature. An important element in the understanding of trauma is the identification that it is as an emotional response to a distressing event (APA, n.d.).
Integrating this understanding with components of other definitions, the following concept from SAMHSA (2014) emerged:

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (p. 7)

When trauma is experienced, it impacts an individual’s ability to cope with stressors, to accurately perceive a threat, and to retain self-concept (van der Kolk, 2000). The trauma overwhelms ordinary human adaptations to life (Suleiman, 2008). People exposed to trauma focus on survival and self-protection, resulting in physiological responses such as numbness, withdrawal, confusion, and shock (van der Kolk, 2000). These reactions may occur when an isolated traumatic incident has occurred. However, trauma can also be chronic and prolonged. This phenomenon is referred to as “complex trauma” and it identifies an early-life onset of traumatic experience.

The implications and outcomes of complex trauma for children differ from isolated trauma (van der Kolk, 2005). Given the ongoing nature of the traumatic experience, emotional and cognitive development are negatively impacted (van der Kolk, 2005). When faced with continuing stress and trauma, children’s brains become less resilient. Consequently, they are less able to respond to situations in a positive manner regardless of the true conditions. Rather, traumatized children react to situations from a survival standpoint thereby reinforcing neural pathways that support actions, such as retreating, diminishing pathways that involve problem-solving abilities (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005).
Incorporation of SAMHSA’s (2014) definition of trauma focuses on three “E”s of trauma that are the pillar of the SAMHSA framework: event(s), experience of event(s), and effect. A trauma-inducing event or circumstances may include an actual threat of physical or psychological harm. The incidents may also consist of severe, life-threatening neglect that interferes with healthy child development. These events may occur as an isolated event or as a longer-term, repeated pattern. Then, how the event is experienced by an individual results in a response that may be classified as trauma. A variety of factors impact the classification of an event or circumstances as traumatic. These elements include how the individual assigns meaning to the event and if a physical or psychological disruption occurred. Finally, the adverse effects of an event and experience may occur immediately or onset may be delayed. Effects may include an inability to cope with typical stressors; to establish trusting relationships; to display sound cognitive processes, such as memory and attention; to self-regulate behavior; or to effectively control emotions (SAMHSA, 2014). A developed understanding of the events, experience, and effect of trauma is key to engaging in effective practices.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of collaboration and preparation of school administrators and police relating to trauma-informed practices and secondary school-aged students, including those with traumatic histories. The study examined the perspectives of police officers and school administrators when working to address disciplinary situations of secondary school students with traumatic histories. Investigation of the collaborative practices and stakeholder perspectives was examined through application of the trauma-informed framework of the four Rs: realization that
trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, response to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

The study focused on collaborative practices between schools and law enforcement and how those methods may impact students with traumatic histories. Role definition and clarity of police in schools was explored from the perspective of school administrators and police officers. Additionally, initial investigation of training opportunities provided to police and school administrators for working with students with trauma provided baseline information on knowledge of trauma. Consideration was given to road patrol officers and SROs as separate entities as their level and understanding of partnerships with schools likely differ.

**Research Questions**

This study examined collaborative practices between police officers, both road patrol and SROs, and school administrators in secondary school settings, specifically when responding to students with traumatic histories. Understanding of the roles of officers in schools was also explored from both a police officer and school administrator perspective. The study addressed these research questions:

1. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what roles do school administrators and police currently play in addressing behavioral situations with secondary students?

2. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, how do they currently collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of secondary school students, particularly those with traumatic histories?
3. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices? What are the current training opportunities and other sources of information that aid in understanding the impact of trauma on students?

Investigation of these research questions was completed through the trauma-informed lens of the Four Rs: realization that trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, response to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

Significance of the Study

Increased police presence in schools has led to many unintended consequences for students, and it may lead to negative outcomes such as school expulsion and juvenile justice system involvement. Despite efforts, such as community policing, certain school and police approaches may contribute to those negative student outcomes. Collaborative practices between school administrators and police officers serving their schools are not defined or consistent. Roles and responsibilities for police officers in schools, including SROs, can be ambiguous, leading to role confusion and a disconnect between stakeholders. Training opportunities relating to trauma and its implications for youth are lacking for school administrators and police officers.

This study examined school administrator and police officer collaborative practices as well as their understanding of trauma and trauma-informed practices. The information gained informs collaborative efforts between administrators and police officers. The outcomes may also guide potential additional training needs relating to
trauma and more appropriate trauma-informed disciplinary decisions. Further, conclusions of this study may support the practice of intervention strategies that help to change the behavior of adolescent students who are struggling. At the time of this research, intervention is often used, instead, as a means to deter the misbehavior of other students or to serve the perceived greater good of the school. Subsequently, administrator and police reactions to students with traumatic histories, who are reacting with negative behaviors, may shift from punitive and damaging results to compassionate and responsive outcomes.

**Definition of Terms**

This section contains the definition of terms used throughout the study as they are defined in the research literature. Key terms specific to this study include:

*Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)* – categories of negative events in a young person’s history that includes abuse (psychological, physical, sexual) and household dysfunction (substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, criminal behavior/incarcerated family member) that may indicate long-term, negative life outcomes such as disease risk factors and incidence, quality of life, health care utilization, and mortality (Felitti et al., 1998).

*Alternative education setting* – any nontraditional environment that provides a comprehensive secondary school curriculum particularly for students who are at risk of dropping out of school (NYSED, 2010).

*Community policing* – organizational strategies by law enforcement departments and officers to support systematic development of partnerships and problem-solving
techniques with community partners in order to “proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues” (COPS, 2014, p. 1).

**Juvenile justice system** – multiple departments that include law enforcement agencies, courts, schools, and detention centers (Donisch et al., 2016).

**Re-traumatization** – occurs when an individual is reminded, consciously or unconsciously, of a past traumatic event. The re-traumatization is likely triggered by an incident that replicates the dynamics of the original trauma (SAMHSA, n.d.; Zgoda et al., 2016).

**Rural school** – schools that have fewer than 50 students per square mile or fewer than 100 students per square mile and an enrollment of less than 2,500 (NYSED, n.d.).

**School resource officer (SRO)** – law enforcement representative who typically reports full time to one school building or one school district and has an established relationship and presence in that environment (Javdani, 2019; Theriot, 2009; Thomas et al., 2013).

**Secondary school** – educational institutions in the United States serving students in the last 7 years of statutory formal education (Grades 6–12); middle, junior high, and high schools are all considered secondary schools (Sen et al., 2005).

**Suburban school** – educational institutions that have at least 100 students per square mile or an enrollment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile (NYSED, n.d.).

**Trauma** – exposure of an individual to physical or emotional harm that may be life threatening or has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and the individual’s social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA, 2014). Trauma may be
experienced as an isolated or situational event, such as a natural disaster or school shooting, or it can be a chronic situation such as ongoing emotional, physical, or sexual abuse (Howard, 2019).

*Trauma-informed care (TIC)* – an organizational approach to negative experiences incorporating two criteria: (a) knowing past and current abuse of the individuals being served and (b) understanding the role that victimization plays in the lives of those individuals and to utilize that awareness to develop responsive service systems. TIC is characterized by five core principles: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (Fallot & Harris, 2008; Harris & Fallot, 2001; Leitch, 2017).

*Triad model* – commonly accepted framework of the functions of the SRO, which are law enforcer, counselor/mentor, and educator (Canady et al., 2012; Chrusciel et al., 2015; McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Thomas et al., 2013).

*Zero tolerance* – policies that mandate schools utilize strict predetermined consequences for any student behavior deemed improper or unsafe (Mallett, 2016).

**Chapter Summary**

The role of police in schools is being scrutinized because of the recent events relating to police practice, decision-making, and responses. The current uncertainty of the appropriateness of police in schools is a part of the evolution of the law enforcement presence in educational settings. Police presence in schools increased exponentially during the past 3 decades in response to multiple events including school shootings and increased legislation (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; Mallett, 2016; McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). As police presence expanded, various functions of their role
evolved including officers assigned full time to schools as SROs (Javdani, 2019; Theriot, 2009; Thomas et al., 2013). This expansion of the police role occurred simultaneously with increased demands on schools to respond to negative student behavior with strict consequences referred to as zero tolerance policies (Mallett, 2016). The combination of these factors resulted in negative outcomes for students including exclusion from school and increased juvenile justice system involvement (Mallett, 2016; Ko et al., 2008).

Decisions relating to school discipline and responses to students often are made without attention to the developmental levels of the youths or the impact of traumatic history on the youths’ behaviors (Javdani, 2019; McKenna et al., 2014; Theriot, 2009).

School administrator decisions regarding discipline and police responses to students may occur in isolation from each other. Collaborative efforts between administrators and officers are not immediately apparent, although evidence exists supporting the benefits of a comprehensive approach for students who have experienced trauma (NCTSN, 2016). Potential reasons for a lack of collaboration are numerous and include school administrators’ lack of agreement on the effectiveness of police in schools (Collier et al., 2018). Another reason may be officer-perceived role ambiguity (Coon & Travis, 2012). Regardless of the cause of the disconnect between school administrators and police officers, improving collaborative administrator-police partnerships may lead to enhanced outcomes for students.

An additional area of focus when considering improved outcomes for students is trauma-informed specific training opportunities for officers and administrators. Current research indicates a lack of training relating to trauma or youth development for any officers, including SROs (Kubena, 2019; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016), and limited
information regarding training for school administrators. This deficit area may contribute
to a potential disconnect between police and school administrators. It may also be a
factor in less desirable responses to students who have experienced trauma.

The research questions in this study focused on the need for collaborative
practices between school administrators and police officers. The questions also explored
the level of understanding of trauma and trauma-informed practices for school
administrators and police officers. Additionally, the research questions examined the
existing training opportunities and sources of information available to school
administrators and police officers relating to trauma. The findings and recommendations
from this study can inform and improve practices to support positive outcomes for
students with traumatic histories.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation includes a comprehensive literature review of
relevant empirical research including studies related to administrator-police collaboration
and role identification. The research design, methodology, and analysis is discussed in
Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the results and findings, and
Chapter 5 discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research
and practice.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

This chapter explores the literature connected to trauma-informed practices, the level of collaboration between school administrators and police, role identification and decision-making for police in school settings, and training opportunities for police and school administrators. First, the impact of traumatic experiences on individuals is examined. Second, the chapter investigates the perceived role of police in schools. Consideration of roles includes the influence of context and settings. Next, the chapter examines the decision-making of officers and how that discretion may impact involvement in disciplinary actions for students. Finally, the chapter reviews research associated with the collaboration that occurs between police officers and administrators in schools. Related to this area is the perception of law enforcement by school administrators and students.

The study addressed these research questions:

1. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what roles do school administrators and police currently play in addressing behavioral situations with secondary students?

2. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, how do they currently collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of secondary school students, particularly those with traumatic histories?
3. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices? What are the current training opportunities and other sources of information that aid in understanding the impact of trauma on students?

The research questions were explored through a trauma theory lens specifically utilizing SAMHSA’s (2014) framework of the principles of the Four Rs: realization that trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, response to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization.

**Trauma Principles**

Application of the Four Rs and trauma-informed principles guided the research relating to trauma. Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is a values-based model that promotes the importance of systematically addressing trauma manifestations (Fallot & Harris, 2008; Leitch, 2017). While varied definitions for TIC exist, Harris and Fallot (2001) posited that a trauma-informed setting is characterized by five core principles: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Incorporation of these principles produces conditions that contrast with experienced traumatic events thereby suggesting there are more positive outcomes for individuals with traumatic histories (Hales et al., 2017). Success of TIC practices depends on the commitment to the guiding principles by entire organizations (DeCandia & Guarino, 2015; Hanson & Lang, 2016; Olafson et al., 2016).

Studies have narrowed the focus of trauma-informed practices to the implementation of the Four Rs when working with youth with traumatic histories.
(Cummings et al., 2017; Perry & Daniels, 2016). Cummings et al. (2017) identified the importance of providing teachers with the necessary skills to support children who have had experienced trauma. Using the Four Rs as a framework for the study, the research questions focused on identifying baseline knowledge of traumatic experiences among children, what teachers should know about emotional and behavioral patterns of children with traumatic histories, and how to support the social-emotional needs of children in the classroom setting. Interviewing 14 community-based service providers across a state in the Midwest, Cummings et al. (2017) organized the results by the principles of the Four Rs: (a) realizing the existence and impact of trauma among young children, (b) recognizing reactions to trauma, (c) responding to trauma by promotive approaches and strategies, and (d) resisting re-traumatization with environmental consideration.

Perry and Daniels (2016) similarly structured a pilot study in a Connecticut school to focus on reversing the negative effects of adversity and stress on families and school-aged children. The school was a Title I setting serving children ranging from pre-K through eighth grade. Students were predominantly Black and Hispanic (95%) from low-income homes, and 81% qualified for free or reduced-priced lunches. The short-term outcomes of the study included school staff learning about trauma-sensitive practices (realization), identification of students requiring trauma-informed support (recognition), schools’ implementation of systems to provide trauma-informed services (response), and students’ learning of skills to cope with current symptoms and respond to future stress or triggers (resist re-traumatization).
Realization That Trauma Exists

To explore the realization of trauma, Cummings et al. (2017) and Perry and Daniels (2016) investigated participants’ understanding and perspectives on the defining aspects of trauma. Participants identified external influences of trauma described as events that occur within the home, community, or other systems that may result in biological, emotional, or behavioral changes, possibly over time. As a result of training, participants also referenced the importance of professional development that enhanced learning new information including being able to better recognize trauma and identify new strategies to utilize with students (Perry & Daniel, 2016).

Recognition of How Trauma May Manifest Itself

When investigating the recognition of reactions to trauma, all participants in the study conducted by Cummings et al. (2017) agreed that children who have experienced trauma may display maladaptive behavioral and emotional patterns in school settings. Respondents further identified that young children with traumatic histories may display biological and/or developmental delays resulting in a need for more support than same-aged peers. A majority of participants cautioned that recognizing patterns of emotion and behavior related to trauma may be challenging (Cummings et al., 2017).

To systematically recognize students who may have experienced trauma, the pilot school studied by Perry and Daniel (2016) utilized a standardized referral form completed by any staff member who believed a student’s family was having difficulty caring for the student’s basic needs. The referral was reviewed by a care-coordination team and, if it was determined the student had or was experiencing trauma, the school reached out to the
family. The recognition of the existence of trauma resulted in enhanced services for students with traumatic exposure (Perry & Daniel, 2016).

**Response to Trauma**

Questions asked by Cummings et al. (2017) relating to responding to trauma resulted in the identification of five approaches that teachers may use when working with children who have experienced trauma and their families. The five strategies were: (a) be attuned; (b) show positive regard; (c) collaborate with parents and other professionals; (d) support positive social, emotional, and communicative responses; and (e) engage in proper reactions to the children. These responses focused on nonpunitive approaches, allowing for opportunities for the children to actively learn and practice adaptive behaviors (Cummings et al., 2017).

Perry and Daniels (2016) identified changes in the pilot school’s responses to trauma at the classroom level and with families. Following the training on trauma, 28 of 32 school staff participants were able to identify specific changes they would make with their students. One change to be made was the attitude of the teachers toward their students with trauma. However, the study did not indicate how this change would be accomplished (Perry & Daniel, 2016).

**Resisting Re-Traumatization**

To resist re-traumatization, responses to Cummings et al. (2017) suggested the importance of the classroom environment. As a safe space for children, the classroom should be designed in a way to prevent potential triggers of a traumatic response. For example, physical proximity to others, established routines and expectations, and adult demeanor and affect should all be considered part of the classroom environment. In
general, participants noted the challenge in knowing and addressing the specific needs of all children in a classroom (Cummings et al., 2017).

Studies related to the Four Rs suggest the relevance of exploring trauma in a structured manner by addressing the realization and recognition of trauma, responses to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization. Incorporating multiple viewpoints, such as those from service providers, teachers, and students, provides a comprehensive perspective on the impact of trauma on individuals.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Significant research has been devoted to trauma and its impact on individuals. The long-term effects of trauma are documented in the ACE study conducted in 1995-1997 at Kaiser Permanente’s San Diego Health Appraisal Clinic (Felitti et al., 1998). The results of the study indicated a correlation between childhood abuse and negative experiences with adult risk factors and health concerns (Felitti et al., 1998). Recent research indicates that when considering the lifetime prevalence of abuse or neglect for children up to the age of 18, one in four children are exposed to these negative experiences (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Continued research drawing from both the ACE study and trauma data resulted in a recognized need for an organizational approach to negative experiences. This framework is commonly referred to as TIC (Leitch, 2017).

In response to research on ACEs and trauma, implementation of TIC practices in school settings is gaining increased attention (Cavanaugh, 2016; Cummings et al., 2017; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). The effect of trauma experienced by children can manifest itself in multiple ways causing potential negative impact on school success. Young children may engage in avoidant, externalizing, or internalizing behavior (Cummings et
al., 2017). Students with traumatic histories may also experience decreased cognitive ability or learning disabilities. Additionally, the incidence of these students dropping out of school or being expelled increases to nearly three times that of peers without trauma (Adams, 2010). While schools can mitigate some of the negative implications of experienced trauma, the likelihood of positive outcomes increases when schools partner with other service systems to provide a comprehensive TIC response (Ko et al., 2008; Olafson et al., 2016).

**Service System Alignment**

Several studies have elaborated on the impact of service systems working in alignment to meet the needs of children with traumatic histories (Benner & Garcia, 2019; Donisch et al., 2016; Graves et al., 2019). Research ranges from the effect of broader TIC practices across multiple service systems to a narrower focus on the collaboration between two specific service systems. These more explicit partnerships include schools and community partners as well as mental health providers and police departments.

Donisch et al. (2016) investigated child-service providers’ understanding and definition of trauma-informed practices, their perceptions of needed resources, and the possible barriers to application of trauma-informed practices. Participants in the study consisted of providers from the child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and education systems. Among the participants from the varied service systems, agreement emerged relating to overarching themes. These themes included the acknowledgment that trauma-informed practices vary by service system and that utilization of trauma-informed practices is an evidence-based method to support youth with traumatic histories.
Despite agreement on the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices, barriers to implementation were identified by the multiple service systems. One obstacle was a lack of knowledge of available community supports for youth with traumatic histories outside of a service provider’s own area of expertise (Donisch et al., 2016). Another identified difficulty for incorporating trauma-informed practices was a need for comprehensive cross-system trauma training. Respondents from all service systems communicated the need for foundational training to establish a common language relating to trauma. An additional desired outcome of cross-system training was to achieve multisystem collaboration and partnerships (Donisch et al., 2019).

Benner and Garcia (2019) also investigated the importance of service system alignment with a specific focus on community group and school efforts to instill social and emotional learning (SEL) across all settings in a community. This approach is identified as the Whole Child Initiative. SEL competencies are defined as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. While these skills are considered essential to sustainable cultural change, Benner & Garcia (2019) recognized the inherent difficulty in exacting a community-wide shift.

Achievement of the community and school objective of introducing SEL competencies in a broad manner was promoted through specific activities and goals (Benner & Garcia, 2019). A primary factor was the development of a cohesive leadership structure at the community, district/community, school building, and family levels. The plan also identified necessary elements to be incorporated jointly among the service systems. These components included assessing readiness for change, establishing
cohorts to implement change together, and building capacity of cross-system groups to collaboratively focus on ongoing student outcomes (Benner & Garcia, 2019). Success of the service systems alignment was evidenced by improvement in youth social and emotional health as well as student, staff, and parent perception that the school climate and safety were significantly enhanced. Additionally, a marked improvement in student attendance was noted as a result of the service systems’ collaborative practices (Benner & Garcia, 2019).

Another study that addressed service system alignment and collaboration focused specifically on a partnership between mental health advocates and a police department in Greensboro, North Carolina (Graves et al., 2019). The Greensboro Child Response Initiative (CRI) was a coordinated effort that embedded CRI advocates within the police department to provide immediate support to children exposed to violence. Rooted in the principles of TIC, CRI coordinated a trauma provider network that encompassed law enforcement, social services, and other community agencies to ensure the needs of trauma-exposed children were addressed. CRI advocates also provided comprehensive and ongoing support and training for the police to promote adherence to the trauma principles and to facilitate communication related to specific cases (Graves et al., 2019).

Results of the CRI partnership with the police department indicated positive outcomes for the children and families involved as well as the police officers (Graves et al., 2019). Families participated in safety planning and received information regarding child development and parenting. Additionally, families and children were referred to mental health providers for ongoing care as well as to community-based resources including housing assistance and tutoring. The availability of CRI advocates to the police
led to expedient identification of child victims resulting in timely mental health intervention after a violent incident. Police officers also reported positive regard for the service system collaboration and alignment. Almost all police participants agreed or strongly agreed that CRI fulfilled a critical need in the community. Most respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that the community would enjoy long-term benefits as a result of the CRI partnership (Graves et al., 2019).

These studies indicate that multiservice system alignment promotes positive outcomes for students with traumatic histories. A specific cohort of service providers that work with and impact students and schools is law enforcement agencies and officers. Their potential influence is largely due to increased police presence in schools. Research informs aspects of the law enforcement presence including the role of officers in the school setting.

**Officer Perception of Roles**

Several studies revealed that officers have definitive beliefs relating to their roles in schools (Coon & Travis, 2012; Curran et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018). In prior and ongoing literature, commonly accepted functions of the SRO are understood through the triad model (Canady et al., 2012; Chrusciel et al., 2015; McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Thomas et al., 2013). The three roles that structure the SRO position in the triad model are law enforcer, counselor/mentor, and educator. Recent literature specifically references officers identifying with these roles. The literature further explored how the role of police in schools may help to make connections between students and other stakeholders, referred to as bridging the gap (Higgins et al., 2019). The influence of context on
officers’ perception of their role in schools is an additional consideration. Context is defined as the environment in which the officer works or the population of students with whom the officer interacts.

**Triad Model**

When considering the law enforcer, mentor/counselor, and educator roles of the triad model, Coon and Travis (2012) discovered that SROs felt their engagement in the law enforcer role was most common. Surveys were distributed to 1,080 schools and corresponding law enforcement agencies across the United States. Officers were asked how involved they were in actions specific to each role. Activities relating to the law enforcer role, including traditional crime prevention and response events such as patrolling school grounds, were the most prevalently reported. Other law enforcer activities in which officers indicated participation were responding to crime and disorder reports from staff and solving crime-related problems. McKenna et al. (2016) interviewed 26 school-based law enforcement officers from 11 districts in Texas. The study also found that respondents most identified as operating within the law enforcement role. In a subsequent study of 564 survey respondents in Texas, McKenna and White (2018), again, revealed that a majority of respondents reported engagement in activities consistent with the law enforcer role.

Further evaluation of officers’ perceptions relating to the triad model suggests a strong connection with the mentor role. Specific mentoring activities included providing advice to students on concerns relating to school and home life as well as referring students to other sources of help (Coon & Travis, 2012; McKenna et al., 2016). Coon and Travis (2012), McKenna et al. (2016), and McKenna & White (2018) all found a
majority of participants recognized the importance of building positive relationships and rapport with students. In the study by McKenna and White (2018), the objective of the mentor role expanded beyond the traditional definition. The enhanced role delved deeper into the officer/student relationship and included an officer’s interest in working with a student to both ascertain the root cause of the misconduct and to determine a way to address it. As a result, an officer operating in a mentor role may, with educational personnel, collaboratively establish school-based consequences rather than imposing punishment from a legal perspective (McKenna & White, 2018).

Connection to the third element of the triad model, the educator role, was indicated in the studies, but specificity of the role was not as well-defined as the law enforcer or mentor role. The educator role can involve direct instruction of students in a variety of topics. However, areas covered are generally related to law and criminal justice subjects. In the educator role, officers also may provide teaching and in-service training to school staff on similar topics (McKenna et al., 2016). Of the three roles in the triad model, officers least identified with the educator role.

Officers indicated clear affiliation with the traditional roles of the triad model. However, McKenna et al. (2016) elicited added role identification from the participant officers in their study. In addition to law enforcer, mentor, and educator, the roles of surrogate parent and social worker were named. Approximately one-third of respondents indicated they felt surrogate parent was a role they frequently played in the school setting. The behaviors associated with the surrogate parent role included providing emotional support to students and positive encouragement. Officers reflected they felt these activities were necessary to supplement a lack of support provided to students
home as determined by the officers’ knowledge of students’ background due to interactions with the students. Aspects of the role included providing not only emotional support, but also clothing, school supplies, and, at times, monetary assistance. As an extension of the surrogate parent role, almost a quarter of officers described engagement in a role similar to a social worker. Within this role, officers performed home visits and encouraged parental involvement in the school (McKenna et al., 2016).

**Bridging the Gap**

Outside of the specified roles within the triad model of law enforcer, mentor/counselor, and educator, as well as the extension roles of surrogate parent and social worker, officers expressed responsibility for creating a connection between students and other service providers (Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019). This role is referred to as bridging the gap. As a unique function, bridging the gap typically falls outside the law enforcer role, and it is more closely aligned with the mentor or social worker discipline. Bridge building “represents an intersection of two parallel needs: to repair communications and solve immediate problems” (Higgins et al., 2019, p. 5) facing students. This association also provides resources to schools that otherwise may have resorted to suspensions and expulsions of students who were struggling (Gill et al., 2016).

Higgins et al. (2019) articulated further development of the role of officers in bridging the gap between students, schools, and service providers. Within this study, data revealed SROs built four types of bridges for students: (a) bridges to those in the school, (b) bridges to the community, (c) bridges to success, and (d) bridges to the police. Bridges to school, community, and the police involved specific activities connecting students to concrete resources. Bridges to success relied more on the SRO acting as a
resource with the purpose of diverting at-risk youth to more appropriate and successful outcomes. Further examination of the four bridges builds understanding of this aspect of officers’ perception of their roles in schools.

SROs indicated the existence of a disconnect between students and school personnel creating a need to build bridges to school (Higgins et al., 2019). As a consequence of the disconnect, interpersonal conflict between students and school staff may negatively impact a student’s ability to effectively communicate with the adults in school with whom they interact. SROs indicated the belief that they can be utilized to reconnect the stakeholders by acting as a liaison between them. This bridge building between students and school personnel was primarily intended to fulfill a non-law enforcer objective (Higgins et al., 2019).

Creating bridges between students and the community allowed the SRO to connect students with community supports they may not otherwise have known how to access. This bridge further developed the trust and rapport that SROs cited as key to their work with students (Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019). Building bridges to success is closely connected to the mentor role articulated in the triad model (Higgins et al., 2016). Rather than providing students with external connections, the SRO served as the primary link to assist the students in decision-making and problem-solving. The SRO participants indicated their belief that, through this approach, students would develop better school engagement and belonging. Students were encouraged to advocate for themselves and were provided with guidance and coaching on how to effectively communicate with others to have their needs met (Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019).
The fourth bridge identified by SROs as a primary purpose is bridging the gap to police. Achievement of this connection had a dual purpose of both increasing students’ understanding of police as well as improving general police perception of the youth with whom they interact (Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019). The student perspective of the police is delineated into three subcategories of bridge building. The first subcategory is that the SRO teaches students how to communicate with police officers and safely navigate interactions with them. For example, students may be taught to keep their hands visible and open, to remain respectful, and to resist becoming angry or defensive when approached by an officer (Higgins et al., 2019). The second bridge to the police identified by SRO respondents was seeking out students who have had a negative perception of police and challenging that viewpoint. To accomplish this, the SRO actively sought to build rapport with those individuals and dispel the belief that police are to be feared or avoided. The SROs in the study specified a third area of connection to police. The area was acting as a legal advisor for students. The SROs gave advice relating to pursuing a possible career in law enforcement or criminal justice (Higgins et al., 2019).

A collateral benefit of bridge building for the SROs and youth was that it may have deterred disruptive and disorderly behaviors by students which might have otherwise led to law enforcement involvement. Bridging the gap to school and the community, assisting students with bridging the gap to success, and bridging the gap to police promoted prevention of future juvenile justice involvement for the students who may have been at-risk (Higgins et al., 2019).
School Context

When considering the role of police in schools, the influence of context must be considered. For the purposes of reviewing the current literature, context is defined as the school environment within which an officer operates as well as the characteristics of the students with whom the officer interacts. Context has an impact on how officers perceive their roles in the school setting. For example, officers tended to report using a mentor/counselor approach with younger students and students with less misconduct history (McKenna & White, 2018). The officers attributed approaching younger students from this position because of a recognition of developmental differences. They also felt that consequences at a younger age did not warrant the severity of consequences that may be imposed later in life. For this same reason, officers reported engaging in a more supportive role when working with students with disabilities (Curran et al., 2019). When engaged in a mentoring role, officers discussed with younger students the potential implications and outcomes of their behaviors when they got older (Curran et al., 2019).

Conversely, officers felt the need to employ a law enforcer role in school environments that they perceived as having more serious and pervasive behavioral concerns (Curran et al., 2019). These environments were typically middle and high schools. Identifying with the law enforcer role correlated with an increase in legal responses to students rather than school-based consequences. Legal responses included referral to the juvenile justice system and arrests (McKenna & White, 2018). In a qualitative study of 47 SROs, Curran et al. (2019) found that 89% of arrests performed by the sample officers occurred at the high school level. The officers also reported
addressing incidents in high schools such as vaping, drug dealing, gang activity, and weapon possession.

Based on the research reflected in this study thus far, evaluation of officers’ perceptions of their roles in school settings revealed a wide variety of functions of their positions. Using the triad model as an overarching structure provided delineation of expectation including a law enforcer role, mentor/counselor role, and educator role. Officers self-identified additional roles of surrogate parent and social worker. Operating within these roles allowed the officers to bridge the gap between students and stakeholders. The context within which officers worked also influenced their perception of the roles they assumed. This information is relevant as it outlined key functions of school-based policing, yet it also illuminated the vastness of the roles. The impact and function of school-based police officers were often without consistent agreement on the importance of each role. The literature review also suggests the possibility of competing roles for law enforcement that may impact how an officer performs within the school setting.

**Officer Decision-Making and Discretion**

Decision-making by officers is another key element in the review of the literature. Relevant concepts in this area are how officers choose to respond to students, and the level of discretion they have in how they operate. Closely connected is the involvement of officers in discipline within the schools. Officer decision-making can be delineated by legal responses, such as arrest, or school-based responses, such as suspension and expulsion. The complexity of officer decision-making and discretion in both legal and school-based responses is elucidated in several studies (Curran et al., 2019; Devlin &
Legal Decisions

Ishoy (2016) presented findings that support and align with studies relating to SROs, although the study focused on street officers rather than school-specific police. When interviewing 25 street officers, focus was placed on three areas that may impact decision-making: (a) an officer’s attitude toward enforcement behavior, (b) the existence of subjective norms regarding enforcement behavior, and (c) perceived behavioral control. Ishoy (2016) posited that an officer’s attitude about enforcement behavior is predictive of that officer’s intent and actual application of formal law enforcement actions. According to Ishoy, law enforcement actions, when addressing a criminal violation, are described on a spectrum from least severe to most severe responses. Officers possessed an individual preference and opinion on what may be the most desirable enforcement action to take, which informed their decision-making. It was discovered that the decision-making was impacted by the context of the situation. This supports the related research that indicates context is a factor in decision-making for SROs (Curran et al., 2019; McKenna & White, 2018).

The second area of street patrol officers’ decision-making considered by Ishoy (2016) was the existence of subjective norms regarding enforcement behavior. Subjective norms relate to an officer’s perception of how decision-making will be received by supervisors and coworkers. Based on the findings, the existence of subjective norms did not have a significant influence on officer decision-making, but the
officers unanimously indicated that they used less discretion in deciding whether to make an arrest when the crime committed was a felony.

The third area of decision-making investigated by Ishoy (2016) was perceived behavioral control defined as the amount of discretion officers felt they had in any given situation. The concept also includes the extent to which a person feels an obligation to act in a certain way. It was identified that the seriousness of an offense lowered the officers’ perceived discretion and latitude in decision-making often resulting in an arrest. More discretion was indicated by officers when an offense was minor in nature. Correspondingly, those offenses more often resulted in less severe enforcement actions taken.

The work of Ishoy (2016) corresponds with studies that relate specifically to arrest decisions by SROs. Wolf (2014) sought to determine the arrest decision-making process and discretion of SROs by asking SROs about influential factors in those situations. When considering the factors that impact the decision to arrest a student, quality of evidence and guidelines provided by applicable laws, rules, and regulations emerged as “extremely important” by more than two-thirds of respondents (Wolf, 2014). Closely following these factors in deciding on an arrest were the nature of the alleged misbehavior, the impact the behavior had on the victim, and the wishes of the victim’s parent or guardian. The wishes of school administrators and the wishes of teachers also had levels of effect on SROs’ decision-making, but neither was particularly impactful.

An additional relevant factor in decision-making was the officer’s belief that arresting students when they misbehave is an effective way of preserving order in the schools and arresting students when they misbehave allows other students to focus on
learning (Wolf, 2014). Wolf (2014) concluded that SROs disregarded the specific needs of individual students who engaged in misbehavior to focus on maintaining the school environment as a whole by using those students as an example for others.

Consideration of the school context as opposed to a traditional road patrol assignment also influenced SROs’ decision-making. A majority of participants indicated a difference in arrest decisions in schools versus on the streets (Wolf, 2014). A common response in explaining the difference referenced the specific state’s school crime law that dictated how public schools must respond to certain student misconduct. Therefore, SROs were called on to engage in decision-making for a wide variety of student offenses. The study also investigated the involvement of the SRO in school-based consequences.

**School-Based Decisions**

Wolf (2014) discovered that SROs may choose to forego the arrest of a student given the availability of school-imposed consequences such as suspension or expulsion from school. While the SRO may engage in activities associated with a law enforcement role, such as questioning a student or issuing a verbal warning, the SRO then relinquished disciplinary decision-making to the school (Wolf, 2014). This approach was echoed by Curran et al. (2019) in their findings that 79% of SROs did not view student discipline as a part of their role in schools. McKenna and White (2018) also discovered that officers tended to rely on school-based consequences, particularly when the officer identified with engaging in a mentor/counselor role. McKenna et al. (2016) reported officers identify distinct boundaries for imposing discipline. These officers attempted to avoid involvement in addressing minor misconduct such as code of conduct violations. However, they would support school personnel in deescalating a potentially volatile
situation by, for example, informally speaking with a student. The officer would then expect the school to determine an appropriate consequence or discipline for the misconduct.

While SROs self-reported that they did not engage in formal discipline, some of their actions could be considered disciplinary. The definition of discipline used by SROs varied (Curran et al., 2019). For example, the officer may issue verbal reprimands or assist school administration with investigations of misbehavior. They may also report misbehavior or suspected criminal activity to school personnel (Curran et al., 2019). Zhang (2019) found that the presence of law enforcement in a school correlated with a greater occurrence of out-of-school suspensions and exclusionary discipline. However, the reason for this parallel was not because the officer was contributing to a decision to suspend. Rather, the officer’s presence increased the likelihood of the detection of a crime or misconduct occurring in the school setting with consequent reporting to school administrators. Administrators then utilized that information to impose disciplinary decisions resulting in the subsequent increase in the frequency of school-imposed consequences (Zhang, 2019).

**Administrator Decision-Making and Discretion**

Similar to police officers, school administrators’ decision-making is impacted by multiple factors, particularly as it relates to student discipline. Findlay (2015) investigated how school principals balance the legal parameters of discretion with personal values when making disciplinary decisions. The ambiguity of discretion, however, was evident in the participants’ varying definitions of the concept. Some believed discretion to be synonymous with judgment while others equated it more closely
with intuition or a “gut feeling” (Findlay, 2015). Regardless of their assigned meaning for discretion, all principals in the study believed discretion was necessary to support students when making disciplinary decisions.

Further exploration of the principals’ discretion revealed several influences on their thinking and decision-making. These influences included expectations of senior administration, expectations of parents and community, expectations of staff, personal characteristics of principals, and student-specific circumstances (Findlay, 2015). When considering the direct impact on students and the school community, expectations of the staff and student-specific circumstances were most relevant.

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that staff often sought more punitive responses to student misbehavior than the principal implemented. The principals expressed frustration over some teachers’ perceptions that administrators, alone, were responsible for discipline and, instead, viewed it as shared accountability. This belief was consistent for less-serious infractions and consequences and more serious misconduct that potentially resulted in exclusionary discipline such as suspension. Regardless of the belief by the participants that suspension was an ineffective response to negative behaviors, they acknowledged difficulty in resisting the expectation of staff members that students should be suspended (Findlay, 2015).

When making disciplinary decisions, Findlay (2015) found that principals did consider the circumstances of the student or students involved in an incident. Discretion was used when reviewing the background of the student, specifically a child’s home life. Accommodations were made when the principal had knowledge that a student struggled because of race, poverty, or disability (Findlay, 2015). Surprisingly, other factors, such
as prior disciplinary actions and academic history, were not as frequently taken into consideration. However, participants indicated that when they differed in their treatment of students, it was in an effort to be fair and equitable (Findlay, 2015).

Administrator decision-making related to student discipline was also influenced by school codes of conduct as investigated by Curran and Finch (2020). Maryland State Department of Education adopted regulations in 2014 to guide reform of exclusionary practices in schools. The new regulations provided clarity of definition for long-term suspensions, and it directed local school boards to conduct an examination and subsequent revision of discipline policies. As a result, Maryland was one of the first states in the United States to shift away from zero tolerance policies. Curran and Finch (2020) conducted an examination of 24 Maryland school districts’ codes of conduct from two points in time—before the implementation of the updated regulations and after.

State regulations established a tiered organization of infractions and responses (Curran & Finch, 2020). However, despite the structure of the system, implementation of the guidelines at the local level provided administrators with flexibility of application. Providing a wide range of response options for more serious offenses led to a coupling of exclusionary discipline practices with more supportive responses such as restorative justice and mentoring. Nevertheless, findings indicated that exclusionary discipline may also be replaced with options such as in-school suspension. While the evolution of response options for administrators was promising, the possibility existed that school leaders would continue to make disciplinary decisions based on their familiarity with potentially fewer effective practices (Curran & Finch, 2020).
Consideration of decision-making and discretion of both police officers and school administrators illuminates potential commonalities of practice and judgment when responding to students, including those with traumatic histories. Development of a shared understanding of expectations may be enhanced through collaborative practices between school personnel and law enforcement.

**Collaboration Between Schools and Police**

The partnership between police officers and the schools in which they work is a crucial element in the literature (Brown et al., 2020; Chrusciel et al., 2015; Coon & Travis, 2012; Curran et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016). A common theme that emerged illustrates a disparity between officers and school administrators’ perceptions of the contributions of the officers. However, although school administration did not necessarily agree with the contribution of officers, evidence demonstrated an acknowledgment by school personnel of the importance of a police presence in the schools. The exploration of these ideas provides greater understanding of the relationship between law enforcement and schools.

**Differences in Understanding**

Curran et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive survey of school principals and the schools’ corresponding law enforcement agencies to gain insight into differences between police and school principal perceptions of police officer involvement in schools. Participation in the survey resulted in responses from 1,080 schools with matching police departments. When asked the purpose of having an SRO in the school, the responses by the principals and law enforcement agencies indicated a fundamental difference. School administration primarily responded that the SRO position existed in response to national
media attention regarding school violence. Police representatives, however, felt their presence was designated due to disorder problems within the school. Even given these differences, principals and officers agreed that if an SRO was not assigned to a school, it was due to either a lack of need or a lack of funding (Curran et al., 2019). While dissimilarities existed in the reason for the presence of the SRO, related research purports strong agreement that SROs should be in public schools, evidenced by a 75% positive response by law enforcement executives and 65% positive response by principals (Chrusciel et al., 2015).

Further investigation of the specific contributions officers make in schools reveal a distinct difference between principals and officers’ perceptions. Curran et al. (2019) found general agreement between both groups that the most common area of police activity fell within the law enforcer role. The officers, however, self-reported higher percentages of involvement than school principals reported (Curran et al., 2019). This trend was consistent, but to a lesser degree, for the other aspects of the SRO roles such as mentoring/counseling and teaching. An exception to this disagreement in activities is reflected in items relating to safety planning and meetings. In these instances, principals reported a higher percentage of police involvement than the law enforcement representatives. The most significant differences were seen in activities relating to creating written plans to deal with shootings, riots and large-scale fights, bomb scares or comparable school-wide threats, and hostage situations (Curran et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2016).
Importance of Officers in Schools

Despite differences in agreement on the activities in which officers engage in school, some consensus exists in the literature articulating the importance of a police presence in schools. One benefit of the presence of officers in schools was the perception that it improved the overall safety of the school environment (Chrusciel et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2016). Chrusciel et al. (2015) surveyed law enforcement executives and school officials in South Carolina. It was found that over 75% of principals believed SROs were the most effective school safety method. Other identified security methods included locked doors/restricted access, metal detectors, and cameras. However, these measures were considered less effective than the physical presence of an SRO for school safety. Additional identified functions of the SRO that contributed to the safety and security of the school environment included coordinating emergency drills, developing emergency operations plans and protocols, and developing response options to school shootings (Chrusciel et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2016).

Another positive school impact of the SROs was the connection they formed with students, faculty, staff, and community members (Brown et al., 2020; Chrusciel et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016). In a qualitative study utilizing interviews and observation of a school-policing program in Seattle, Gill et al. (2016) discovered that the relationships formed by police in the school often uncovered reasons for students’ behavioral difficulties that otherwise may have remained unknown. In so doing, the officer was able to assist with problem-solving and overcoming potential obstacles to the students’ success in school. For example, when conducting a home visit for a student who was perpetually truant, the officer discovered the student had chronic
health problems and the family was unable to afford medical care. The officer connected the school nurse with the family thereby assisting them with accessing available community resources (Gill et al., 2016). Officers’ widespread knowledge of community resources, paired with their rapport and understanding of the students, was cited as a benefit of having police in schools (Higgins et al., 2019).

In addition to improving the physical safety of schools and increasing connections for students, families, and the community, school police officers also engage in information sharing and teaching (Coon & Travis, 2012; Curran et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2016). Some teaching opportunities were more formal and related directly to a law enforcement role. These opportunities included teaching DARE and anti-drug classes as well as anti-gang and anti-bullying classes. Topics related to law enforcement careers, the juvenile justice system, conflict resolution, and problem-solving were also reported as teaching activities undertaken by officers (Coon & Travis, 2012; Gill et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2016). For some officers, informal opportunities to engage in an educator role presented themselves. For example, Curran et al. (2019) observed officers regularly entering classrooms and engaging with students. The officers would greet students, assist the teacher during lessons, and deliver materials. These activities are evidence of the partnership benefiting students and school personnel.

Although the importance of officers in schools is well-documented, recent events in the nation have altered some perceptions of the effectiveness and appropriateness of a law enforcement presence in school settings (Frederico, 2020). Evolving opinions include removing all officers from schools and reallocating funding of SRO programs.
(Richards, 2020). However, currently, no studies are available to detail the extent of the potential changes to SRO involvement in schools.

**Student Perception**

Consideration of collaboration between schools and SROs must take into account the direct impact on and perspective of students. Within this literature review, three studies specifically sought the student voice regarding the presence of SROs in their schools (Bracy, 2011; Theriot, 2016; Theriot & Orme, 2016). Theriot (2016) and Theriot & Orme (2016) used the same sample of students for data collection with a different focus for each study. Theriot & Orme (2016) investigated a potential connection between the presence of an SRO and students’ feelings of safety at school. Students enrolled in 12 schools with SROs completed a survey. The respondent students represented a consistent gender and ethnic distribution of the 12 schools. There was an almost equal split of male and female students. White respondents accounted for 64% of the sample, African American respondents were 32%, and Hispanic respondents were 2% of the total. Over 2,000 students responded to 10 questions using a 5-point scale. All questions related to the general attitude of the respondents toward school police. For example, students were asked if they liked having the officer in school, if they felt safer because of the officer, and if the officer had a good relationship with students. Resulting data indicated the presence of the SRO had minimal influence on the students. No significant relationship was found between the number of interactions students had with the SRO and their feelings of safety at school. However, although the number of interactions with the SRO was insignificant, students who demonstrated an overall positive attitude about the presence of police in school did report better feelings of safety (Theriot & Orme, 2016).
Using the same data collection and sample as Theriot and Orme (2016), Theriot (2016) sought further information on the impact that SRO interactions had on students’ feeling of school connectedness and school police. Expanding on the findings of Theriot & Orme (2016), Theriot (2016) reported that increased interactions with the SRO correlated with more positive attitudes about the SRO. Students who reported higher levels of school connectedness paired with better feelings about the police as well as having a higher sense of safety, all felt more positively about the SRO at their school. Conversely, and perhaps unsurprisingly, students who experienced more types of school violence consistently reported more adverse opinions about the SRO. An unexpected outcome of the study was that students with increased SRO interactions felt a lower level of school connectedness. Theriot (2016) indicated a possible cause for the relationship is the complexity of the SRO role in the schools. Interactions with the SRO may be the result of misconduct, crime, or delinquency. Engagement in these activities may cause decreased school connectedness. However, when responding to these incidents, the SRO established rapport with the students and enhanced the students’ perception that the SRO was fair, helpful, and capable of improving safety in the building (Theriot, 2016).

Bracy (2011) also sought to ascertain students’ perceptions of SROs in a school setting. This investigation was conducted via ethnographic research done over the course of a school year in two high schools. Data collection involved students, building SROs, administrators, and teachers. Activities included in-depth interviews, shadowing school staff, observing classrooms, talking to staff and students, and listening to staff and students talk to each other. Bracy (2011) discovered that, while students were not opposed to the presence of an SRO in school, they did not attribute increased safety to the
SRO. Upon further exploration, the students indicated three reasons for the disconnect between SRO presence and school safety. First, students reported their schools were safe and, therefore, the SRO was unnecessary. Second, the presence of only one officer felt insufficient to prevent all crimes in a school. Third, students suggested that a person intent on committing a crime would do so regardless of an SRO’s presence (Bracy, 2011).

Bracy (2011), Theriot (2016), and Theriot & Orme (2016) consistently report students’ viewing the SRO with a degree of indifference. While students had a generally favorable impression of SROs, they did not correlate the presence of police in the schools with increased safety. Unlike law enforcement representatives and school personnel, students did not indicate an awareness of the various roles that officers might play in the schools. Student perspectives of the law enforcer role directly related to the safety of the school and response to student misconduct. Bracy (2011), Theriot (2016), and Theriot & Orme (2016) did not reference instances in which students viewed SROs in a mentor role. Bracy (2011) indicated that students viewed the SRO in the educator role evidenced by students’ reports that the SRO was a useful legal resource. For example, one interview with a student elicited information by seeking guidance from the officer related to interacting with police. Theriot and Orme (2016) reported that only 29% of respondents attended a class taught by an SRO. These disconnects between SROs and student experiences may indicate a lack of proactive and regular engagement and interaction between the officers and the youth.
Training Opportunities

When considering partnerships between law enforcement and school administrators working with students with traumatic histories, attention must be given to what, if any, training opportunities are available. Specifically for school administrators, research does not exist relating to the preparation to address trauma manifestations in students. Gumus (2015) and Spanneut et al. (2012) investigated pre-service training and the professional development needs of public school principals. Both studies referenced national leadership standards for principal training known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The standards recognize that school administrators promote student success through activities such as facilitating a vision of learning, advocating a school culture that supports student learning and staff professional growth, and collaborating with faculty and community members (Gumus, 2015). However, specific consideration was not given to student-specific needs outside of academic achievement criteria.

Participants in the Gumus (2015) study were asked what pre-service training they received and the effects of those trainings on problem-solving in their initial years in a principal role. It was discovered that both coursework and internship opportunities were considered most common for these administrators. Focus on training in areas such as finance and policies and procedures were consistently referenced. It was also acknowledged that much of the pre-service administrator coursework was largely theoretical in nature and did not provide sufficient information on how to apply that theoretical knowledge in practice (Gumus, 2015). Respondents did not indicate any
training related to student-specific needs, adolescent development, or trauma manifestations.

Spanneut et al. (2012) conducted an anonymous needs assessment of building principals to determine their self-identified need for professional development in areas contained within the ISLLC standards. The majority of principals indicated a need for professional development relating to “advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth” (Spanneut et al., 2012, p. 78). More specifically, they expressed interest that focused on elements of maximizing the time spent on quality instruction and developing assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress. Similarly to Gumus (2015), principal participants concentrated on student achievement when considering their professional development needs. Attention to student trauma experience was not evident.

Increased recent awareness of students’ social emotional learning needs resulted in guidance related to whole school implementation of social emotional curriculum (NYSED, 2019). This guidance includes identification of core social emotional competencies that all students must learn to be successful in school and in life. Resources are also provided to support the execution of social emotional curriculum and instruction (NYSED, 2019). Guidance of this nature begins to balance student academic achievement and student mental health. Although this focus is necessary to inform future training opportunities for school administrators, it is not yet clear what training or professional development specific to trauma will be available.
Gaps in the Literature

Analysis and synthesis of the current literature illuminated gaps in the research and potential opportunities for future investigation. One apparent research gap area is the development of a strong understanding and agreement concerning the roles of SROs in schools. Multiple studies identified definitions of various roles that apply to SROs. Frequently these roles are organized in the triad model of law enforcer, mentor/counselor, and educator. However, current research indicates wide variability in how SROs engage in these functions. It also points to the possibility of role conflict for officers when they lack definitive direction and expectations (Coon & Travis, 2012; Curran et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018).

Gaps also exist relating to the ambiguity in role definitions and the level of collaboration between officers and school personnel in two capacities. The first area of collaboration is relevant to the functioning of SROs in the school setting. Research does not indicate if school police officers and school administrators collaboratively develop a shared understanding and agreement regarding how the SRO functions within the school environment. Data in current studies suggest that information from SROs and administrators is gathered in isolation from one another. The second area of collaboration lacking attention is the impact of police–school personnel partnerships on student outcomes. Specifically, evidence does not suggest that law enforcement and school administrators work together to provide students with response patterns to be employed as alternatives to misconduct. These gap areas indicate a lack of research in the potential power of deliberate collaboration, shared decision-making, and a multisystems approach between SROs and school personnel.
Further lacking in the current research is a comprehensive investigation of the position of police in schools that extends beyond single school districts or police jurisdictions. Existing studies acknowledge the lack of large-scale data collection that would provide more generalization of findings (Curran et al., 2019; Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; Ishoy, 2016; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018; Wolf, 2014; Zhang, 2019). This limitation illustrates a gap in the research as it prevents greater synthesis of understanding the role, function, and impact of school-policing. Closely related to the geographic limitations of current studies is the absence of longitudinal studies with effect measurement over multiple time points.

An additional gap in the current research relating to law enforcement in schools is the selection criteria and training processes for officers. Multiple studies explicitly cite this as a limitation in their own research (Curran et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018; Theriot, 2016; Zhang, 2019). The qualifications to be considered for an SRO position are not delineated on any level. Additionally, evidence does not exist regarding if officers voluntarily seek positions in a school or if their assignments are granted to them unwillingly. Once an officer is identified to work in a school setting, information on mandatory or optional training requirements is absent. The absence of training opportunities for school administrators is also a gap. No studies were found regarding administrative pre-service training and/or preparation in trauma-related strategies or restorative practices. This gap in the research may connect with other gaps such as lack of role clarity or collaborative practices.

Based on the identified gaps, the implications for future research are substantial. Delving into the working relationship between officers and schools is one area to be
considered. Existing research explores stakeholder perceptions of the role of police in schools in isolation. Data are gathered from officers and administrators, but they are collected in silos rather than dealt with comprehensively. Conducting a qualitative study in which officers and school personnel respond to questions and share information together may reveal dynamics in the partnership that could otherwise be left unnoticed. Current research suggests a disconnect between officers and administrators’ perceptions of the role and activities of SROs. Further research can illuminate what commonalities may exist between the two groups.

Another crucial area in need of research relates to training for both police and school administrators. Specifically for SROs, information is lacking regarding the selection process and training opportunities. The current lack of information in this area is pervasive. Developing a better understanding of these elements may alter the interpretation of the SRO role identity and function. Further research may also reveal critical missing elements that could improve the effectiveness of SROs in schools. Similarly, for school administrators, investigation into training opportunities specific to student discipline and collaborative practices may expose gaps in their background knowledge and professional development.

Further research on SROs’ understanding and knowledge of students, disabilities, and child development should also be considered. This is closely related to the selection and training of the officers. However, explicit focus should be given to the histories of students and reasonable developmental expectations. Current research suggests that officers frequently operate from a law enforcer viewpoint (Coon & Travis, 2012). This is to be expected as this is evidently their primary training and background. Nevertheless,
the study of youth development may be vital if SROs are to expand their roles and impact in schools. Students often present with multiple and complex needs requiring an alternate response than traditional law enforcement. This approach to future research will provide greater depth and understanding of the impact of police in schools.

Exploration is also needed into school administrators’ understanding of trauma and its manifestations in students. While significant research exists relating to implementing trauma-informed practices in schools, it is specific to teacher training and development. As the leaders in schools, attention needs to be given to administrators’ capacity for realizing trauma exists, recognizing the manifestations of trauma, responding appropriately to that trauma, and resisting re-traumatizing students. If principals are unable or unwilling to embrace a trauma-informed model, it cannot be expected that efforts by teachers will be successful.

Chapter Summary

Realization of the existence of trauma, recognizing the impact of trauma, developing appropriate responses to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization of individuals with traumatic histories are critical components when working with students. Collaboration and understanding of trauma should occur across service systems, including school personnel and law enforcement.

An increased police presence in schools has been in response to several factors including expanded federal legislation and violent acts committed on school grounds. As a result of the enhanced police role, much research has been conducted on the perceived impact of officers regularly working in school settings. Focus and outcomes of studies often refer to the negative effects of SROs including increased criminalization of student
behaviors contributing to a school-to-prison pipeline. There has also been research on the role of officers in schools and the functions they perform. However, discrepancies exist in clearly articulating each role of an SRO and how the duties of those roles are interpreted and executed. This inconsistency may also contribute to differences in officer decision-making and discretion. As a result, partnerships between police officers and school personnel may not be well-defined or consistent. As the prevalence of officers in schools increases, continued consideration needs to be given to officers’ perception of their roles, the rationale behind their decision-making, and their collaborative practices with school personnel and students.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology that was used to conduct this qualitative study. Information relating to the research context and research participants is included. Additionally, the instruments used in data collection and the procedures for data collection and analysis are discussed.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

U.S. schools have experienced, in recent decades, a substantial increase in police presence (Watts, 2019). School administrators and police officers may possess disparate understandings of the role of officers and their response to students including those with traumatic histories. Additionally, background knowledge of trauma and training provided to both law enforcement and school administrators may be inconsistent, further interfering with collegial partnerships between the two groups. More recent events involving officer discretion and decision-making have also shifted the opinion on the appropriateness of law enforcement individuals within school settings. Incidents of individuals dying during apprehension by police or while in police custody have mobilized many to decry the standard operating procedures of police agencies (Walters, 2020). As a result, inadequacies in police training relating to social interaction needs are being exposed (Wolfe et al., 2020). Due to the use of SROs as part of the intervention process in many districts, it is important to consider that these combined factors may lead to unintended negative consequences for students, police officers, and school administrators.

This study examined the collaborative practices between police officers, both road patrol officers and SROs, and school administrators in secondary school settings, specifically when responding to students with traumatic histories. The roles of officers in
schools were also explored from the perspective of police officers and school administrators. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what roles do school administrators and police currently play in addressing behavioral situations with secondary students?

2. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, how do they currently collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of secondary school students, particularly those with traumatic histories?

3. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices? What are current training opportunities and other sources of information that aid in understanding the impact of trauma on students?

These research questions were examined through a trauma-informed lens of the four Rs: realization that trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, response to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

The study was conducted as phenomenological research to explore the collaborative practices of law enforcement and school administrators interacting with secondary school-aged students. Phenomenology was selected as an appropriate design to develop a balanced description of the perspective of the individuals involved as well as to cultivate an understanding of their shared experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The exploratory nature of phenomenology lends itself to investigating the viewpoint of police officers and school administrators relative to their own experiences. This research
method does not rely on reference to specific literature or research, thus, allowing the participants to develop a unique and authentic narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenological research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Broadly stated questions guided the study while allowing for advancement of the exploration based on participant responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the data evolved, a better understanding of the research problem developed and informed follow-up inquiries and analysis.

**Research Context**

The study took place in Upstate New York and included rural, suburban, and alternative-education secondary schools. Rural schools are defined as those that have fewer than 50 students per square mile or fewer than 100 students per square mile and an enrollment of less than 2,500 (NYSED, n.d.). Suburban schools are defined as having at least 100 students per square mile or an enrollment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile (NYSED, n.d.). An alternative-education setting includes any nontraditional environment that provides a comprehensive secondary school curriculum particularly for students who are at risk of dropping out of school (NYSED, 2010).

Attention was given to secondary schools, defined as schools serving students in the last 7 years of statutory formal education (Grades 6–12). Middle, junior high, and high schools are all considered secondary schools (Sen et al., 2005).

The region for the study included nine counties with a population of 1.2 million people. The majority of the population is concentrated in a midsize city and its suburbs. The population of the region is less diverse than the overall state with most counties
reporting between 87% and 96% White, non-Hispanic residents compared with 57% of the same residents statewide (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017).

Outside of the metropolitan area, there are several smaller cities and villages, but the region remains largely rural. Industry in the urban center was historically considered high-tech with significant growth through the 1980s. However, major industrial leaders experienced significant downsizing in recent decades resulting in substantial economic challenges. Other than the immediate metropolitan area, the economy is mainly driven by agriculture and tourism (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017).

All nine counties in the region report household income below the state median with the urban center reporting the lowest. At $30,960, the city’s median income is significantly below the state median of $59,269. Regionally, the unemployment rate of 4.9% is slightly higher than that of the state at 4.8%. However, the city has an unemployment rate of 6.5% (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017). Poverty is recognized as a major concern and a limit to economic growth in the region. As a result, an anti-poverty initiative aims to reduce poverty 50% by 2031. The initiative, supported in part by a $500,000 challenge award from IBM, aims to provide community-based programs to ready children for high school, college, and careers. It also intends to provide job mentoring and skills development for hard-to-place adults (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017).

Despite economic disadvantage and concerning unemployment rates, the region includes several industrial leaders as well as many institutes of higher learning. The region is home to several innovative companies that are related to retail, medical care, and technology industries. Other large employers in the region include a not-for-profit
human service and vocational rehabilitation provider, and NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017). The region is also home to 12 institutes of higher learning. These institutions collectively generate about 19,000 graduates annually (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017).

The region includes 70 public school districts, educating over 175,000 students yearly. Graduation rates are collectively similar to the state rate of 85.5% with the exception of the city school district. In the year measured, the city school district reported a graduation rate of 51%. Additionally, the students in the district were much poorer than the surrounding districts in the region with 88.2% qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunches compared to 43.5% regionwide (Office of the NYS Comptroller, 2017).

Of the nine counties in the region, the study focused on three of these counties for participant identification and selection. These counties are centrally located in the region providing geographic accessibility. Each county is also home to both a county sheriff’s department as well as town/village police departments. This diversity of officer representation promoted a more diverse base of participants. These counties also have a variety of public school settings. One county is home to 18 school districts that are considered suburban or rural. It also has two shared educational service organizations, providing educational services and programming in the region. The second and third counties consist of eight and 11 public school districts, respectively. These counties also share an educational service organization.
Research Participants

The participants in this study included school administrators and police officers from suburban, rural, and alternative-education settings. The police participants consisted of one road patrol officer and five SROs. Administrators and police officers who had prior interactions or established working relationships were identified. Two pairs of participants from each category of school, suburban, rural, and alternative education, contributed to the data for a total of six administrators and six police officers. This sample allowed for comparison between same-school groups and across all participants collectively. Participants from an urban setting were not included in the study. The magnitude of both the city school system and city police department made it difficult to identify appropriate representatives of administrators and officers. Securing access and approval from the school district and police department for the research was also anticipated to be difficult due to recent events that brought both organizations under intense scrutiny. Additionally, students and administrators in suburban, rural, and alternative-education settings interacted with multiple police departments unlike the urban setting in which the city police department primarily responds. For these reasons, the study focused on suburban, rural, and alternative education settings.

The researcher had prior professional interactions with some participants in the study, which was due to experience as a school administrator and professional interactions with law enforcement agencies. These relationships were collegial with no supervisory connection. These relationships benefited the study by increasing the comfort and trust level between the researcher and the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As a school administrator, the researcher has the shared experience and
understanding of the complexity of the position. Ethical principles supported the broader importance and mutually beneficial outcomes of the study for administrators and police officers (Adams & Lawrence, 2019).

**Demographic Information of the Research Participants**

Data for this study were collected using individual, semi-structured interviews of secondary school administrators and law enforcement officers. Over a 5-week period, 12 separate interviews were conducted. Participant selection was based on the type of school setting (suburban, rural, and alternative education), and included two administrators and two police officers from each setting. The school administrators were contacted first, and each identified a law enforcement officer who worked closely in their school setting. This connection resulted in participant pairs with established relationships and comfort working together. All but one law enforcement representative operated in the capacity of an SRO. The outlier officer was trained as an SRO and worked in that capacity in the past, but at the time of the study, was the police department liaison to two suburban districts who did not employ SROs.

As shown in Table 3.1, principals’ experience ranged from 5 to 11 years as a secondary school administrator with an average of 6.7 years in the role. Five of the six administrator participants were male. The police officer experience was identified in two ways—time spent as a road patrol officer and time spent in the SRO role. Road patrol experience ranged from 4 to 27 years with an average of 13.7 years working on the road. SRO experience ranged from 1 to 8 years with an average of 4 years. All police officers had experience as a road patrol officer prior to working as an SRO. Five of the six police officer representatives were male (Table 3.2).
Table 3.1  

_Demographic Information for the School Principal Participants_  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Berry</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Carter</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Harper</td>
<td>Alternative Ed.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Maverick</td>
<td>Alternative Ed.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Moore</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Alexander</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Participant names are pseudonyms.

Table 3.2  

_Demographic Information for the Law Enforcement Participants_  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Years of Experience Road Patrol</th>
<th>Years of Experience SRO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officer Hartson</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Thompson</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Lincoln</td>
<td>Alternative Ed.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Smith</td>
<td>Alternative Ed.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Wolfe</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Franklin</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Participant names are pseudonyms.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

Approval was obtained from the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB), and preliminary support was confirmed from the educational service organizations and the local law enforcement. The educational service organizations
represent the component school districts in their respective counties. The county sheriffs as well as the president of the local police chiefs’ organization represent the county deputies and the departments of the towns and villages. Upon these approvals, a purposive sample of participants was identified based on the researcher’s prior knowledge of the representativeness of the individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Holosko & Thyer, 2011).

After IRB approval was obtained, an initial investigation of a school’s designation as a suburban, rural, or alternative setting was conducted. For two schools from each setting, potential school administrator participants were identified by the researcher through information gathered from district websites. Each school principal was contacted via email with a description of the study and an invitation to participate (Appendix A). The principals were asked to respond with potential times to meet and with contact information for their associated law enforcement representative. Once specific police personnel were identified, they were also emailed with the same information provided to the principals. All participants were provided with an explanation and copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B). The communication confirmed IRB approval and precautions to protect confidentiality and dignity of participants. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided to encourage or motivate involvement.

Once the individuals agreed to participate, the researcher invited the participants to meet virtually using the Zoom meeting platform. Video calls were utilized in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to maintain social distancing and to respect and protect the health and safety of the participants and the researcher. All participants were familiar and comfortable with the Zoom platform.
Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. An advantage of conducting interviews lies in the control given to the researcher over the line of questioning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Open-ended, indirect queries also allow the participants with freedom of response (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Management of semi-structured questions supported extricating implicit, subjective information from the participants. The researcher was then able to present knowledge in a manner that is interpretable and accessible (Flick, 2018).

All interviews were conducted individually with the participants. It was necessary to meet virtually with each participant only once. The duration of the interview sessions varied slightly and was dictated by the semi-structured format of the questioning. Duration of the interviews averaged 30 minutes each. Elaboration of the participant responses was necessary during some interviews. In these circumstances, expansion of their answers was encouraged with a variety of interview question types such as probing and follow-up (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The interview format followed a semi-structured protocol with specific questions posed to all participants (Appendices C and D). The protocol was reviewed with all participants at the beginning of their interview sessions and it included information relating to the study’s purpose, participant selection process, how data were to be collected, and assurances of confidentiality.

In addition to audio recordings and subsequent transcriptions of the interviews, analytic memos were utilized. Memos were written by the researcher to reflect on a variety of aspects of the study including identification of emergent patterns, themes, and concepts. These memos also captured reflections on any possible links or overlaps.
among codes to ensure connections and conclusions were relevant and valid (Saldaña, 2016). This mechanism allowed for documentation of the researcher’s impressions and observations. The analytic memos were organized to support the coding process.

During the interview process and subsequent data analysis, the researcher managed reflexivity deliberately and thoughtfully. Balanced consideration and understanding of both the school administrators and police officers’ viewpoints allowed the researcher to approach all participants with impartiality. Despite the reflexivity engaged by the researcher, only participants without direct, close connection to the researcher were selected for inclusion in the study to eliminate potential conflicts of interest or undue influence on the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Data Analysis**

As previously stated, this study was conducted as phenomenological research utilizing semi-structured interviews. A priori coding categories of the data were developed and helped form the major themes of this study including the roles of the police, collaboration, understanding of trauma, and training opportunities. Further organization of the coding frame resulted in subcategories aligned with the Four Rs framework of the study. The subcategories of realization that trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, response to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014) paired with the main categories informing the coding units. In vivo coding was used as a second coding cycle. These codes developed from the direct language of the participants (Saldaña, 2015). A third coding cycle was completed using axial coding. This cycle determined the dominant codes and reorganized the data set to link categories and eliminate redundancies (Saldana, 2015).
Inter-coder reliability was used to increase the dependability of the coding process (Flick, 2018). The researcher acted as one of the coders. One colleague of the researcher, also a candidate in a doctoral program and who received instruction on coding, was also used as a coder.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

1. Preliminary Steps
   a. Obtained IRB approval from St. John Fisher College.
   b. Obtained preliminary support from regional superintendents and law enforcement leaders for the participation of school administrators and police officers in the study.

2. Data Collection
   a. After the initial identification of potential participants, the researcher sent introductory emails with study information (Appendix A). Upon agreement to participate, sent informed consent form (Appendix B).
   b. Finalized interview protocols for school administrators and law enforcement officers (Appendices C & D).
   c. Scheduled interviews to occur after receipt of informed consent forms.
   d. Conducted and recorded virtual interviews with all participants.
   e. Wrote analytic memos during all steps of research process.

3. Data Analysis
   a. Had interview recordings transcribed.
   b. Sample coded a portion of the transcript for interrater reliability.
   c. Reviewed analytic memos.
d. Analyzed transcripts using a priori coding.

e. Analyzed transcripts using in vivo coding.

f. Analyzed transcripts using axial coding.

g. Developed categories and themes from coding.

**Ethical Guidelines and Confidentiality**

Prior to participant selection and recruitment, St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. When the interviews were conducted, each followed the same format with the same initial questions asked. The purpose of the research and overview of this study was reviewed with all participants. The participants were also informed that they could choose to end their participation in the interview at any time. To ensure confidentiality of participant identity, pseudonyms were developed. When reporting the results of the interviews, all identifying information has been omitted. The only characterization of the participants is their roles and which type of educational setting they represented—rural, suburban, or alternative education. Additionally, the participants were assured that all materials related to the interviews, including researcher notes, audio recordings, and transcripts, are accessible only to the researcher.

Several precautions were taken to ensure confidentiality of the collected research material. All recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are stored on the private, password-protected computer of the researcher and maintained in the private residence of the researcher. All participants are identified by a pseudonym used for all materials. Actual names and information that may identify a participant have been eliminated. All other materials, including research notes or paper files relating to the interview data collection and analysis are securely stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s private
The Zoom interviews were recorded resulting in both video and audio files. Only the audio files with participant pseudonyms were maintained for transcription purposes. Videos were deleted immediately in a manner that prevents restoration of the electronic files. All digitally recorded audio files and signed informed consent documents will be kept by the researcher for a period of 3 years from the publication date of this work. At that time, all materials both digital and paper will be destroyed. Digital records will be permanently deleted in a manner that prevents restoration of the digital files.

Summary

This study qualitatively explored the collaborative practices between school administrators and police officers in secondary school settings. Particular focus was given to trauma-informed practices and training. Through semi-structured interviews, a phenomenological approach was applied to best realize the lived experiences of the participants. Analysis of participants’ responses provide a richer insight of the existing practices of school administrators and law enforcement officers as well as their understanding of and response to trauma experienced by adolescents.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Integration of law enforcement officers into school settings has evolved over the past several decades. Increased police presence was driven by federal legislation passed in the 1980s and 1990s (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; McKenna & Pollock, 2014). The demand for police in schools was further solidified in response to incidents of school shootings in the 1990s and 2000s (Mallett, 2016; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). More recent developments of reported negative responses by police have shifted the perception of the appropriateness of uniformed officers in school settings (Frederico, 2020; Richards, 2020). While the evolution of school policing is well-documented, an examination of the collaboration between school administrators and law enforcement personnel is lacking. More specifically, school administrators and police officers’ responses to students exhibiting negative behaviors, as a result of trauma, is missing from the current research.

The study explored collaborative practices between police officers and school administrators in secondary school settings, specifically when responding to students with traumatic histories. The roles of officers in schools were also explored from the perspective of the police officers and school administrators. Additionally, the study examined participants’ understanding of trauma and training in trauma-informed practices. The examination occurred through a trauma-informed lens of the Four Rs: realization that trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, responding
to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014). The study answered the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what roles do school administrators and police currently play in addressing behavioral situations with secondary students?

2. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, how do they currently collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of secondary school students, particularly those with traumatic histories?

3. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices? What are the current training opportunities and other sources of information that aid in understanding the impact of trauma on students?

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and findings of the study. The analysis and findings are presented in the order of the research questions they address. Themes and key concepts for each research question are presented and explored. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

Qualitative methods were employed to organize and analyze collected data. Transcripts from semi-structured interviews were examined through multiple stages of coding. The first coding cycle involved a priori codes that were structured around the research questions and the study’s Four Rs framework: realization that trauma exists,
recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, responding to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014). In vivo coding was used as a second coding cycle. These codes developed from the direct language of the participants (Saldaña, 2015). A third coding cycle was completed using axial coding. This cycle determined dominant codes and reorganized the data set to link categories and eliminate redundancies (Saldaña, 2015). Analysis of the coding resulted in several key concepts, themes, and subthemes for each research question.

**Research Question 1**

*From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what roles do school administrators and police currently play in addressing behavioral situations with secondary students?*

**Results and Analysis.** This study focused on understanding the specific roles played by school administrators and SROs as they related to decision-making and responding to students. When investigating responses to student misconduct, attention was given to alignment with the Four Rs lens. Examination of the data revealed opinions and perceptions from both school principals and law enforcement officers. As a result of the data analysis, four themes relating to Research Question 1 emerged: the relationship piece, not here for problems, trying to help, and getting rid of fear. Table 4.1 depicts the themes, key concepts, and subthemes for Research Question 1.
Table 4.1

Research Question 1 – Themes, Concepts, and Subthemes

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**Theme 1.1: The Relationship Piece.** This theme refers specifically to the role and response of school administrators when addressing student behavioral issues. The principal participants referenced the importance of building relationships with students and relying on those connections when responding to disciplinary issues. Mr. Carter stated, “Our focus is relationship based” (SA2, 85). The importance of these relationships was evident in three subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. The first subtheme involves the administrators’ knowledge of their students. The second subtheme addresses the established codes of conduct that administrators are bound to follow that may result in a more traditional approach to discipline. The third subtheme focuses on administrators’ thoughts on the appropriate level of police involvement during disciplinary interactions and decision-making.

**Knowledge of Students.** The importance of demonstrating an understanding of student needs, backgrounds, and baseline behavior was evident in the principal
participants’ responses. This mindset connects with the Four Rs component of realizing trauma exists and recognizing that trauma. The administrators indicated they were deliberate in reflecting on their background knowledge when approaching students engaged in negative behaviors or when determining consequences. Mr. Harper stated:

For a behavioral issue, if I’m just approaching, my question I’m always kind of asking myself is first of all, who is it? And if I know who it is, what was the potential trigger? Because if I could understand the trigger for the behavior, I’d probably have a better shot at maybe understanding where they’re coming from.

(AA1, 70–72)

Mr. Harper further reflected on the knowledge of his students by stating, “There are some students I know that it might take them a little bit longer till they’re back to baseline . . . and while they might appear to be at baseline, mentally, they’re not” (AA1, 90–92).

The administrators’ understanding of their students was also emphasized by Ms. Maverick when she said, “We see disruption in the classroom, verbal threats, physical aggression. Every situation is different and we look at every situation differently. We definitely take into account the student. What’s going on?” (AA2, 145–149). Ms. Maverick indicated pairing this knowledge of her students with established protocols and supports available to her and her team. For example, she specifically referenced the school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) framework as tools they relied upon when responding to students (AA2, 120–121). These strategies support the Four Rs trauma-informed element of responding to students in an appropriate manner. Mr. Carter, also speaking of the importance of structured responses to enhance understanding of students, said, “We’re
moving towards a restorative approach but still trying to build capacity around what that means and making sure that everybody has training in the use of circles for a resolution” (SA2, 93-95).

The principal participants were realistic about the potential inability for them to fully know all the students in their schools. In those situations, the principals reflected on the importance of their assistant principals when developing knowledge of the students and responding to disciplinary issues. Mr. Carter stated clearly, “I rely on the assistant principals to advocate on behalf of students to understand the bigger picture” (SA2, 103–104). Mr. Berry shared this sentiment when he said, “Our assistant principal really kind of takes the lead . . . and they know the students so much better. Nine times out of 10, because of those relationships, it just makes the process that much easier” (SA1, 83–85). Mr. Carter explained that this knowledge then informs decision-making for consequences:

In terms of being in school, when we know the student, again that relationship, or we know the student and there’s been three or four times now. They were calling someone a name here. They pushed someone in the locker over here. That’s the same student. Then in that case, we’ll up our consequences. (SA1, 119–125)

However, the knowledge of the students and the teamwork of the principal and assistant principal may also result in a de-escalation of student behavior as indicated by Mr. Harper:

I have an assistant principal, and we do play off each other. There’s some students I know that I get along with really well; so maybe I’ll tap her out, and I’ll
begin to work with the student because they’re going to be a little bit more responsive to me and vice versa. (AA1, 47–50)

Possessing a solid foundational knowledge of the students was important to the principal participants in this study. However, situations do exist that may result in administrative decisions considered more traditional in response to misconduct.

**Traditional Discipline.** Connected to relationships with students, the principal participants discussed their decision-making in circumstances that may have led to conventional discipline. Generally, the safety of the students and school were taken into consideration. While some behaviors may have historically led to more severe outcomes, such as out of school suspension, administrators indicated this was no longer a foregone conclusion. Rather, a desire for a positive outcome for the student impacted the decision-making. As Mr. Alexander stated, “I do not draw lines in the sand, period” (RA2, 100). Mr. Moore echoed this sentiment when discussing his process of investigating an incident of misconduct:

> My role is to always run an investigation from the school side of things . . . it’s my job to do an investigation to learn all the information and all the facts as best I can, and then determine any kind of discipline that would follow from that, or any kind of response that would follow from that. (RA1, 56–59)

This deliberative approach to decision-making is a dismissal of the zero tolerance policies that would dictate a predetermined consequence for certain actions and reflects a more trauma-informed approach to student discipline. Mr. Carter also referenced student connection as a factor in his response:
I would say 100% of our focus is to connect with students and with teachers and with our administrators. And so, when those conversations take place, there is something to base [the decision] on and it’s not just the consequences. (SA2, 91–93)

Reliance on their schools’ codes of conduct was a point of reflection for the principals. Ms. Maverick stated, “When there’s behaviors that wouldn’t be considered illegal . . . we really try to manage those with our school disciplinary process, relying on our code of conduct” (AA2, 97–99). Notably, codes of conduct have been revised to suggest a more restorative approach to discipline, as evidenced by Mr. Alexander saying, “We’ve actually changed our whole code of conduct . . . to reflect we’re only going to suspend if it’s a dangerous situation. That’s it” (RA2, 85-86). Indeed, the shift away from suspension was also noted by Officer Hartson:

I don’t think administrators are looking to suspend everybody. They want to make sure that the kids are going down and making good decisions that can eventually lead them off to long, healthy careers and lives and what have you.

(SP1, 76–78)

Officer Hartson’s reflection indicates the less-restrictive approach adopted by school administrators. The statement also aligns with principals’ desire to limit police influence and participation in student discipline.

Police Involvement. The principals and police officers unanimously agreed that decisions relating to student discipline should be left to the administrators. Mr. Carter put it most simply by stating, “Discipline is only for administrators” (SA2, 65). Mr. Moore indicated agreement that, “if there is something that is disciplinary and school-related,
then that is completely up to the school administration” (RA1, 16-17). He expanded on this thought by adding:

We very much try to separate school discipline from law enforcement. If there is an incident that’s not criminal but involves discipline of students, we will not involve the SRO. We won’t involve him in any of the questioning of either the student or the witness or anything like that. We keep him completely separated from any investigation that we run as a school administration. (RA1, 26–29)

Deputy Franklin reiterated this belief of excluding police from discipline issues when she said, “[The principal] really tries to have his administration handle things the way they’re supposed to themselves” (RP2, 70–71).

While the administrators and police agreed that consequences imposed on students should only be decided by the school administration, there were occasions when the SRO may have been included in a situation. Specifically, if an incident occurred that could potentially be considered a criminal act if it escalated, the police officer may have been consulted. Officer Hartson stated:

Most of the quote-unquote student discipline issues are all non-police issues, but I still think the administrators like having an SRO there to assist with like, “Hey, make sure this doesn’t become a police matter. You could be going that way, let’s bring it back the other way.” (SP1, 59–61)

Mr. Moore also spoke of the importance of consulting with the SRO in the event of a violent altercation:

If there is a student who is either violent towards themselves or towards others, then we would quickly act and respond to them. And if that were the case, we
would involve the SRO at the very least in the decision-making of the response.

(RA1, 73–75)

Although the SRO may have been included in some decision-making, it was evident this would occur for proactive purposes rather than as a punitive response. Indeed, the role of the police in the schools was minimally focused on traditional law enforcement practices.

**Theme 1.2: Not Here for Problems.** This theme relates to the concept that the SRO presence in the schools was not due to explicitly identified areas of concern. Rather, the participants recognized multiple modes of operation for school law enforcement officers. The administrators and police officers were provided with the SRO triad model through an introduction to the three frequently identified roles for police in schools. These roles naturally established the three subthemes of educator role, law enforcer role, and mentor/counselor role.

**Educator Role.** Articulation of the educator role referenced different ways in which the officers functioned. One area was a more traditional teacher approach where the SRO provided instruction in classrooms. Mr. Berry provided the example of his SRO “[going] into classrooms, especially our law and justice class, but also our health classrooms, too, and . . . speak[ing] to our students and hav[ing] lessons” (SA1, 11–12). Officer Hartson also referenced his thoughts on engaging in the educator role:

> I’ve been in a lot of classes. I am, by no stretch of the imagination, a teacher. So I’ve found it to be a lot more, kind of like a team approach, especially in criminal justice classes where kids will have questions regarding something that’s going on in class at that real time. So it’s nice to be literally in class. It’s kind of like, “Oh, I can help with that.” (SP1, 25–29)
Officer Hartson’s reflection on providing assistance to students with existing issues they were facing supports the second area of the educator role. In this capacity, the SROs provided teaching to students on events they might have encountered involving law enforcement outside of school.

Teaching opportunities for out-of-school events can include things such as speeding tickets. The educator role may then occur with individual students or as a classroom lesson. Deputy Wolfe provided an example:

Kids coming in talking to me about getting their first speeding ticket or someone in my [police department] was at their house breaking up their underage party over the weekend, asking me for advice on the legal side of it. And then getting in the classrooms and talking about it. (RP1, 36–39)

Mr. Moore also acknowledged Deputy Wolfe’s student approachability. Mr. Moore said:

As . . . relationships have developed, [Deputy Wolfe] will provide assistance to kids informally, as they come to him, “Oh, I got pulled over,” or something like that . . . and they come to him and seek his advice and he helps them out in that way. (RA1, 21–24)

This feeling was affirmed in other settings as well. Ms. Maverick stated that the SRO in her school “offers advice to the students about things out in the community, so anything from preparing for their driver’s test to if they have a concern about something happening at home or with peers” (AA2, 40–41).

The less-traditional educator role also lends itself to officers providing students with information about potential legal consequences to their actions. Officer Hartson reflected on the fact that “the administrators and faculty and staff use the SRO to kind of
help educate, ‘Hey, if you continue down this line, this is what can happen to you in the legal aspect’” (SP1, 54–55). An extension of this role was evident when Deputy Wolfe stated:

Most of the time when they end up in my office for more serious things, they have no idea what they did could result in them not being able to vote, not being able to own a firearm down the road. So, we try to be proactive. Let’s try to get out in front of it and educate kids. (RP1, 45-49)

The insight provided when an officer operates as an educator is influenced by the second role in the triad model, the law enforcer role.

**Law Enforcer Role.** Of the three roles, both the administrators and police officers indicated SROs performed in the law enforcer role least frequently. One identified reason for the lack of need for the role was that the schools did not experience criminal activity. Mr. Moore specifically stated, “We have very little criminal activity, so there’s not a ton in that department for law enforcement” (RA1, 19–20). Deputy Lincoln mirrored that thought saying, “In my district . . . there’s not really a crime rate . . . so I’m not much of a law enforcer” (AP1, 28–29). He did acknowledge that, if he was called in for a law enforcer perspective, there was a need to be collaborative. He said, “If I need to be [in the law enforcer role], I always let the school choose—unless it’s something serious—if they choose to handle it in-house or with me” (AP1, 29–31). Officer Hartson also referenced the importance of working with the administration because “it really has to be a team effort where you can’t just have somebody focused solely on the law enforcement aspect because not every school needs law enforcement in there” (SP1, 14–16).
Agreement on the need for a law enforcer perspective did exist when related to school building safety and security. Mr. Harper shared his thoughts from the school principal perspective:

For school safety, just looking as somebody who knows a little bit about that area. When we do emergency drills and things like that, getting feedback, making sure we’re looking at things and our safety plans, so that we’re keeping the building safe. (AA1, 29–31)

Mr. Berry also described using his SRO to assist with safety planning. He said, “We do lockdown drills with him. He helps organize it. We go over the law enforcement side of a lockdown and other drills, fire drills” (SA1, 17–19). Deputy Smith described his involvement in maintaining building security:

When they go over the fire drills, lockdown drills, we meet up. Any issues I find throughout my day while I’m touring the building, I’ll bring those up to the administrators. Whether it be like some cameras that are not working properly, anything outside on the school grounds, I’ll bring it up to maintenance and get those issues corrected. (AP2, 136–139)

This aspect of the law enforcer role was deemed important but fairly benign. There were, however, other occasions that warranted a more direct law enforcer reaction.

Some student concerns necessitated a more traditional law enforcer role, but the response was generally considered as a last resort. “We are very careful as to what needs to have law enforcement involvement and what doesn’t,” explained Mr. Moore (RA1, 42–43). Officer Hartson described his desire to refrain from the law enforcer response:
I’m not here because you have a problem. I’m here so we don’t have problems. And I tell kids that all the time, don’t make me do my job in school. Because I don’t want to have to arrest people. That’s the last thing I want to do. (SP1, 39–42)

Mr. Alexander asserted that his SRO was also opposed to acting as a traditional law enforcer unless it was absolutely necessary. He said, “I’ve seen her arrest a kid, if he had brought marijuana to school, but even that . . . she almost refused that. She won’t touch things like that . . . unless somehow it originated outside of school” (RA2, 34–36).

Events deemed an imminent safety risk would also result in a conventional law enforcer response. Deputy Lincoln described one such occurrence:

There have been a few times where it’s been so unsafe that we’ve had to handcuff individuals to either move them to [the hospital] for a mental evaluation, or to take them into custody until parents got there to keep them safe and everybody else safe. (AP1, 48–51)

The school principal participants also referenced the need for law enforcer involvement to maintain a safe environment. Ms. Maverick shared, “We see a lot of escalation in our site . . . of needing police because things escalate beyond the school level to keep people safe” (AA2, 51-55). However, despite some limited incidents demanding this type of response, the role officers most identified with the mentor/counselor role.

**Mentor/Counselor Role.** The SRO acting as a mentor/counselor was clearly recognized by all the participants. Deputy Lincoln most succinctly stated, “The main thing is being a counselor and a mentor for the kids” (AP1, 18). Deputy Thompson reflected that “the more time that you could spend at the schools, you become more of a
counselor” (SP2, 52–53). Deputy Wolfe recognized that “the majority of my time is spent working with kids, counseling kids, talking to kids about making good decisions” (RP1, 19–20). Deputy Franklin shared, “In my heart, in my mind, I want to be the counseling piece . . . I’m just a different person to talk to . . . whenever they need me, they can get a hold of me” (RP2, 48–51). Officer Hartson distinguished the unique ability of SROs to assume this role as opposed to road patrol officers:

That’s the nice thing about an SRO. We generally have more time to respond and interact with kids. We don’t have to rush to get back into service . . . . That definitely helps. So I think [we’re] responding more from a counselor standpoint and trying to understand a little bit more [of] the puzzle. (SP1, 103–106)

The importance of fulfilling this role was evident across all the police participants. They clearly felt acting as a mentor/counselor was an essential duty of their position within the school setting.

The school principal participants shared in the police perspective that the SROs acted in the role of mentor/counselor. Mr. Berry acknowledged that “kids do seek [Officer Hartson] out as an official mentor. We don’t designate him as a mentor or counselor, but he’s definitely there. He’ll talk to students; students come up to him” (SA1, 24–26). Ms. Maverick also spoke about the positive impact realized by her SRO acting as a counselor/mentor. She stated, “They’ve been able to build a relationship with him because he’s here every day and they’ve been able to build trust with him. So, from that counseling lens, I see him play a huge preventative role” (AA2, 23–25). Mr. Alexander articulated his gratitude for the mentor/counselor role his SRO played by sharing, “[Deputy Franklin] said, ‘I’m more here to educate or counsel students.’ She
made that very clear from the very beginning, so I liked that. I appreciated that” (RA2, 15–17).

Defining the triad model of the SRO roles clearly revealed the unique importance of each role. The school principals and police officers identified explicit functions associated with the educator, law enforcer, and mentor/counselor roles. While each role had significance, the preference for the mentor/counselor role emerged across all the participants.

**Theme 1.3: Trying to Help.** The value of the SRO mentor/counselor role aligns with Theme 1.3. This theme addresses the ways in which SROs respond to students as well as the relationships they develop with the students. Examination of this theme revealed the complexity of the SRO role and the multiple factors impacting their functioning in a school setting. The subthemes that emerged were use of a positive approach, considerations that influence decision-making, and the SRO’s rapport and relationships with students.

**Positive Approach.** The school principals and the SROs reflected on the importance of proactively interacting with students. When specifically addressing the SROs’ approach, attention was given to preventative communication and rapport as well as engaging in de-escalation strategies. Utilizing these strategies supports the Four Rs area of positively responding to students with potential trauma. Mr. Moore explained that the SRO in his school has “a really good approach—friendly, kind, caring. Not intimidating in any way, which I think is really important” (RA1, 168–169). Mr. Harper echoed this belief by stating, “The more of a proactive approach [the police] take in the building on good days, the more effective they are when they have to work with students.
in crisis” (AA1, 37-38). Ms. Maverick expounded on the importance of these connections:

[The SRO] is talking to students before their behavior escalates to a place where it might be disciplinary on the school end or go into the criminal justice system. And he’s able to pull them into his office from class and just have a conversation with them about what’s going on, why is the behavior happening, what it could mean if the behavior continues. (AA2, 25–28)

Mr. Berry shared a similar mindset about the SRO in his school and the power of being present for students:

A lot of times, what he’ll do is, if he knows of something going on and he knows the student, he’ll just make a contact, say, “Hey, I’m here for you. If you ever want to talk and go through things, I can give you the legal side of things. I can help you out with that part and help you through it.” (SA1, 31–35)

The principals’ statements illustrated their belief in the importance of the SROs in their schools. The SROs’ positive approach added value to the school environment and helped mitigate potentially volatile student behavioral incidents.

Similar to the school principals, the SROs also recognized the benefits of knowing their students and approaching them in a positive manner. Deputy Wolfe said, “I pride myself on being able to communicate not only with adults, but with kids, and I use my proactive approach” (RP1, 112–113). This communication became particularly effective when it could be used to deescalate a student who was approaching or actively in a crisis situation. When approaching that type of scenario, Deputy Lincoln thought and explained that, “The main thing is just trying to get to the student and try to calm
them down. Trying to figure out what’s wrong and try to help them to control what they’re feeling right then” (AP1, 87–88). To help accomplish this, Deputy Lincoln said he “will just use open communication” (AP1, 99) and then credited his relationship with the students for the success of this approach.

Deputy Wolfe used a similar approach for working with students involved in negative behaviors. “Most of the time, I feel that just by communicating, taking the time, giving the kid a chance to take a deep breath, not have to impress anybody, just talk to me as a human being, we’ve had great success” (RP1, 123–125). This tactic for de-escalation was also utilized by Deputy Smith:

Just see how they’re acting, what they’re doing, whether they’re throwing a desk or they’re just kind of shutting down and not really responding to staff. Give them space and time and let them kind of work through it and see whether they respond . . . it’s very fluid and constantly changing. (AP2, 41–44)

Deputy Smith attributed his success in deescalating students to his amount of time in the SRO role. He explained,

After . . . being here for 3 years, I’ve dealt with some of these students on several occasions . . . And I know, based on previous interactions with them, they’re able to deescalate and bring themselves down with a little bit of time” (AP2, 86–89).

Knowledge of the students and their potential responses to different approaches is one factor taken into consideration for SRO decision-making.

**Decision-Making.** When presented with student behavior, SROs consider multiple elements to make a response decision. Deputy Franklin indicated her top priority “first and foremost [is] my safety and theirs. So, like who else is around, who
needs to see this? Who doesn’t need to see this?” (RP2, 103–104). Immediate safety, as a primary concern, was common for all the police participants. Deputy Smith reflected, “I get in there and, first thing, just with my law enforcement background, I’m looking at things from a security and safety standpoint” (AP2, 39–40). This reference to the law enforcer role was repeated by the other participants.

Interestingly, only when describing their thought process for student misconduct did the police officers indicate a reliance on law enforcer tactics. Deputy Smith referenced assessing the situation and utilizing physical proximity as a strategy:

I know, once I get into a room, and it’s a more tense situation, student’s already been throwing desks, staff will kind of get back. I’ll keep my distance, but I’ll get a little closer just to maybe within 20 feet and just try to talk and engage where they’re at, whether they’re escalating or deescalating. (AP2, 63–66)

Deputy Lincoln also described the possible incorporation of law enforcer techniques if he deemed the situation warranted that response. However, even in that type of situation, Deputy Lincoln indicated using the least-restrictive intervention possible:

I’m going to respond to [students] as they are in a situation. Do I need to go hands-on? And if I do, it’s going to be more of a hold to try to calm them down, instead of, it’s not going to be a takedown and handcuff them and things like that. (AP1, 96–99)

When asked his approach to the decision-making related to student misconduct, Deputy Wolfe also was adamant about avoiding any use of force:

I try to let all of my talking and all of my actions speak for themselves before we get to a point where I would ever even think of pepper spraying or tasing or doing
what some of these officers are doing with kids. It just blows my mind. (RP1, 162–164)

The officers demonstrated an ability to reflect on police practices and the potential inappropriateness of a law enforcer approach to students. Deputy Lincoln acknowledged, however, that this had not always been his outlook and it was his experience as the SRO that shifted his perspective. He recalled, “My philosophy has changed greatly over the last 8 years. More patience, more talking” (AP1, 39). This mindset, reflective of the Four Rs response to trauma, also allowed the officers to develop stronger relationships with the students in their schools.

**Building Rapport.** Connections between the SRO and students promote more successful and positive outcomes for the students when they need intervention or support. In some instances, the relationship can be framed as an incentive for a student. For example, Mr. Harper stated that if “[the student] has a good day, [the SRO] will come over and greet them and say hi to them and spend some time with them” (AA1, 21-22). Mr. Moore also shared the personal connection the SRO made with students. “He has a small number of kids that he contacts daily, checks in on them, reminds them when their Zoom meetings are and things like that” (RA1, 161–162). These relationships are also beneficial when students are in more critical need of assistance.

The benefits of SRO/student rapport was noted by Mr. Berry in saying, “A lot of times it’s just him talking the kid through . . . he talks them through all the steps and tries to get them to a better resolution” (SA1, 39–41). Deputy Smith emphasized how important it was to him that students could approach him by expressing, “Whatever issues they’re dealing with; try to help them. Get their focus on whatever it is and get
past that hurdle and finish out their day” (AP2, 21–22). He went on to elaborate, “I’ll just try to reassure them that I’m there for them. They’re not in trouble with me. Number one priority, I just want to understand what’s going on with them” (AP2, 68–69). Deputy Smith again highlighted this concept by reiterating, “[I’m] just trying to show them that I’m here for them, whatever it may be, whether it’s here, in school, or something outside of school. At some point, when they’re comfortable, I’ll be here for them” (AP2, 245–246).

The power of a police officer building rapport with students was expressed by Ms. Maverick. Her reasoning extended beyond the more obvious benefits to include student histories with law enforcement. Ms. Maverick explained, “It’s been really nice to have our school resource officer here because he’s built some rapport with our students, many of which have had traumatic experiences or negative experiences with police in the community” (AA2, 21–23). Understanding these background experiences and the resulting perceptions of the police is further explored in Theme 1.4.

**Theme 1.4: Getting Rid of Fear.** This theme reflects the perception of law enforcement by both community members and the students with whom the police work. The participants indicated that a police presence in the schools elicited varied responses and opinions from stakeholders. The participant reflections developed into two subthemes including community perception of police in schools and the connections SROs build within their communities, and student perception of law enforcement.

**Community Perception and Connections.** Of the six school settings that were included in this study, all but one had a designated SRO assigned to their building or district. The one exception had an established partnership with the local police
department and an identified police liaison with whom to partner when needed. In this school, the decision to not have an SRO was deliberate because of the perception associated with having an officer in school. Mr. Carter explained:

We have a lot of conversations about [hiring an SRO] and culturally we do not believe in the concept of it. It’s been recommended to us. We did a safety and security audit . . . and one of the recommendations was for us to consider SROs, but the culture here has always been a little bit more passive. (SA2, 59–63)

Despite the acknowledgement that an SRO was considered good practice from a safety perspective, Mr. Carter was adamant that “we don’t want the presence of any kind of armed or uniformed presence in the building” (SA2, 73). The police liaison working with the school also recognized this mindset and the potential disruption, in that particular school, that could be caused by a police presence. Deputy Thompson shared:

There’s a lot of fear when you see a police officer inside of a school, and usually first thing that kids do is text out, “Hey, there’s police at our school.” Then the school started getting a thousand calls as to why the police were at the school.

(SP2, 76–78)

The experience for this particular district and community may have contributed to their steadfast decision to maintain no police presence in their schools. However, this community mindset was not consistent across the other school settings investigated.

Officer Hartson is an established SRO in his district, and he demonstrated an understanding that his role could be misperceived at times. He recognized that “a lot of our job is kind of to be seen as like a deterrent so people don’t do anything bad in school” (SP1, 161–163). Officer Hartson also explained how the mere presence of police may
send a negative message to the community:

You’re representing the police department in education, which is not always easy because there’s that kind of barrier at first where a lot of schools are like, “Well, wait a minute. If the police are here, that means I have a problem. And I don’t have a problem in my school.” (SP1, 36–38)

In spite of this perception, Officer Hartson reflected on the importance of his connections with the community and the relationships he had built in his role as SRO:

You spend your entire time caring for these kids. Especially . . . working [in the town] as long as I have, I’ve known some of these kids since they were–the seniors in high school I might’ve known some of them since they were infants . . . . So you definitely care about them, and you don’t want to see anybody get hurt.

(SP1, 42-46)

The importance of community connections articulated by Officer Hartson was echoed by the other police participants and the school principals.

Ms. Maverick reflected, “[The] strongest part of our program with the SRO is that community engagement . . . he will show up to a situation in the community that involves one of our students, and that wrap around back to school is extremely helpful” (AA2, 253–355). Ms. Maverick provided an explicit example of the SRO’s community connection that resulted in a positive outcome for a student:

I had a student who was going to be mental-hygiene arrested in the community, and the student told the police officer that they refused to follow any direction, they refused to do anything until they could talk to Deputy Smith, our officer. And that officer was able to call him, and they were able to have a phone
conversation, and then the situation deescalated. (AA2, 32–37)

This response is indicative of the importance of employing a trauma-informed response as indicated in the Four Rs framework. Additionally, building on the relationships developed in the school setting and extending those into the community provides clear benefit.

The connections built while the students are in school also have longer-term impact in the community. Mr. Alexander explained the circumstances in his school district:

We have something of a very unique situation in [our district] where it’s a town, it’s a community. Everyone lives here and, when you graduate, you’re going to live here. If you don’t graduate, you’re going to live here. What happens, oftentimes, is [the SRO] is building a relationship, so that one day when you have graduated, you know that person, and you have an affection for somebody in law enforcement. (RA2, 21–25)

This realization described by Mr. Alexander illustrates not only community influence and connection, but also student perceptions of the police.

**Student Perception.** When describing how they may be viewed by students, police participants agreed students often think they are there to impose consequences, especially during the initial interactions. Deputy Wolfe described this phenomenon:

I got that a lot when you’re first here, “Well, you’re just here to get us in trouble, arrest us.” And I said, “No . . . actually, that’s the least favorite part of my job . . . . My goal is to not arrest anybody and to be able to talk to you beforehand. Tell you your actions have consequences. Here’s what it is on the legal and the
criminal side of things.” (RP1, 241–243)

Mr. Moore agreed with Deputy Wolfe’s assessment and stated, “[Deputy Wolfe] does a really good job of . . . not reinforcing . . . that [police] stereotype. Just building relationships with kids that feel very genuine” (RA1, 172–174). Influencing student perception through rapport building was also referenced by Deputy Smith:

The last thing I wanted to do was come here and do that heavy-handed law enforcement role. I knew it was important to build my rapport with the students here and let them know that I’m here for them. I’m not here to make arrests.

(AP2, 10–12)

The decision by the police participants to intentionally avoid engaging in traditional law enforcement actions promoted more positive experiences with the students. This approach also prevented students from having a negative response to police, which may have been triggered by prior adverse interactions.

The administrator and police participants identified that students may have difficulty when engaging with a police officer. Mr. Moore shared, “There are some kids who have history and some baggage and law enforcement is a trigger to them” (RA1, 171). This acknowledgment aligns with the Four Rs aspect of resisting re-traumatization. Mr. Harper recognized the importance of realizing students’ histories to prevent additional conflict or trauma. One particular student scenario was shared:

We have a new student that started with us this fall and he was, just . . . due to their family interactions with the police, just not having a lot of positive interactions. So we really have tried to find many, many situations when we could call our SRO to come in and have a positive interaction with the child.
This proactive approach in the school setting would “hopefully change some of the perceptions about interactions with the police” (AA1, 11). Officer Hartson agreed that great importance existed in taking “the opportunity to make positive police interactions” (SP1, 167). He concluded that “most people in life . . . have very few police interactions. And with that, most of them are negative” (SP1, 167–169).

Promoting a more positive student perception of police would result in short-term outcomes of reduced conflictual interactions in the school. However, hope also existed that long-term benefits could be realized. Mr. Harper shared his belief in the possibility of a long-term effect on student perception explaining, “I think making a positive impact on the kid . . . that’s going to be something he remembers as he grows up, that he was treated well by this officer and there’s a lot of good ones out there” (AA1, 22-24).

Officer Hartson also confided his wish for a greater impact:

Not that I want people to remember my name or who I am. Just, I want people to, when they see another police officer, they can think of that positive interaction they had, “Hey, that cop at school, he was good.” (SP1, 178–180)

Students’ perception of the police as well as community viewpoints were influential factors in how police operated in the school setting. Importance was given to the realization that police are often considered negatively. Efforts to lessen this perception were consistent across participants.

An analysis of the roles of both the school administrators and the police officers when interacting with students with behavioral issues resulted in several conclusions. The participants identified the importance of the administrators and law enforcement
officers building relationships and rapport with students to promote positive outcomes. They also recognized distinct administrative responsibilities when addressing student misconduct. The manner in which law enforcement and the school administrators worked as partners is elaborated through discussion on collaborative practices.

**Research Question 2**

*From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, how do they currently collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of secondary school students, particularly those with traumatic histories?*

**Results and Analysis.** This study sought to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the collaborative practices the participants engaged in relating to student behavioral decision-making and problem-solving. Analysis of the data revealed the existence of ongoing, collegial partnerships. As a result of this examination, two themes emerged for Research Question 2. These themes are working as a team and importance of adult relationships. Table 4.2 depicts the themes, key concepts, and subthemes for Research Question 2.

**Table 4.2**

*Research Question 2 – Themes, Concepts, and Subthemes*

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key concept</th>
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Theme 2.1: Working as a Team. This theme highlights the importance of engaging in teamwork and employing a shared vision of student support. The participants were asked to reflect on their existing understanding of and engagement in collaborative practices. Deputy Franklin described collaboration simply as “teamwork . . . you’re working as a team with a group of people or another individual for a main goal” (RP2, 151–152). The resulting data confirmed that these professional partnerships were beneficial and enhanced the decision-making process. The participant responses are organized in three subthemes. These subthemes are utilizing a team approach, recognizing the benefits of collaboration, and maintaining a student focus.

Team Approach. The effectiveness of applying a team approach was consistently identified by all participants. Teaming opportunities took place for a variety of student planning reasons. However, most frequently discussed was collaboration relating to student behavior and discipline. It was evident that the schools included multiple stakeholders in those conversations and decisions. Mr. Carter described the structure in his school:

Every house is teemed with an assistant principal, two guidance counselors, and then we have related support in the form of school psychologists and social workers . . . . Depending on where we are in the continuum of discipline, any or all of those people are involved. (SA2, 166–171)

This level of support was evident from the other participants, as well. Mr. Moore shared that in his school “what’s most important . . . is to involve our counseling staff, either the school psychologist or counselors, as part of the response to the discipline” (RA1, 104–105). Ms. Maverick also reflected on the established team practices in her school:
We have a lot of different collaborative processes . . . . For behavioral and disciplinary, we put in a lot of preventative work. So, we have weekly pupil service team meetings that consist of a team of administrators, counselors, teachers, and we create the agenda based on what we’re seeing, what’s the data showing, where are students struggling? (AA2, 169–173)

Ms. Maverick’s statement illustrates the potential complexity of the team structure. It also suggests the importance of a proactive approach to collaborative problem-solving. This significance was shared by the other participants.

Deputy Wolfe shared the preventive processes his school utilized to address student concerns:

We meet as a team at least once a week for a few hours with the school psychologist, myself, [and] every counselor in the building. [The administrators] have set up various ways that teachers can send concerns, issues, anything to us for that meeting. And we’ll go through anything from grades to behavior issues to somebody’s parents just passed away. What can we do to support them? (RP1, 189–193)

In the course of discussing the structure and logistics of various collaborative models, the importance of maintaining students as the priority was evident. Maintaining a student lens also revealed specific benefits gained from collaboration.

**Benefits of Collaboration.** The participants identified advantages to working within a team model. Multiple perspectives and areas of expertise provided richer problem-solving and led to more diverse solutions. Mr. Berry described this phenomenon by stating, “The power of collaboration is that it’s kind of distributed...”
leadership that gets out there more frequently. There’s more ideas, more thoughts, ‘Hey, we didn’t think of that’” (SA1, 175–176). Ms. Maverick more specifically explained the positive impact of collaboration:

There’s a lot of experience and a lot of different experiences coming into making decisions. So, we might have a school psychologist who is looking at things from a testing piece; myself who might be looking at things from a safety, regulations, IEP implementation piece; the teacher who’s looking at what it looks like in the classroom. So, there’s a lot of different viewpoints. (AA2, 200–203)

Deputy Wolfe more succinctly characterized the process as “a team effort, and I think everyone at that table is trying to come up with ideas” (RP1, 204). Mr. Carter gave his opinion on what might ensue when the opposite of a team approach occurred saying, “I think that working in isolation, you’re prone to making rigid decisions and ill-informed decisions” (SA2, 209–210).

An additional identified benefit of working collaboratively was the attention given to prioritizing student needs. Mr. Harper recognized the power of applying a group approach to supporting students:

Everyone gets on the same page. Obviously, if there’s anything that we’re missing, people kind of point it out. No one really works well in a vacuum. So, putting several minds together that are all working with the same child, people are more able to identify things that will go well and things that might become a barrier. (AA1, 149–152)
A group of individuals working together also promotes the sharing of individual expertise. Ms. Maverick reflected on her appreciation for this type of collaborative environment:

We have a pretty diverse staff as far as experience . . . . So, our counseling staff specifically, we have these young, new staff who are fresh out of college who have all this knowledge about restorative practices. But then we also have these people who have been around for a really long time who know everything there is to know about TCI [therapeutic crisis intervention] and PBIS [positive behavioral interventions and supports] and the parts of this program. So, when you mesh those together, it makes for a pretty strong team. (AA2, 203–208)

Appreciation of the unique skill sets of team members contributed to the effective functioning of the group.

Having multiple professionals involved in student outcomes allows options regarding which adult could most effectively work with a struggling student. Mr. Moore recognized “the counselors help to address the behavior in a way that doesn’t necessarily feel as punitive, but it’s like the learning process. You made a mistake, this is what you could do in the future; that type of thing” (RA1, 119–121). Mr. Carter established a similar mindset in his school. He reflected, “We’re very mindful of [preserving relationships] and understanding. That’s where I think the collaboration comes in and trying to really get to know your students and to understand what’s the behavior” (SA2, 200–201). This emphasis on preserving student relationships and working together to support students was referenced by multiple participants.
**Student Focus.** The importance of considering student needs was central in the participants’ reflections on collaboration. Recognition existed that student behavior may be the result of unknown factors. This awareness directly connected with realizing that trauma exists and recognizing how that trauma may manifest as outlined in the Four Rs framework. Rather than only concentrating on long-range goals, a student’s immediate needs should also be considered during collaborative decision-making. Mr. Carter suggested, “We’re making decisions that are in the best interests of the kids and aren’t about teaching life lessons. They’re much more focused on figuring out what level of support that the kid needs in the moment” (SA2, 190–192).

Officer Hartson also shared his belief about the importance of the school team understanding a student and their possible motivation when engaged in a negative behavior:

I think any adult’s role in the entire school is to have those relationships with kids to understand this kid’s not having the same day. They look different today. What’s going on today and why? And what can we do to make sure that this kid gets through today and gets through tomorrow and through the next year and gets through high school? (SP1, 116–119)

Officer Hartson elaborated by putting an emphasis on building an early relationship with students and developing rapport over time. He said, “If we can work on these kids that have some of these issues earlier on, it makes it much easier when they become young adults” (SP1, 125–126).
The collaborative team supporting students does not have to be limited to school personnel. Outside providers might also contribute to a student-focused support network. Deputy Wolfe referenced:

A couple times we might get some people from outside our buildings, whether it’s mental health, whether it’s somebody from a hospital coming in to talk about it, but at a minimum we’ve got, I think, everybody who is working with kids in this building on a daily basis talking about, “What can we do to support kids?” Not only just in school, but out of school as well. (RP1, 196–199)

This larger characterization of school and community support was echoed by Deputy Thompson. As the only officer in the study who was not a full-time SRO, Deputy Thompson had a unique experience of partnering with multiple school districts. His assessment through a law enforcement lens was aligned with the school administrators and SROs:

It’s about the kids, right? At the end of the day, we want to make sure that the kids have the resources they need. If they’re in distress, if they have some sort of trauma going on in their life . . . make sure they have those resources available to them. (SP2, 161–163)

The participant responses illustrated a shared belief in the value of utilizing a collaborative approach for student decision-making and support. These partnerships position the respondents well to effectively meet the needs of students through understanding and relationships.

**Theme 2.2: Importance of Adult Relationships.** This theme offers a more in-depth exploration of the collaborative practices specifically between the administrators
and police officers in the studied school buildings. While law enforcement individuals may not have direct involvement in student disciplinary decisions, their presence in the school buildings can be significant. Participants communicated varying levels of interaction and partnerships, but all indicated the value of establishing a positive relationship and the benefit to both the adults and students. This analysis led to the emergence of three subthemes. These subthemes are the relationship between officers and school administrators, the rapport officers develop through their presence in the schools, and the police operating as a resource for the administrators.

**Police/School Relationship.** The relationship between the school principals and law enforcement was identified by the participants as an important element. A specific area of collaboration discussed was related to student discipline. In Research Question 1, it became clear that disciplinary decision-making fell entirely within the administrators’ role. This opinion was reiterated when the participants were asked about collaborative practices. Mr. Alexander shared, “[The SRO and I] really don’t collaborate on our discipline decisions. I don’t run any decisions by her” (RA2, 223–227). When speaking about discipline in the context of collaboration, Officer Hartson also reiterated, “I don’t try to get involved in school discipline, and I kind of tell the administrators and the kids, ‘I’m not here to walk the halls and grab the first kid that’s late for class’” (SP1, 113–114).

Deputy Smith shared this perspective, elaborating to include that establishing that standard had taken time: “Now that we’ve been working together for a little while here, they know what I will get involved in and what I won’t” (AP2, 103–104). Deputy Smith also indicated the planning between himself and the principal was deliberate:
I think we do a good job communicating, and I think it’s better letting the school handle it and take care of most of the discipline[e]. That way, it keeps the kids knowing that they’re going to be held accountable. (AP2, 125–127)

Deputy Lincoln similarly suggested a partnership with his principal in which the administrator was ultimately responsible for discipline but valued the input of the SRO. He explained, “I’m not a disciplinarian, and I’m not supposed to be a disciplinarian. But at times [administrators] do ask, ‘How do you feel?’” (AP1, 135–136).

Maintaining open lines of communication was identified as a priority by several participants. One interpretation of this involved allowing the administrator to set the tone for a student interaction with police following their lead. Deputy Smith shared he “always[s] look[s] to the administrators, first, to see what they want to do” (AP2, 115). Deputy Lincoln also referenced relinquishing control to the principal for initial decision-making. Deputy Lincoln acknowledged that it was, at times, frustrating for him to step back from this responsibility. He reflected that it was a departure from his initial perception of his SRO role. He explained:

It’s really important that there’s a relationship with the administrators and law enforcement. And it was hard for me, at first, to realize, but I’m just there as a guest. I’m not a disciplinarian. I’m not involved in this or that. And sometimes I get frustrated because I’m left out of certain things . . . . You just got to remember it’s their building. You’re just there to help them and guide them in any way you can. (AP1, 267–279)

Although a potential source of frustration for Deputy Smith, his opinion of administrative communication and authority was not universal among the participants.
The school principals demonstrated a decided appreciation for the communication opportunities they shared with the SROs in their schools. Ms. Maverick indicated that the responsibility for initiating open communication was a shared responsibility. She spoke to her main concern when working with her SRO:

Two major things I would encourage are being open about your priorities and then communicating. So, when it comes to priorities, our SRO knows that we want to be restorative, that we want to look at things through a trauma-informed lens. (AA2, 269–271)

Ms. Maverick also referenced the frequent collaboration and communication she and her SRO shared in an effort to balance decision-making from multiple perspectives:

There’s collaboration . . . every single day on a variety of levels . . . . We can talk through a situation and really determine, “Okay, this is the age of the student, so this is what it would mean if there were legal ramifications. This is what it would mean if the school went forward with suspension or a restorative circle or a restitution plan.” It helps us make informed decisions. (AA2, 222–229)

While Mr. Harper did not express the same frequency of communication with his SRO, he did think it was important to “make it a priority that you’re touching base with the SRO at least once a week about something” (AA1, 190). This focus on communication between the administrators and police officers promoted greater collegiality and support.

Mr. Carter described his experience with developing open communication with the police resources available to his school. His school district did not employ SROs, so Mr. Carter’s interactions with the police were more often with road patrol officers or the
police officer liaison connected with the district. The existing state of communication and partnership was compared to earlier police responses with Mr. Carter explaining, “I have a relationship where I can tell them what I need, or I can give them context. And prior to that, you never knew what you were going to get” (SA2, 231–232). He continued, “It’s having those relationships with the police and meeting with them on a regular basis . . . . They are very responsive in terms of getting back to us and trying to help us” (SA2, 247–250). Mutual benefit of the relationship and communication meant “there’s a lot of comfort about, ‘I’m taking your call, you’re taking my call; we’re here to help each other’” (SA2, 274–275).

Development of a positive relationship between the administrators and police through intentional communication had beneficial results. Strong rapport was established, and the importance of the police presence was more clearly articulated.

*Police Presence.* When asked about the presence of officers in their school buildings, the administrator and police participants offered suggestions for establishing a positive role. Deputy Thompson most succinctly stated, “Get into the school, say hi, introduce yourself. Bring the level of concern down . . . . We don’t always want to be the bad guy” (SP2, 203–209). His statement referenced the perception that police in schools may have a negative connotation. Mr. Harper also reflected on the importance of promoting a positive response to the police in the school. He said, “Get [the SRO] in the building. People can see him, staff feels safe. Students see the SRO, and they see that just because there’s police in the building doesn’t mean that there’s enforcement happening” (AA1, 192–193).
Importance was placed on proactively and deliberately establishing an accepted police presence. Deputy Lincoln shared a lesson he learned when he first became an SRO and how, in hindsight, he would have acted differently. He expressed, “I would like to start all over and sit down with everybody and hear from everybody. What do you want from me? This is what I want from you. What do you expect?” (AP1, 163–164). Placing emphasis on intentionally setting clear expectations was shared by others. Mr. Berry valued the opportunity to have his SRO actively involved in the school community. He stated, “Invite them in to be part of your culture and your school climate. Because students, good or bad, they’re drawn to police officers. That’s a good thing” (SA1, 224–227). Engagement of the police in the school benefits the administrators and students. It also leads to positive outcomes for the officers.

Commitment to the school and the students resulted in the officers forming more innovative relationships. Deputy Wolfe gave an example of the efforts he engaged in to enhance his presence:

Every morning, 7:30, I call my kids and wake them up, get them out of bed, tell them their Zoom schedule and if there’s anything they need, they tell me, “Well, can you go tell this teacher I haven’t sent the homework in yet, but I’m going to?” I mean, really anything that we can think of that could help, we’re going to try. (RP1, 213–216)

Ms. Maverick shared a similar interpretation of her SRO’s connections and collaborative approach. She reflected, “He’s very committed to the position and to the collaboration, so that has fostered almost this sense that these are his students, just like maybe an administrator would have” (AA2, 42–44).
The collaborative presence of the police in the schools required deliberate and thoughtful practice. An additional outcome of this partnership was the ability for the administrators to utilize the police as a unique resource.

**Police as a Resource.** The principal participants acknowledged their appreciation for the insight provided from the law enforcement perspective during collaboration. Access to community resources and an enhanced understanding of the criminal justice system were valued in decision-making. This awareness allowed the school to respond to student needs more proactively and appropriately. Ms. Maverick shared a specific scenario where her SRO’s knowledge of a situation informed the school team’s response:

Problem solving has . . . improved across settings since we’ve had an SRO. For example, we had a student who’s been struggling in the program. They were mental hygiene arrested from the community last night. The SRO heard [and] he was able to send me a text message about the situation. I was able to get in touch with the counselor, so we knew we had to come up with a plan before buses got here today. (AA2, 188–191)

This awareness of events outside of the school setting was also reflected in the officer’s insight on home situations for students.

The SRO participants all indicated close connections within the districts and communities in which they worked. Events that occurred outside of school hours may not be brought to the attention of the school personnel if not for the SRO. Mr. Berry affirmed this phenomenon when speaking of a student in his school:

[The SRO] says, “Hey, just so you know, this family had this happen to them over the weekend. Maybe keep an eye out for the girl.” Or connect them [with] a
counselor [to] just say, “Hey, is everything okay?” We don’t say that Officer Hartson said anything, but we just want to check in because they had police called to their house for a domestic situation. (SA1, 210–214)

The SROs’ dual perspective on the students’ home lives also provided a link between the school and the community. Mr. Berry stated, “[The SRO] helps out a lot of ways in terms of our outside-of-school stuff. He’s also gone to do home visits for certain families where he has a relationship that might be beneficial” (SA1, 215–216).

Utilizing the police as a resource was not limited to student-specific events that occurred outside of school hours. The administrator participants referenced having knowledge of the legal system as an additional collaborative opportunity. SROs could be accessed for insight on an appropriate response to a student’s misconduct. Ms. Maverick said, “Having [the SRO] with that knowledge [of community and legal resources] helps us make better decisions about how we want to move forward with student behavioral issues” (AA2, 232–234). Officer Hartson, likewise, saw the value in proactively sharing information to prevent future legal involvement for students:

I think that most of these encounters that we have with kids that may be law enforcement issues, arresting someone is not the best solution, sending someone off to family court. And I would much rather them get the help and the follow-up through school. (SP1, 137–139)

The mutual benefit of collaboratively utilizing the police as a resource was evident. Their knowledge paired with the relationships they developed contributed to overall positive feelings of the SRO/school partnership. The police contribution to collaboration often involved a response to a mental health crisis. This phenomenon is indicative of the
potential underlying causes of student behaviors and the need to explore the concept of trauma.

**Research Question 3**

*From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices? What are current training opportunities and other sources of information that aid in understanding the impact of trauma on students?*

**Results and Analysis.** This study focused on the concept of trauma and aimed to determine the existing understandings of trauma. This study also sought to investigate what, if any, training opportunities relating to trauma exist for both the school administrators and police officers. Through data collection and analysis, a general understanding of trauma was identified. However, existing training provided at the time of this study was acknowledged as a deficit area despite the participants’ recognition of the importance of trauma awareness. As a result, three themes emerged: trauma is different things to different people, identifying trauma can be a challenge, and trauma is not adequately covered in pre-service training.

**Table 4.3**

*Research Question 3 – Themes, Concepts, and Subthemes*

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<th>Theme</th>
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Trauma is Different Things to Different People. This theme addresses the participants’ descriptions of trauma. The complexity of trauma was uncovered, evidenced by the participants offering varying explanations. The definitions of trauma led to additional reflections on the importance of being mindful of the presence of trauma as indicated in the Four Rs realization of trauma. Examination of this theme resulted in three subthemes. The first subtheme is how trauma was defined. The second subtheme is the awareness of trauma, and the third subtheme is the demonstrated understanding of trauma.

Trauma Defined. When asked to provide a definition of trauma, a variety of responses were offered. Rather than providing a clear definition of trauma, some participants provided examples of events they would consider traumatic or trauma-producing. A commonly given reply referenced the impact of the home environment on a student. Deputy Smith equated trauma with abuse and the residual consequences of those experiences:

Abuse. Being abused. Growing up in their home . . . just some of the kids coming in from foster care, they tell about growing up. When being taken away from their homes. Some of the trauma with police. Just witnessing that with their parents, seeing their parents taken away. (AP2, 186–189)

Deputy Thompson also cited encounters in the home as potential causes of trauma. He specified that trauma may be caused by witnessing an event rather than being
directly involved in such event. His assessment illustrated the difficulty in clearly articulating a definition for trauma:

There’s a lot to trauma, right? So many factors, there’s different factors that can cause trauma in a student’s life. Environmental factors, factors at home, third person. What you see and hear, if you’re a child at home, you may not be involved in the traumatic experience, but it may cause trauma for you just hearing it. Mom and Dad arguing, domestics at home . . . . Maybe they experienced sexual abuse, stuff like that that has caused trauma in their lives. It could be an accident they were in. I mean, a number of things can contribute to trauma. (SP2, 218–225)

Deputy Fitzgerald also identified a student’s home life and background as potentially trauma-inducing and believed it may be the result of “what their socioeconomic status is, how they’ve grown up in their homes. Some of my kids go home, and at 9 years old, they’re taking care of younger siblings, and Mom works nights” (RP2, 240–241). She continued that the cause of trauma may be “how they were raised, just the life experience, the things they’ve seen . . . and some of these kids have been exposed to drugs at a very young age” (RP2, 247–254).

The definition of trauma originating in the home was expanded to include additional possible contributing factors. Mr. Carter reflected:

Trauma could be abuse in the home, could be relationship abuse at our level here at the high school. It could be . . . living in poverty, it could be racially based. There’s so many things, but obviously anything that’s impacting students in a
negative way that impedes their ability to learn, to feel safe, and to feel supported in this environment. (SA2, 281–284)

This more comprehensive explanation of trauma references how the student might feel as the result of trauma. The impact on individuals was further discussed by Deputy Wolfe:

It’s really an issue that a child is going through in their lives that is affecting them socially, mentally, physically, and it can be anything really. And I’ve seen it run the gamut from physical abuse, verbal abuse, living on a two-inch mattress with rats and no electricity, no heat. So, anything that a child or an adult is dealing with that is affecting them in those ways. (RP1, 258–261)

Recognizing a difference between the events that might cause trauma and the potential social, mental, and physical effects on someone is an important distinction. The participants were able to expand on this thought further by detailing how trauma might shape a person’s future outcomes.

The long-range consequences of trauma were described by several participants. Mr. Alexander acknowledged that trauma may be lifelong:

Pretty much [you can have trauma] even before you’re born. It’s basically events that could cause . . . your brain to make you think differently. To me, it’s really about making you think that that’s normal, when all of a sudden you have now switched your view on life because you think that is something that’s okay to do. That’s okay to have witnessed or been a part of. Now you have a different series of events of how you live. (RA2, 262–266)

The concept that trauma can change the thought processes of individuals was also suggested by Mr. Harper when he was asked to define trauma:
[Trauma] is experiences that somebody would have in their life that will initiate the fight or flight response and repetitively, so multiple times, or perhaps a significant occurrence. And then, again, that goes to rewiring the brain and how your brain reacts to similar situations in the future. (AA1, 209–212)

Mr. Moore also referenced the developmental impact of trauma. When describing his understanding of the concept of trauma, he explained:

Trauma can be a number of things . . . adverse childhood experiences that shape our behavior and personalities as we grow . . . . I think it’s just the things that have happened in our past that shape what we do, and maybe shape our behavior and our personalities and our decision-making. (RA1, 180–183)

The participants’ descriptions of trauma had many similarities including the ongoing, long-range impact of trauma. Some participants also spoke to individualized responses to trauma. Mr. Harper indicated, “I think we all have [trauma] to some degree, some have it a lot more than others . . . . It does rewire the brain” (AA1, 199–200).

Deputy Franklin expanded on this idea:

I think trauma is tricky; that there’s all kinds of it, and people experience it differently. To say exactly what trauma is, is hard, but in my opinion, it’s your response. Like, if your life’s experiences, you’ve experienced these events, they’ve settled with you differently that they’re going to settle with the person next to you. And, out of the blue, it can hit you. And something that might affect you wouldn’t affect me and vice versa. (RP2, 226–230)

When discussing trauma, the participants agreed on the major concepts of what defines trauma including referencing events such as adverse childhood experiences. The school
principals and police officers also shared the importance of demonstrating an awareness of the existence of trauma among student populations.

*Awareness.* All the participants exhibited a working definition of trauma and the possible causes of trauma. Perhaps more notably, the administrators and law enforcement officers naturally shared their thoughts on the importance of recognizing trauma exists for students as outlined in the Four Rs framework. The level of needed awareness that they discussed indicates a deeper understanding of the influence of trauma. Mr. Harper reflected, “We don’t necessarily know all the trauma that our students have experienced. So, we have to just assume that they all have had some pretty horrific trauma at some point” (AA1, 202–204).

The percentage of their student populations that the participants believed to have experienced trauma was significant. Deputy Lincoln offered:

> I would say, I don’t know, maybe 80% of the students that I deal with, there’s trauma behind it. And you can see it, and you just feel like you can fix it, but you know what it is and talking with the kids, but whatever you do for them, at the end of the day, they just go right back to [the traumatic environment]. (AP1, 254-257)

Ms. Maverick also identified considerable trauma histories for her students saying, “I’m working with a population of students who largely have endured trauma or have endured multiples ACEs before they get to me as seventh graders” (AA2, 307–309).

Deputy Wolfe shared a poignant example of a student with a known traumatic experience:
I looked at one [student] this morning; a child had been choked by his dad two nights ago, and yet he’s in school and he’s doing the best that he can. But all of these things, you don’t know, and it’s tough. (RP1, 160–161)

Considering these types of student experiences prompted Mr. Harper to state, “It’s something that, as adults, we always have to keep it in the back of our head when we’re working with students that have experienced trauma” (AA1, 200–202).

Recognizing that information regarding traumatic histories may not be available was also identified as a reality. Ms. Maverick said, “Identifying trauma, really, it can be a challenge, because it’s straightforward with some kids. You have all of their history on paper for you. Other kids, you have very little” (AA2, 321–323). Ms. Maverick also shared the importance of everyone working in the school and understanding trauma. She stated, “We really push that you don’t know who’s endured trauma, so you need to assume that people have endured trauma. Whether they’re parents coming into the building, whether they’re your colleagues, whether they’re your students” (AA2, 318–321). This viewpoint directly correlates with the Four Rs lens of realizing trauma exists.

Mr. Moore shared the sentiment that trauma may be invisible and difficult to identify. He shared, “[Students with trauma] can look very much put together but [they] have plenty of trauma in their lives” (RA1, 199).

Realizing that a student’s trauma history may not be immediately evident led to the participants reflecting on how trauma might impact student behavior. Mr. Moore stated, “I think it’s really important for just an awareness of the impact of trauma on behavior” (RA1, 242–243). Mr. Harper agreed that “all behavior has a meaning. A lot of times when you see that behavior, there’s usually something there” (AA1, 222–223). Mr.
Moore recognized that, at times, he might temporarily neglect to consider trauma when a student is engaged in misconduct. He shared:

You get caught up in [behaviors] . . . and you’re just like, ‘Oh, I can’t believe this kid is doing this and he just continues to do this over and over again.’ And [you have to] have some awareness of the reasons why. (RA1, 252–254)

Deputy Thompson also believed that “you have to understand what the underlying issues are” (SP2, 235).

Deputy Wolfe suggested that, in his experience in the school, he had witnessed a growing awareness of trauma:

I do think most people are recognizing the fact that we’ve got a lot more kids that are dealing with trauma in their lives and there has to be better ways to do it than how we’ve done it in the past. (RP1, 330–332)

This statement connects to the participants’ efforts to better understand trauma and shape their responses around that knowledge and insight.

**Understanding.** Addressing student behaviors in an understanding and compassionate manner was an area that some participants conceded was not always their natural response. Officer Hartson very candidly shared:

At first I found [acting out] very frustrating. Why would you do something so stupid? The kids just want attention. Negative attention, positive attention . . . I [found that] frustrating. But when you understand it, you can work with the school counselors and school psychologists to understand, “Hey, this kid just wants attention.” It definitely helps to understand . . . I’m not going to get mad at a kid for wanting attention. (SP1, 252–267)
Officer Hartson also reflected, “Instead of being frustrated or upset with kids, you start to realize . . . this isn’t really all of their fault. Did they make a poor choice? Yeah, but they’re kids” (SP1, 89–93).

Placing importance on approaching students from a place of understanding shifted the priorities of the participants’ school buildings and, in at least one case, the entire school district. Rather than concern primarily lying with academic assessment, value was given to students’ social and emotional well-being. Ms. Maverick explained her school’s approach:

We really rely on [trauma] research, and we also try to push it out to our staff and help them understand, yes, we want the student to pass the [state exam], but are they safe? Are they healthy? Do they have all of their needs met? (AA2, 309–311)

Mr. Carter shared a similar perspective that his district had adopted:

From the district level, [there] is a concerted effort from the superintendent on down for us to say that relationships matter and test scores don’t. Not to say that we don’t care about academics, but we believe that, if relationships are strong, then academics follow. (SA2, 326–329)

The evolution to a more student-centered focus reflects the increased understanding by the school stakeholders. The police participants also shared examples of how their perspectives had changed regarding students and traumatic histories.

Deputy Lincoln provided insight into how his perception changed from his time as a road patrol officer to his experience as an SRO. He was first reflective on gaining a more comprehensive understanding of students’ stories:
Being in the schools, obviously now, I’m seeing a lot more what these kids live in on a daily basis and what they’ve been through. And I thought I saw a lot working the road and domestics and things like that. But some of these kids, what they’ve been forced to live through, it’s definitely changed my way of dealing with them. (AP1, 174–177)

Deputy Lincoln continued to explain how his appreciation for the experiences of the students grew significantly because of his opportunity to work more closely with them in the school:

It’s definitely much worse than I ever realized, because you never really had the time [when you were working the road]. As a policeman, you go, you handle this complaint, you leave, and you go to the next one. But here at school, you handle the complaint, but you see more of what’s behind the scenes. (AP1, 183–185)

These feelings were shared by Deputy Smith who also recognized the importance of demonstrating more empathy for the students. He shared, “The biggest thing is just patience and understanding that a lot of these kids are a product of their environment and they come from all different backgrounds, a lot of different traumas and experiences” (AP2, 243-245).

The administrator participants also specifically recognized understanding the students’ backgrounds and potential traumatic histories as essential. Mr. Moore elaborated:

Empathy is a really important character trait to have as an administrator, as a human being. It opens everything up for you, where you start to feel the need to
understand kids at a deeper level, before you can make decisions about their behavior, before you can make judgments about their behavior. (RA1, 243–247)

Compassion for their students was a mutual value held by the principals and police officers. Deputy Wolfe shared the story of a particularly poignant experience he and one of the school administrators shared:

The elementary principal and I were driving to go check on the welfare of a couple kids who hadn’t shown up to school. And I had already been to the house four or five times in the past couple months but he had never been there. And he got there and he saw the trash stacked up 20 feet in the yard, he saw broken windows on bedrooms, and he goes, “I really wish that some of the teachers could get out here with you sometimes and see what these kids are coming from. They expect kids to do this, this, this, this, this. But you look at this house and you look at what they’re dealing with at home.” And I said, “I know, it’s amazing that they even come to school and can sit down and focus and do anything.” (RP1, 148–156)

Developing empathy and understanding for the students’ trauma is crucial. However, recognizing that people have endured traumatic experiences can be difficult. This obstacle was discussed by the participants.

**Theme 3.2: Identifying Trauma Can Be a Challenge.** This theme addresses the difficulty that exists in identifying trauma in students. As the participants indicated, trauma affects different people in different ways. What one person may respond to as traumatic may not impact another individual. Additionally, expression of trauma responses vary. Through the analysis of the participant responses relating to identifying
trauma, two subthemes emerged. They are the importance of relationships to assist with trauma identification and recognizing how trauma might manifest itself in student behaviors.

**Relationships.** Developing relationships provides principals and police officers with a baseline understanding of student affect and behavior. This is important as it then gives adults insight when a student may be acting in an unusual manner. When asked how he might identify that a student has a traumatic history, Officer Hartson stated, “When you have those relationships, that’s when you can start to say, ‘Hey, this kid’s not the same today’” (SP1, 235–236).

Deputy Wolfe similarly looked to a departure from baseline behavior as an indicator of trauma. He shared, “You can see the signs if you look for them, and if you know a child’s baseline, a child’s baseline affect or if it’s changing, it’s usually going to be something coming from the home” (RP1, 280–282).

Deputy Smith also valued his relationships with the students. His reasoning was that, due to familiarity and rapport, students developed an increased comfort level. As a result, they more openly shared their experiences:

I’ve heard about some of the trauma just from the students coming in and voicing it themselves, telling me about their own experiences. Other times, I’ve sat with counselors while they’ve had a meeting with the student and the students shared that with us. Or shared it with the counselor and allows the counselor to share with me. (AP2, 178–181)
Establishment of this trusting relationship leads to more opportunities to interact with students. As a result, “once you sit down with these kids, you can usually find out what’s causing [the behavior]” (AP1, 202–203) was voiced by Deputy Lincoln.

Mr. Harper also referenced the importance of rapport with students. He recognized that without that connection, students are less inclined to confide in the adults:

You identify trauma, I think a lot of times, number one, through your relationships. They’re just going to tell you. If you have a relationship with a kid, they’re going to tell you. Some of them are going to be much more guarded. So, you’re going to have to be more perceptive and watch what they’re doing, how they respond to certain stimuli in the building. (AA1, 230-233)

Mr. Harper’s reflection on noticing how a student may respond to events in the school setting is also important. This observation connects to how student trauma may manifest in the school setting.

**Manifestation.** The school principals and police officers identified several ways in which trauma could appear. One common response was that the student may behave inappropriately or in a manner contrary to established school rules. Officer Hartson said, “You might see kids act out. That’s the one thing that I’ve seen quite a bit, unfortunately, is kids looking for attention” (SP1, 251–252). Deputy Lincoln shared this assessment of student behavior as an indicator of trauma:

How they’re acting. Acting out against maybe males or females. Disrespect.

Maybe some of the things they’re doing with other students or to other students . .

. . You can tell the students and look at them and just by the way they’re acting, there’s something going on at home. (AP1, 191–193)
Mr. Moore agreed that “maladaptive social behavior” (RA1, 193) might be a sign of trauma. He suggested “students have difficulty in navigating the social scene . . . and even have either verbal or physical altercations with either peers or adults” (RA1, 193–195).

Deputy Franklin also referenced acting-out behavior as a possible indicator of trauma:

The kid that’s acting out constantly. You’ve told them 30 times, “We don’t bring weed to school. Okay, why are you still bringing weed to school?” Well, because now they’re addicted, and it’s how they cope with what’s going on at home.

(RP2, 272–274)

Deputy Franklin connected acting out with other harmful behaviors. This association identified self-harm as another possible manifestation of trauma.

Self-harm behavior was referenced by several participants when explaining the evidence of trauma. Officer Hartson shared Deputy Franklin’s assessment that students may turn to drug use as a coping mechanism. He expanded on this concept to include other harmful actions: “They might do self-medication and get into a drug or alcohol addiction. They might do self-harm and not just physical self-harm, but emotional self-harm or they’re doing things, they’re putting themselves in poor positions” (SP1, 208–210).

Mr. Moore also recognized the likelihood that students might engage in destructive activities. This could occur as a result of feeling ill-equipped to deal with their experiences until “ultimately, after those things kind of build, you can have some self-harm . . . like suicidal ideation and things like that” (RA1, 207–210).
The participants also discussed the concept of triggers for students with traumatic histories. They indicated the difficulty of identifying or predicting what might trigger a student with a history of trauma. As Ms. Maverick described, “You can’t always find that clear, ‘This student was upset and I asked them to do work, so they threw a desk.’ Sometimes the desk goes flying, and we have to put the pieces back together later” (AA2, 342–344). Ms. Maverick also explained that, when a trigger is identified, it can be surprising. She shared, “We see students triggered by things that we would have never expected. A certain type of food comes from the cafeteria line, or a peer plays a certain song; things like that” (AA2, 339-341).

Mr. Carter communicated his experience with students reacting to triggering stimuli:

A lot of times kids with trauma, they’re like taut rubber bands and something that another kid can cope with pretty easily—you know, like somebody, I don’t know, I’m looking at them wrong in the hallway, turns into something a little bit more of a confrontation. (SA2, 335–337)

Mr. Carter felt that this response behavior could also be classified as a student demonstrating anxiety in the environment:

In other ways, more sensitive ways, it’s just triggering anxiety, that they don’t want to be in school or they don’t want to be in that class. There’s avoidant behaviors, going to the bathroom, tapping out, going to the nurse’s office and parking in there instead of confronting the things that are triggering them at the time. (SA2, 337–340)
Mr. Harper classified this type of reaction as a survival instinct. He stated, “I think it’s almost like a self-preservation type of response that they have. That’s when they get guarded. That’s where some of them have learned that they really can’t trust” (AA1, 240–241). He recognized that this manifestation of trauma results in students who are “so guarded, they’re putting up that shield to protect themselves and we’re not able to get as far as quickly as we might with other kids” (AA1, 248–249).

The participants demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the possible manifestations of trauma. They also reinforced the importance of relationships to assist with identifying traumatic histories. The participants’ understanding of trauma was further explored through discussions relating to formal training opportunities.

**Theme 3.3: Trauma Is Not Adequately Covered.** This theme relates to specific, formal trauma training that may or may not have been provided to the participants. The principals and police officers were asked about any pre-service training they received as well as existing professional development. The participants also shared their opinions regarding what would constitute appropriate learning opportunities relating to trauma, in general, and specifically when working with adolescents. Three subthemes resulted from the data analysis. These subthemes are agreement on a lack of training, a description of currently provided training at the time of this study, and potential training opportunities.

**Lack of Training.** The participants were invited to think about pre-service training they had received for their respective positions. The school principals were asked to reflect on their undergraduate and graduate education classes as well as their administrative coursework. The police officers were asked to consider the training they
received in the academy or for their position as an SRO. When directed to specifically identify the teaching related to trauma or working with individuals with traumatic histories, the participant responses were unanimous. No one could recollect any meaningful training on the subject.

Several of the principal participants expressed genuine surprise and dismay that trauma training was a deficit area in their educations. Mr. Carter said, “That would be zero [training]. Unfortunately, there’s a lot of things that you don’t get trained on in administrative classes” (SA2, 356–357). Mr. Harper similarly responded, “I don’t recall in my admin prep or my teacher prep anything about trauma” (AA1, 259–260). Mr. Berry commented, “I don’t think I had any work [on trauma]. We had educational psychology, but . . . I don’t think that had anything to do with trauma” (SA1, 312–313).

When asked about her recollection if she received trauma training, Ms. Maverick replied, “No. Honestly, no, which is pretty concerning. I think we went through mandated reporter training, and that was really the extent of it, and that was really focused on nothing preventative and nothing supportive” (AA2, 351–353).

The police participants expressed a similar lack of trauma coverage in their academy and SRO curricula. Deputy Lincoln shared, “On a law enforcement aspect, none, which is sad. I think all the SROs need trauma training” (AP1, 223). He elaborated that any training he has received “is what the school has offered . . . but there’s not enough out there for us to be able to handle [trauma] because you definitely have to handle it differently” (AP1, 226–230). Officer Hartson acknowledged that “most first responders are trained to deal with the immediate physical trauma” (SP1, 275) rather than mental or emotional trauma.
Deputy Thompson referenced some attention to mental health needs in his academy training, but it was not specific to trauma:

I know, back then, there was a focus on some mental health training . . . I think they brought in some people, that had some mental health diagnosis, to sit as a panel and talk to us, and tell us about what their mental health issues were going on. Then teach us what to say, what not to say. (SP2, 269–271)

Deputy Franklin also shared her training experience. Rather than the focus placed on recognizing and responding to trauma, she recalled information regarding how officers might react to individuals experiencing trauma:

There wasn’t a lot of training. Ten years ago in the academy, it was like, “Okay, you’re going to see some things. You’re going to see some things, they’re not going to sit well with you, get help if you need it.” And that was the extent that we talked about trauma really. (RP2, 299–301)

Deputy Wolfe summarized the level of trauma training by clearly stating, “I don’t think it’s adequately covered” (RP1, 316).

The study participants were also asked to identify any training they may have received relating to working with adolescents or on adolescent development. Similar to trauma training, the responses clearly illustrated a lack of attention to the topic. It might have been expected that, as trained teachers, school principals would have more background in this area. However, the school administrators did not indicate any substantially different experience in their pre-service learning than the police officers.

Mr. Berry was surprised by this realization stating, “This isn’t good. I don’t remember [adolescent development classes]. I remember financial classes . . . . Hey, if I
can’t remember, it must not have stood out, right?” (SA1, 319–324). Mr. Moore said he “vaguely remember something in my undergrad . . . there certainly isn’t enough” (RA1, 271–274). Ms. Maverick referenced being enrolled, at the time of her interview, in continuing education courses and this being her first experience with adolescent development content. She shared, “I took my first class over the summer, actually, surrounding adolescent development. And that was my first experience because, as an administrator, you get the certification for everything, but training-wise, I’m an elementary teacher” (AA2, 363–365).

The police officers referenced that any training they had received related to adolescents was more focused on juvenile justice than child development. Deputy Wolfe explained:

Maybe once a year, you’ll have a juvenile day of in-service where you kind of go over A to Z about new juvenile laws to things relating to juveniles. But I don’t know specifically; I can’t think of any training related to adolescent development. (RP1, 338-340)

Deputy Franklin had a similar reaction when asked about adolescent development training. She reflected, “We’ve touched on [working with adolescents] a little bit. Nothing in-depth, nothing really. And, especially, like with adolescent trauma, I don’t think we’ve had anything on that. I don’t recall anything on that” (RP2, 322–323).

**Provided Training.** The participants did indicate more recent training opportunities they received in response to a growing awareness of trauma and mental health needs. They also indicated the power of experiential learning. Reflecting on provided trainings suggested an appreciation for the shift in focus and resources.
Deputy Thompson recognized that, “over the past year or so, maybe a little bit more, it’s gotten way more in-depth as far as training and trauma-based stuff goes” (SP2, 273–274). Several of the police participants referenced crisis intervention training (CIT) as a more recent resource for the police departments. They expressed that the material taught was more in-depth than any prior training they received. Deputy Franklin completed CIT “through [the] county, and I think it was 40 hours. So, that was much better” (RP2, 303–304). Deputy Smith appreciated the recent shift in training focus. He said, “I think [our] county is doing a great job with the training we’ve had so far. And I know we’ve got future trainings coming up” (AP2, 211–212).

The principal participants shared the perspective that training was growing and shifting. Mr. Moore felt “there’s been kind of this growing awareness of trauma in the past few years” (RA1, 221–222). Mr. Carter shared, “We’ve had a lot of foundational training around [trauma] this year, adverse childhood experiences” (SA2, 281). Mr. Alexander also indicated familiarity with ACEs. He stated, “We take something called ACEs training. I do professional development at least probably once a year, maybe even more than that, on some type of trauma-informed care” (RA2, 329–330). Ms. Maverick’s district made trauma training a priority. She reflected, “All the schools in [our district] have gone through a lot of training around trauma-informed care and trauma, illness, and grief [TIG] . . . . It’s a huge priority in [our district], and it’s extremely important” (AA2, 294–299). Mr. Harper also indicated his district had almost exclusively focused on trauma for professional development for a school year. While he felt the information was valuable and necessary, he cautioned against oversaturation of the topic:
I got the sense, a few years ago, when we did a full year of trauma training, that people were over trauma. They felt like it was too much because some of it, when you think about it, it’s quite sad and it brings you down. So, there has to be a balance. (AA1, 289–291)

This unique perspective was only expressed by Mr. Harper. However, it is an interesting observation to consider.

The administrators and law enforcement officers both cited their experiences working in the schools as an informal means of training. Ms. Maverick recognized that, despite formal educational opportunities, “a lot of [my training] has come from experience and learning in the moment” (AA2, 367). Mr. Carter shared that his development as an administrator was influenced by learning from others. He felt his assistant principals also grew in their decision-making and understanding of trauma. He reflected, “I think a lot of it is internal mentorship and being guided through that by other administrators. That’s on-the-job kind of learning” (SA2, 369–371). Deputy Smith credited his on-the-job training for developing an enhanced skill set and more effective interactions with students:

> With me just being in school here, just learning to have patience a little bit, because with that patience, more things come to light. Whereas if you were acting a little more quickly in that situation, you never would have found out certain information. So, just slowing down a little bit, I’ve been able to learn more. (AP2, 213–216)

**Training Opportunities.** While the participants valued the training they had received in recent years, as opposed to their pre-service training, they identified areas in
which they would like additional focus and learning opportunities. The principal participants indicated the importance of continued training on established areas of focus. Mr. Moore specifically referenced that he believed, “behavioral psychology is fascinating and probably something else that’s missing in terms of any administrative training. In particular, behavioral psychology and trauma would be extremely important in any kind of program that works with young people” (RA1, 254–256). Mr. Harper shared an example of utilizing the expertise of his faculty to increase training opportunities. He explained:

I have a behavior specialist in the building, and he comes to us with a great deal of trauma training. And he’s always finding these little clips of speakers on YouTube and sharing them with staff. And it’s just a 10-minute consumable type of training that people could watch on their lunch break or something like that. (AA1, 271–274)

Maintaining focus and momentum on trauma training was a priority for the principal participants.

The police officers also recognized the significance of ongoing training opportunities. Some of the participants gave specific suggestions for topics to be covered. Deputy Franklin identified a gap for all police, particularly when on road patrol:

I would say, like, at least a one-day training on adolescent trauma would be helpful. Because all of the kids that we’re dealing with on the road are in crisis, and they don’t know how to get themselves out of that cycle. (RP2, 334–336)

Officer Hartson reflected on a specific training he experienced that he deemed valuable:
I went through TIG training at the county level, which I think every SRO should go through. It’s huge. Helpful in having an understanding of how kids deal with trauma and grief and understanding their ACEs. (SP1, 85–87)

He went on to share, “If they could offer [TIG] to police officers within the first 5 years . . . that would be huge . . . from life training as well as just understanding how people grieve, how they respond, understanding how the school district handles things” (SP1, 304–306).

The officers acknowledged a recent shift in the perception of police when they proposed ideas for training. Deputy Thompson said, “I just went through mental health training . . . . But I think, with the environment and the climate, the way it is now, and some stuff that we have going on, I think it’s going to lead to more training” (SP2, 230–233). Deputy Wolfe also referenced a need for change in police approach and response patterns:

I think, now, maybe law enforcement is being forced to kind of look at themselves in the mirror and go, “We’re not really doing a great job when it comes to mental health. When it comes to people with disabilities.” So, I think society and kind of what’s happened and what’s been plastered all over the newspapers across the country over the past couple years, is kind of forcing different agencies to take a long, hard look at, “Hey, there may be better ways to handle it.” (RP1, 316–320)

The participants demonstrated a realization and recognition that more can be done from a trauma training perspective. They indicated that the provision of tools to increase their skill set would promote more appropriate and effective outcomes for the students. Across the participant responses, evidence of and connections to the Four Rs framework was
present. There was a clear realization that trauma exists among youth with a recognition of how that trauma may manifest itself. Participants indicated various responses to trauma although these reactions were specific to individuals and were not informed by training or evidence-based trauma principles. Resisting re-traumatization was peripherally referenced, but was not consistently considered by participants as a factor in their decision-making or response options.

Summary of Results

This chapter presented the results of 12 semi-structured interviews conducted individually with six secondary school administrators and six law enforcement officers from suburban, rural, and alternative education school settings. For Research Question 1, data were analyzed to determine the specific roles played by the school administrators and law enforcement officers relating to decision-making and responses to students. Four themes emerged from the results of the analysis. The first theme was the importance of student relationships for the administrative role and response. The second theme was the organization of the law enforcement role into the triad model of educator, law enforcer, and counselor/mentor. The third theme that emerged was the desire of SROs to use their role to help students. The fourth theme was the perception of law enforcement in schools from both a community and student perspective. The participants acknowledged a negative view regarding police in schools, and they desired to remove an element of fear caused by their presence. This perception was particularly clear in the suburban setting evidenced by one school district opting to not engage in a relationship with an SRO.

Research Question 2 focused on the collaborative practices between the secondary school administrators and police officers when engaged in student behavioral decision-
making and problem-solving. Two themes emerged from this question. The first was the effectiveness of working as a team and maintaining a student focus during collaboration. The second theme revealed the importance of relationships and centered on specific elements of the SRO partnership with the school. It additionally looked at the impact of their presence in schools and the ability to be a resource to all the stakeholders.

Research Question 3 addressed the existing understandings of trauma and the training provided to the participants. As a result of the analysis, three themes were identified. The first theme elicited definitions and descriptions of trauma. The importance of developing an awareness and understanding of trauma emerged. The second theme was the inherent difficulty in identifying trauma. The third theme indicated that training in trauma is not consistent. The participants unanimously agreed that additional training for the participating administrators and police is needed.

Connection to the Four Rs framework emerged from the data analysis and review of analytic memos. Memos recorded during participant interviews and subsequent coding cycles informed theme and subtheme development. Their use captured nuances from the data that may not have been immediately apparent. For example, the use of memos connected the observation that perception and use of law enforcement varied between school settings. Analytic memos and data analysis also illustrated the degree of alignment with the Four Rs. While all participants demonstrated a clear realization and recognition of trauma, responses to trauma were individualized. Resisting re-traumatization was a deficit area that emerged from examination of the data.

Chapter 5 discusses the research implications based on the results presented in Chapter 4. Additionally, Chapter 5 includes the limitations of the study as well as
recommendations for future research. The conclusion of the study is also presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Although researchers have studied the aspects of school administrator responsibilities as well as the roles police officers play in school settings, the existing studies have not examined the collaborative practices between school principals and law enforcement officers. More specifically, the areas that are not present in the existing research at the time of the interviews include decision-making and partnership when responding to students with potential traumatic histories. The purpose of this study was to examine the collaborative practices between secondary school administrators and police officers with a focus on SROs when working with students who have experienced trauma. This study also sought to identify the existing understandings of trauma as well as the prior training the participants had in the subject.

This chapter provides an overview of the research including the implications of the key research findings. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and gives recommendations for future research and practice. The framework of the study was SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs of trauma—realization that trauma exists, recognizing trauma, responding to that trauma, and resisting re-traumatization. As a result of this study’s purpose and theoretical framework, the following research questions were addressed:
1. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what roles do school administrators and police currently play in addressing behavioral situations with secondary students?

2. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, how do they currently collaborate and prepare to effectively meet the needs of secondary school students, particularly those with traumatic histories?

3. From the perspective of school administrators and police officers, including SROs, what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices? What are the current training opportunities and other sources of information that aid in understanding the impact of trauma on students?

Several themes and subthemes emerged from the analysis of interview data. Those themes resulted in three key findings.

**Implications of Findings**

The first key finding is that collaborative practices between school principals and the police are impacted by the school setting in which they work. Varied interactions emerged between the suburban, rural, and alternative education participants. Second, consistent training regarding the impact of trauma, including the effect of adolescent development, is essential when working in a secondary school setting. However, this training is not present in pre-training opportunities for administrators or police officers, including SROs. The third finding is that the school administrators and the police in this study operate in distinct roles. Principals bear the responsibility for student discipline
and officers act as a mentor/counselor. These findings and their implications are
presented and discussed. Comparisons will be drawn between the findings and existing
research relating to collaboration, training opportunities, and the roles of the school
administrators and the police. Additionally, the key findings will be considered through
the study’s theoretical framework of SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs – realization that
trauma exists, recognizing trauma, responding to that trauma, and resisting re-
traumatization.

**Finding 1**

*Principals and police work together differently in suburban, rural, and alternative
education settings.*

Engagement in collaboration was evident for all participants in this study. However, a comparison of responses between the suburban participants, rural participants, and alternative education participants revealed differing patterns of collaborative practices. This distinction was not evident in existing research prior to this study. Principals from the suburban schools engaged in less interaction with the police in their buildings. These administrators were reluctant to give the impression that their schools or districts were unsafe, necessitating the need for a police presence. As Mr. Carter stated, “The culture here has always been a little bit more passive” (SA2, 62–63). He maintained this stance despite the recommendation from a safety and security audit to employ an SRO.

When identifying members of collaborative teams charged with problem-solving and decision-making relating to the students, the suburban principal participants relied primarily on school personnel. Mr. Carter referenced the “assistant principal, two
guidance counselors. . . school psychologists and social workers” (SA2, 166–167). Their partnership with the police in this capacity was more limited. Mr. Berry clearly indicated “[the SROs are] not involved in the majority of the collaboration” (SA1, 194). Desire for a clear delineation between the school and the police may be the result of community pressure and influence. Typically in suburban districts, parent groups, board of education members, and community groups have more significant impact on the functioning of the district. If a perception exists that a partnership with law enforcement indicates a problem in the schools, it stands to reason administrators would avoid that association.

Rural principal participants indicated more frequent collaboration with their SROs. They considered the police as a resource for both the students and the community and invited them to engage in student activities and interactions more actively. This finding is consistent with the concept of bridging the gap in which officers expressed a responsibility for connecting students with other providers and resources (Higgins et al., 2019). The police connection in the rural setting is also reflective of a community-oriented policing approach that promotes connections between law enforcement, the school, and the community (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; McKenna & Pollock, 2014).

In the rural setting, the police appeared to have more direct connections to and knowledge of the students’ personal lives and circumstances when they were out of school. Due to the smaller community setting, the police had more opportunity to interact in numerous ways, lending a unique perspective. Deputy Franklin referenced working on road patrol in her school district during summer and school breaks. She shared, “If I’m not seeing them at school, I’m seeing them out playing in the street or out in the park” (RP2, 140–141). Student knowledge was an important factor in police
collaboration with the school administrators. The camaraderie between the principals and the SROs was more fluid and informal in the rural school sites with the administrators more willing to include the police in problem-solving and decision-making. This may be the result of fewer numbers of students and stakeholders and less pressure from the community.

The alternative education participants portrayed a much different level of collaboration and partnership. Principals and SROs consistently reflected on their frequent teamwork when addressing student needs. Principals expressed appreciation for the insight and expertise of the police. Administrators readily acknowledged that, because of the high behavioral and emotional needs of their students, they often called on the police to assist with volatile or unsafe situations. Students enrolled in alternative education settings would have engaged in actions that originally resulted in their exclusion from their suburban or rural home school districts. These behaviors could have included physical and verbal aggression, self-injury, and destruction of property.

With documented exposure to adverse childhood experiences, these behaviors may be the manifestation of trauma. Alternative education principals identified the mental health needs of their students as another justification for additional law enforcement assistance. The efficacy of this support was due to the relationships the officers had developed with the students. When considered through the Four Rs framework, alternative setting SROs and administrators demonstrated a solid understanding of the need to realize the existence of trauma as well as to recognize the signs of that trauma. Through their collaborative approach, these officers and principals
consistently responded to behaviors and student needs in a trauma-informed manner, and they actively sought to resist re-traumatization.

Similar to the rural schools, a connection with law enforcement in an alternative education setting was more accepted by all stakeholders. Alternative education sites serve students from multiple districts. As a result, home school districts are disconnected from daily interactions and decision-making for the students. Additionally, when a student enters an alternative education site, it is typically because they have been unsuccessful in their home schools indicating their needs exceeded the resources available in a traditional school. Incorporating the perspective and assistance of law enforcement is a reasonable extension of typical school supports that had proven inadequate.

Based on this analysis, the study revealed that boundaries between the school and police are more distinct and defined in the suburban settings, and they become more flexible in both the rural and alternative education settings. The suburban school principal participants indicated less of an alliance when describing their collaboration with the police. Their decision-making was autonomous and intentional without police input. In the suburban settings, the police were not consistently invited to collaborate, and they operated more on the periphery of student problem-solving. Conversely, the alternative education principals freely recognized their reliance on the police in their schools. It appears that, as student needs and traumatic histories intensify, the implementation of collaborative practices also increases. Law enforcement expertise in juvenile justice pathways and community mental health supports were cited as examples of the benefits of collaboration between the police and the school administration.
Additionally, SRO engagement in the mentor/counselor role in alternative education sites was a crucial element in supporting the students.

Interestingly, this conclusion contrasts with the findings of Curran et al. (2019). In their study, when working in a school perceived as having students who engaged in more pervasive misconduct, officers relied on traditional law enforcement interventions. A law enforcement presence in schools also resulted in increased arrests of student (Mallett, 2016). The police participants in this current study, however, articulated a different conclusion. They described a need to approach students with more care and understanding as challenges and trauma became increasingly apparent. Deputy Smith reflected:

   Everybody has their own life experiences and you got to try and understand their experiences through their lens. Myself and a student, we might’ve experienced similar incidents, but based on life experiences, we’re going to interpret these and feel differently and it might impact them more than it would me. (AP2, 162-165)

Realizing this trauma existed shifted Deputy Smith’s response to the students and the manifestations of trauma to an approach of “patience and understanding” (AP2, 243).

Despite clear distinctions in collaboration based on the school settings, the partnerships between the school principals and the police consistently maintained a student focus regardless of environment. The participants repeatedly referenced the importance of understanding students and their backgrounds. This significance is evident in statements such as “Our focus is relationship-based” (SA2, 85); “You have to understand what the underlying issues are” (SP2, 235); and “Being able to know what’s
going on in their lives before an event happens so that, when it happens, I can sit down, I
can talk to them” (RP1, 113–115).

The connection to students as the driver of collaboration is absent from the
existing research. However, acknowledging student trauma as a factor to be considered
is associated with SAMHSA’s Four Rs framework (2014). In this study, demonstrating a
realization that trauma exists proved to be the primary component in the collaborative
decision-making of the administrators and police officers. The study participants
acknowledged trauma among their students with Mr. Carter succinctly stating, “There’s
absolutely trauma here. There’s lots of it” (SA2, 292). SAMHSA’s (2014) framework
also specifies that a realization of trauma includes understanding the role trauma plays in
mental health disorders. Additionally, the effect of trauma on communities and
individuals must be considered. These factors were referenced in this study. For
example, Ms. Maverick explained, “Our school . . . has a lot of students who have
emotional and behavioral disabilities and . . . a lot of students who have had trauma in
their lives” (AA2, 49–51). As a result, the collaborative practices did focus on the
students’ needs—regardless of the school setting or student population.

**Finding 2**

*Training related to trauma is absent in pre-service learning and inconsistent in
existing training opportunities.*

All the participants identified the realization that trauma exists as a critical
element in their approach to their students. Moving beyond realization was their
recognition of the signs of trauma and response to trauma as outlined in SAMHSA’s
framework (2014). To fully align with SAMHSA’s (2014) framework for responding to
trauma, organizational training must be a priority for staff and leadership with budgetary support for the ongoing training. Based on the findings of this study, there is an increasing awareness of the need for training and attention to trauma and its implications for students. However, there is no purposeful plan for this training or consistency across districts or police departments.

Recognition of trauma was an element of the Four Rs that participants identified in their practice. Identification of a potential trauma manifestation most often occurred when students engaged in negative behaviors, or were “acting out” (SP1, 251; AP1, 191; AP1, 200; AA2, 339–341; RP2, 272). The participants also referenced school failure as a manifestation of trauma. Deputy Thompson asked himself, “Are their grades dropping? Are they falling asleep in class?” (SP2, 246–247). Mr. Alexander also recognized that, “there’s a lot of class failures” (RA2, 280). This recognition, however, was not attributed to any particular training opportunities.

Moving beyond the Four Rs components of realization and recognition of trauma, the principals and police officers described their response to trauma manifestations as a deliberate practice that resulted from training in specific strategies. The use of restorative practices was an example of a method incorporated to effectively respond to students. Restorative practices are defined as prevention and intervention approaches aimed at building community, encouraging relationships, and lessening punitive discipline. These strategies also involve actively repairing harm following an incident of misconduct (Fallot & Harris, 2008; Kervick et al., 2020; Rainbolt et al., 2019). Mr. Carter stated, “We’re moving towards a restorative approach” (SA2, 93). Mr. Alexander also shared, “We do a ton of preventative work and a ton of restorative work surrounding behaviors”
If a response involved the SRO, Mr. Berry indicated, “If we do involve him . . . we’d only do it in a restorative manner” (SA1, 68–69).

The responses by the participants also reflected a desire to provide the students with a physically and psychologically safe environment. This is another element outlined in SAMHSA’s (2014) response to trauma. In order to be trauma-informed, an organization must provide a setting and interactions that promote a sense of safety for individuals (SAMHSA, 2014). Deputy Franklin described the development of this safe space when she gave students the opportunity to self-regulate when in crisis:

We’re at the point where [a student] sees me and she just stops. And she waits . . . It’s just like, “Come on, walk back with me. Let’s talk it out. And if you want to cool off, we’ll walk.” And I do a lot of walking and talking with kids. (RP2, 124–129)

Mr. Carter also recognized the importance of “creating spaces for [students] to have trusted adults in the buildings” (SA2, 296–297).

As SAHMSA outlines (2014), a commitment to training is necessary for a comprehensive response to trauma. While progress is being made, work remains to be done to promote consistent, evidence-based training across settings. The participants in this study indicated evolving training opportunities in both the school districts and police agencies. Mr. Berry spoke about his school participating in ACEs training and how beneficial it was for him and his staff to promote their realization of their students’ backgrounds (SA1, 297–301). Mr. Carter also realized the importance in “having our staff trained and understanding what our kids are coming with and making sure that we focus on building connections with kids” (SA2, 295–297). Mr. Moore agreed that
“there’s been kind of this growing awareness of trauma in the past few years” (RA1, 221–222). From the police perspective, Deputy Lincoln indicated a desire for road patrol officers to receive more training comparable to the school trainings. He said, “I’m hoping that the trauma portion of it will catch up and get more training on that” (AP1, 235–239).

While the participants were thoughtful when considering the multiple aspects of trauma, they all indicated a fundamental lack of preparation in their pre-service training. The participant responses regarding a lack of training mirrored the findings from the existing research. Police training most frequently focused on the law enforcer aspect of the position such as firearms training, arrest procedures, and officer safety. Little to no attention was given to working with youth or engaging in effective youth interactions (Buckley et al., 2013; Chappell, 2007; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). This was reinforced by the police participants when asked to reflect on their academy training. Deputy Wolfe recalled:

You spend a lot of time with educational law as it related to criminal and legal procedures . . . . Educational law related to what you can do in schools, what you shouldn’t be doing, search and seizures. When you can talk to kids, when do you need parents? So, more of the . . . procedural part of it. (RP2, 352–359).

Training specific to SROs did not provide more comprehensive information for working with the students. According to prior research, SRO curriculum often relates to responding to school safety issues such as hostage or active-shooter scenarios with little regard for youth development (Kubena, 2019).
For the school administrators in this study, their pre-service education concentrated on topics such as instructional strategies and budgeting practices. Prior research focused on pre-service training and professional development resulted in similar findings (Gumus, 2015; Spanneut et al., 2012). When explicitly asked about any training opportunities relating to student mental health, trauma principles, or adolescent development, both the principals and police officers expressed surprise that they were unable to recall any learning dedicated to these topics. The school administrators seemed particularly dismayed that this was lacking in their preparation courses. This disappointment was evidenced by statements such as, “This isn’t good. I don’t remember” (SA1, 319) and, “Honestly, no [training] which is pretty concerning” (AA2, 363).

On-the-job training emerged as a common phenomenon for the participants. Great value can be gained in learning from colleagues and naturally occurring situations in the school setting. However, dependency on spontaneous interactions and events to improve professional practice prohibits reliable, evidence-based training. On-the-job opportunities cannot be controlled. Information gleaned from these situations may be inaccurate or misleading. Additionally, relying on naturally occurring events in the school setting automatically positions people in a reactive, rather than proactive, mindset. As a result, responses to students may be inconsistent and, potentially, detrimental. This type of reaction is contrary to the Four Rs framework that identifies the importance of established organizational trauma-specific interventions (SAMHSA, 2014). Particularly when working with students with traumatic histories, the possibility of causing re-traumatization must be realized and guarded against. This impact may occur when a
stressful or toxic environment is created that triggers painful memories or responses in an individual with a traumatic history (SAMHSA, 2014). Approaching youth without a well-informed understanding of their development and mental health is irresponsible.

While there was a decided lack of pre-service training for the school administrators and law enforcement officers, increasing awareness of trauma and trauma-informed practices was evident. Particularly in the past few years, schools have committed to the delivery of professional development that is focused on adverse childhood experiences, manifestations of trauma, and appropriate responses to students with trauma histories. Police departments have also incorporated training opportunities relating to the mental health needs of individuals in the community. This shift in resources and time commitment is promising and will contribute to continued alignment with SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs.

Building on an already evolving understanding of trauma and appropriate response options is critical. However, training remains highly individualized and at the discretion of specific districts or police departments. Combined training between law enforcement and school personnel does not occur. This finding is consistent with prior research that similarly found a disconnect among service systems in their approach to trauma (Donisch et al., 2019; Ko et al., 2008). As a result, there remains a void within and between police and principals’ understandings of trauma and effective ways to respond and support students.

**Finding 3**

*School administrators and police officers operate in distinct roles with principals assuming sole disciplinary responsibility and police acting as a mentor/counselor.*
The school principals and police officers in this study operated within specific parameters when engaging in collaboration and when interacting with students. While agreement existed on the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with students, the participants’ interactions and responses to students were position-dependent. When responding to student misconduct, roles were abundantly clear. The school principals were solely responsible for imposing discipline, while police were often intentionally removed from those situations.

These findings are consistent with prior research relating to the responsibilities of administrators in which it was found that school principals understood the importance of maintaining order and safety within the school setting (Findlay, 2015). This discretion in decision-making, however, was paired with an understanding of potential trauma resulting in the use of restorative practices (Curran & Finch, 2020). When considered through SAMHSA’s Four Rs (2014), this finding supports the importance of responding to trauma thoughtfully and deliberately.

These findings are also consistent with prior research relating to police officers’ connections in school settings. As with the officers in this study, Wolf (2014) found that officers valued the importance of relationships with students and relied on that rapport to guide their decision-making and interactions. Curran et al. (2019) similarly reported that officers overwhelmingly viewed discipline as the responsibility of administrators.

Significant differences in the findings between this study and previous studies are evident when considering officers’ roles within the triad model of school policing. Research consistently indicated that officers and school administrators perceived police as primarily operating within a law enforcer role (Coon & Travis, 2012; McKenna et al.,
2016; Thomas et al., 2013). Actions associated with this role included patrolling school grounds, responding to crime and disorder reports from staff, and solving crime-related problems (Coon & Travis, 2012; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018). However, the police officers in this study most often performed as a mentor/counselor for students. Value was placed on getting to know the students and providing them with guidance on a variety of topics. These areas included events occurring in the home or in the community. Ms. Maverick attributed a great deal of the success of their SRO program to “that community engagement . . . [where] he will show up to a situation in the community that involves one of our students, and that wraparound back to the school is extremely helpful” (AA2, 253–255). Mentoring also involved problem-solving potential legal consequences for students’ actions. Interestingly, neither the school principals nor the police officers indicated that the mentor/counselor role was deliberately assigned to the police. It occurred naturally through the officers’ presence in the schools.

While prior studies found that police most often assumed a law enforcer role (Coon & Travis, 2012; McKenna et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2013), this role was identified as the least-utilized in this study. The police intentionally avoided engaging in actions that could be perceived as traditional law enforcement. They were purposeful in their interactions with students to generate a less intimidating presence. For some, this was a departure from both their training and initial entrance into the school setting. However, value was realized in employing a gentler approach. Police and administrators acknowledged that students would seek out the SRO for guidance.

Additionally, steering away from a law enforcement approach was reflective of current events both locally and nationally. Incidents of individuals dying while in police
custody or during apprehension raised awareness of and attention to police practices (Walters, 2020). Alarming events with children increased the focus on officers’ lack of understanding of youth (Griffith, 2021). As a result, the law enforcement officers in this study intentionally sought to avoid any possibility that their intentions could be questioned. Deputy Franklin described the reaction to her presence in the school:

First and foremost, I'm a police officer. I'm always going to be a police officer. I'm always wearing this uniform at school. We don't have a soft uniform that we get to wear to school. So no matter what situation I walk into, they always look at me and go, "Oh, the cop is here." So I kind of have that against me right now. (RP2, 45-48).

She went on to explain her recognition of the existing perception of police:

I'm always going to be the police officer and I always have to be. You know everything that's going on in the world, liability and all that. I always have to be thinking, how do I not put myself in a bad spot? How do I not put the school in a bad spot? And protect the [Police] Department, too. (RP2, 51-54)

Police officers’ self-reflection and awareness of the lens through which they may be viewed further contributed to them shifting from a law enforcer approach to a mentor/counselor role.

The three findings of the study revealed alignment with SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs framework – realization that trauma exists, recognizing the manifestation of trauma, responding to that trauma, and resisting re-traumatization. Particular emphasis was placed on realization and recognition of trauma. Response to trauma was also an area of focus, but without clear training on or expectations for appropriate and effective response
options. Resisting re-traumatization was not as evident in the findings. At the core of a trauma-informed approach is the need for whole organizations to accept and incorporate the Four Rs. While collaboration and training varied across school settings, acknowledgement of the need for a greater understanding of trauma existed. There was also a clear priority on students’ needs and building relationships. Additionally, while administrators accepted the responsibility for imposing school discipline, they avoided exclusionary discipline options in favor of more restorative, student-centered decision-making. These efforts support a trauma-informed methodology and account for effective trauma realization, recognition, and response.

Limitations

The scope of the research study was limited to six school principal participants and six police officers working in suburban, rural, and alternative education settings in Upstate New York. Results cannot be generalized across all school administrators and police officers. Urban settings were not represented in the study for a variety of reasons. Recent events relating to both the nearby city school district and city police department were prohibitive to accessing those organizations. The SROs had also recently been removed from all nearby city schools. Additionally, due to the pandemic during the period of this research, the local city school district was not offering in-person instruction.

An additional limitation of this study is the understanding that established relationships existed between the participant pairs. The principals and corresponding police officers were engaged in working partnerships prior to the research. As a result, rapport and norms for teamwork were already in place. Therefore, when examining the
possible obstacles to collaboration, potential discord or disagreement did not exist. Rather, all the participants demonstrated mutual respect for their counterparts. Had the participants lacked this existing understanding, further exploration of developing collaboration could have been investigated.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study examined collaborative practices between secondary school administrators and police officers when working with students with traumatic histories. Specific attention was given to the roles of the administrators and police, the participants’ understanding of trauma, and training opportunities relating to trauma and adolescent development. Future research can further contribute to this examination of trauma-informed collaboration.

First, it is recommended that future research include urban participants. The lived experiences of school administrators and police officers in an urban setting are likely vastly different from the study’s existing participants in suburban, rural, and alternative education settings. Officer Hartson shared that, in his experience and through conversations he had with police working in city schools, “an SRO in the city is much different than out in rural and suburban areas . . . . They’re really not allowed to go into classrooms and offer . . . collaboration with teachers” (SA1, 324–328). Investigating the urban perspective would contribute a unique layer of understanding to the experiences found in this current study.

Second, employing a quantitative methodology in the form of a survey is recommended so that additional data may be added to this topic. This approach may also garner more candid responses from all participants as involvement in a survey provides
an increased sense of anonymity than that which is afforded in an interview setting. Conducting a survey also allows a larger sample of participants. As a result, generalizability of future findings could be more likely.

Third, a recommendation for future research is to include police officers operating as SROs as one of the selection criteria. A determination could be made if an officer actively seeks to work in that capacity or is unwillingly appointed. With this information, analysis could focus on an officer’s response to students and their impressions of the schools in which they work. Additionally, qualifications of the officers may be compared to determine if any particular skillset is sought when placing law enforcement in a school.

Finally, it is recommended that future researchers explore the perspectives of participants who do not have established professional partnerships. In this current study, the participants were aware that their respective partner school principal or officer was also interviewed. Examining these existing partnerships was intentional to provide a comparison of perception and response. A random sample of participants without connections to each other would offer a unique viewpoint on the developmental stages of collaboration between schools and police.

**Recommendations for Practice**

In this study, partnerships between the school administrators and the police officers were flexible and demonstrated similarities and differences across school settings. A factor that impacts collaboration and decision-making includes the environment in which participants work. Student needs were important to all the participants with particular attention given to trauma and its manifestation in the school setting. Training practices were identified as inconsistent and unregulated. Based on
these conclusions, specific recommendations for practice may inform future principal-police collaboration, training opportunities, and expectations for roles and responsibilities.

**Collaboration Around Student Needs**

The findings of this study highlight the importance of positive collaborative practices in school settings; specifically focusing on student needs and problem-solving were key elements of school teams’ decision-making. However, a wide variation in the members of the collaborative teams existed. Some schools, particularly suburban, primarily relied on the educational professionals when planning around student academics, behaviors, and interventions. If the police officers were involved in the conversations, their contributions were limited. As a recommendation to ensure equal contributions by all, specific expectations surrounding collaborative practices should be established and inclusive of both administrators and police officers. These guidelines may include items such as identification of individual roles on the team, determined meeting times, and recognized norms for those meetings. Focusing on a multisystem approach to collaboration encourages consistency of practice and response to students. As a result, there is increased success for students who have experienced trauma (NCTSN, 2016). Particularly when considering traumatic histories, it is essential that a systematic approach based on evidence-based strategies is in place (Ko et al., 2008; SAMHSA, 2014).

Structures for teaming and collaboration exist and are available resources for school districts and police departments. Investigation of these frameworks could provide a foundation for effective teamwork, ultimately leading to better outcomes for students.
One example of a collaborative model is a professional learning community (PLC). PLCs historically support learning and teaching practices in school settings. However, the core principles of a PLC model can be applied to collaboration between school administrators and law enforcement officers. The first element is a focus on student learning (DuFour, 2004). When applied to the lens of school–police partnerships, this can be modified to focus on student outcomes and responses. The second principle of a PLC model is developing a culture of collaboration (DuFour, 2004). Specifically, this relates to developing a systematic process of working together to analyze and improve practice. Engaging in this type of planning and reflection will benefit all stakeholders. The third element to consider in a PLC is focusing on results (DuFour, 2004). Through collaboration, goals can be set to assess continual improvement.

Success of deliberate multisystem collaboration was found in the Greensboro Child Response Initiative (CRI) that embedded mental health advocates within a police department (Graves et al., 2019). In this model, comprehensive and ongoing training and support relating to trauma principles were provided to the police. While the CRI was a considerable multisystem commitment that may be difficult to replicate, the foundation of the project provides a framework that can be duplicated. Establishment of reliable supports for both administrators and police officers paired with structured expectations for teaming and collaboration is a realistic goal for any school and police department.

A commitment to this work needs to be made by all participants including administrators and police officers. Participation in these opportunities also requires larger organizational support of the school district leadership and the police department chain of command as indicated in SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs, which indicates a need for
the realization of trauma at all levels of an organization. Promoting consistent collaborative practices fosters an environment in which each professional’s expertise can be heard and respected.

**Provide Comprehensive, Trauma-Informed Training**

As the findings of this study show, appropriate training opportunities for school principals and police officers relating to trauma and adolescent development is a deficit area. Staff training is the key element in effectively responding to individuals in a trauma-informed manner (SAMHSA, 2014). Within the schools and police departments in this study, more recent attention has been given to information sharing on trauma and mental health needs. However, there does not exist a standard of training expectations for schools or police departments. Additionally, trauma training was not evident in the administrator pre-service coursework or the police academy curriculum. Even training opportunities tailored to the SROs did not include youth development or trauma as areas of focus. Specific recommendations for administrator college preparation, school districts, and police departments to remedy this are numerous.

Colleges offering coursework in educational administration have a responsibility to ensure their graduates are prepared to meet the complex demands of a school administrator. This includes thinking beyond instructional and budgetary implications and considering the specific needs of students including their mental health and traumatic histories. Bringing attention to these elements of student life will expand future administrators understanding of the scope of their role. Prior research indicated that administrators did not recognize or identify student mental health as a priority for training (Gumus, 2015; Spanneut et al., 2012). Expanding the learning objectives and outcomes
within these preparatory classes is an important element in truly preparing future administrators for the challenges of their position.

School districts, similarly, have the responsibility for providing ongoing professional development to their administrators. The participant responses illustrate greater emphasis recently on trauma training and understanding. However, this was generalized training to all faculty members of a district rather than a specific focus on school administrators. While leadership training for trauma is available for administrators, it is not a resource that was accessed by the participants. As the instructional leaders in their districts, these individuals need to develop not only a basic understanding of trauma but also competence in leading others in trauma-informed practices. Success of trauma-informed care depends on a commitment to the guiding principles by entire organizations (DeCandia & Guarino, 2015; Hanson & Lang, 2016; Olafson et al., 2016). Providing school administrators with the tools to oversee large-scale implementation is necessary to promote greater realization of a trauma-informed environment. These resources must be paired with an assurance from administrators that the provided tools will be accessible to every staff member throughout their district. The principles of the trauma-informed approach include providing physical and psychological safety, developing trustworthiness, and allowing choices in decision-making. Being trauma-informed also involves encouraging collaboration and empowering individuals (Harris & Fallot, 2001; SAMHSA, 2014). Development of this type of culture will support the elements of the SAMHSA (2014) Four Rs framework.

As with school districts, police departments also need to commit to training opportunities that foster better understanding of trauma, its potential manifestations, and
how best to respond to possible trauma. Unlike schools, police agencies do not have a specific and defined population with whom they work. The vastness of their interactions may make it difficult to provide meaningful and relevant training that is consumable by the officers. To mitigate this, departments can identify the officers working in schools and select them for targeted training. This approach will provide tools to those officers who will benefit from them most immediately. However, long-range planning for more universal training of all officers needs to be considered. Whether or not they work in schools, police officers will inevitably respond to individuals in the community, both youth and adults, who have experienced trauma. Utilizing a variety of resources for training opportunities can provide comprehensive and relevant information. This may be done through a partnership with local universities offering coursework in mental health needs or establishing more concrete partnerships with school districts. Offering this information to officers during their academy experience will establish a foundation of understanding that will ideally shape their future practice.

When considering the partnership between school principals and police officers working with students with traumatic histories, an innovative model of training may be appropriate. Integrated training for administrators and SROs would provide an opportunity for them to develop a mutual awareness of trauma. This understanding could be applied generally in the school setting as well as specifically for particular students. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) endorses collaborative relationships between law enforcement and researchers (IACP, 2017). Suggestions for practice include development of collaborative training. This model can be modified and applied to the school–police partnership. IACP directly acknowledges that a critical fact
to remember in collaboration is that law enforcement officers come from a very different occupational culture than other industries. As a result, everyone within the partnership needs to learn the norms, values, and assumptions of those people with whom they are working. This will result in enhanced trust as the foundation of collaboration. Training should then be codeveloped with equal representation in delivery of curriculum (IACP, 2017). Development of a concrete baseline knowledge of student needs and effective response strategies from both the school and police perspective provides a basis for continued growth, problem-solving, and collaboration.

As training is developed, SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs should be used as a structure to ensure alignment with a trauma-informed approach. Participants in this study demonstrated a realization that trauma exists and indicated fairly consistent recognition of how trauma may manifest itself. When moving to responding to trauma, it becomes critically important that all administrators and police officers share an understanding of appropriate means of response. Cummings et al. (2017) identified five response approaches when working with children who have experienced trauma. The five strategies were: (a) be attuned; (b) show positive regard; (c) collaborate with parents and other professionals; (d) support positive social, emotional, and communicative responses; and (e) engage in proper reactions to children. As a format for training, clear definitions of these five principles could be paired with scenario and situation-based problem-solving. By improving and unifying response options, the likelihood of causing re-traumatization decreases. Having principals and police engage in the training exercises together would allow opportunities for discourse and development of a shared understanding and trauma lens.
Define and Formalize Roles and Responsibilities

Collaboratively defining roles and responsibilities for administrators and police officers in the school setting and formalizing expectations for those roles is an additional recommendation for practice. Beyond their involvement with collaborative teaming, individuals need a clear understanding of what is expected of them and others. Agreed-upon expectations need to be articulated starting with the senior leadership of the school district and the police department. Following this guidance, roles at the building level need delineation and agreement by administrators and police officers. While these roles may vary in individual settings, the practice of explicitly identifying them will result in improved communication, decision-making, and collaboration. This clarity is particularly meaningful in situations involving students because it will prevent confusion, ambiguity, or misunderstanding of intentions and responses.

This study indicates that officers most often perform in the mentor/counselor role, but it was not by design. Operating as a mentor/counselor was also contrary to prior literature that overwhelmingly revealed police in schools operating within the law enforcer role (Coon & Travis, 2012; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018). To provide parameters around the mentor/counselor or any other role, deliberate agreement should be reached on the expectations of the school administrators and the police officers. The study participants referenced the perceived importance of this clarity, yet it was a practice they had not incorporated. Deputy Lincoln illustrated this lack of definition by stating, “I would like to start all over and sit down with everybody and hear from everybody, ‘What do you want from me? This is what I want from you. What do you expect?’” (AP1, 163-164). Identifying individual roles will promote more
effective collaboration. Responses to situations can be streamlined and consistent. Improving the efficiency and fidelity of adult roles and responsibilities will result in improved outcomes for students.

Conclusion

This study examined the collaborative practices of secondary school administrators and police officers working in their schools. Specific attention was given to the roles of the principals and police, including SROs, when addressing students with potential traumatic histories. Focus was also placed on the participants’ understanding of trauma and their training in trauma principles. Increased reliance on police in schools, paired with expanded recognition of trauma in students, was the impetus for this study. During the course of this study, incidents of improper police responses occurred in the nation that brought into question the appropriateness of police in the schools (Griffith, 2021; Walters, 2020). Many districts eliminated their SRO programs, and countless people called for defunding police departments. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on the schools resulting in many students remaining at home for instruction. Despite these events, the importance of examining how students are supported by administrators and police officers, including SROs, remains relevant.

SAMHSA’s (2014) Four Rs structure formed the theoretical framework for the study. Drawing from trauma theory and trauma-informed care practices, the framework identifies elements to be considered when working with individuals with traumatic histories—realization that trauma exists, recognition of how trauma may manifest itself, responding to that trauma in an appropriate manner, and resisting re-traumatization of an individual. It was through this lens that the participant interviews were conducted, and
data were analyzed. Demonstrating a realization and recognition of trauma included defining trauma and providing examples of how trauma impacted students in the school setting. Then, exploration occurred on how that realization and recognition informed responses to students with traumatic histories. Resisting re-traumatization did not emerge as a common consideration for participants.

Research questions sought to determine the roles of both administrators and police officers when addressing student misbehavior in secondary schools. The questions also explored the collaborative practices of principals and police and how they prepared to meet the needs of students with trauma histories. Research questions additionally investigated participant understanding of trauma and training they had received relative to adolescent development and trauma histories. The findings of this study revealed three things. First, varying levels of collaboration among the school principal–police pairs depended on the school setting in which they worked. In addition, the findings clearly illustrate that trauma-related training was deficient, particularly in pre-service education. Finally, the findings show that school administrators and police officers operated in distinct roles with principals assuming sole disciplinary responsibility and police acting as a mentor/counselor.

Examination of the literature revealed gaps in the areas of role engagement for SROs as well as how SROs and administrators collaborate. An additional gap relates to the trauma training processes for both law enforcement and school administrators. SRO roles are commonly understood as a triad model in which officers operate as law enforcer, educator, or counselor/mentor (Canady et al., 2012; Chrusciel et al., 2015; McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Thomas et al., 2013). The administrators and police officers
predominantly identified SROs as acting within the law enforcer role (Coon & Travis, 2012; Curran et al., 2019). However, agreement on the level of involvement and scope of activities was inconsistent (Curran et al., 2019; Gill et al., 2016). As a result of these discrepancies, it was unclear what, if any, collaborative practices were utilized by the school principals and the police. Clear distinctions existed in decision-making opportunities such as for student discipline. In those situations, consequences were solely at the administrators’ discretion (Curran & Finch, 2020; Findlay, 2015). The SROs agreed on the appropriateness of relinquishing disciplinary decision-making to school administration (Curran et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016; McKenna & White, 2018; Wolf, 2014). Beyond this agreement, however, specific areas of collaboration and decision-making are not addressed in current literature.

Training opportunities relating to trauma and adolescent development for administrators and police officers are inconsistent and not well-documented. For administrative pre-service training, topics, such as finance and policies and procedures, were consistently referenced (Gumus, 2015). When identifying desired professional development, most principals indicated a need for information on school culture and instructional programs (Spanneut et al., 2012). Lack of trauma training is also prevalent for law enforcement officers (Buckley et al., 2013; Chappell, 2007; Martínez-Prather et al., 2016). This absence of information is true for both road patrol officers and SROs (Kubena, 2019; Thurau & Or, 2019). Limited research on police roles in schools, collaborative practices, and training for administrators and police necessitates further study.
This study used a qualitative methodology through semi-structured interviews. Six secondary school principals and six police officers affiliated with the administrators’ schools were interviewed individually. The school principal participants were selected to ensure equal representation of suburban, rural, and alternative education settings. The principals identified the SRO or road patrol officer assigned to their school to be included in the study. While interviews were conducted individually, each participant was aware that their partner principal or officer was also being interviewed.

Analysis and coding of the interview data resulted in several themes for each of the three research questions. Four themes emerged for Research Question 1, which examined the roles of the administrators and police when addressing behavioral situations of secondary students. The themes were (a) the relationship piece, (b) not here for problems, (c) trying to help, and (d) getting rid of fear. Research Question 2 focused on the collaborative practices between the administrators and police officers. Two themes emerged from the analysis: (a) working as a team, and (b) importance of relationships. Research Question 3 examined the participants understanding of trauma and training opportunities they had received, resulting in three themes. The themes were (a) trauma is different things to different people, (b) identifying trauma can be a challenge, and (c) trauma is not adequately covered. Key concepts and subthemes were generated to support the themes.

As a result of analysis of the themes and subthemes, three key findings surfaced. First, collaboration between school principals and police is impacted by the school setting in which they work. Suburban principals limited the influence and participation of police in their schools. Rural participants engaged in more authentic collaboration with the
police acting as a resource within the school and in the community. Alternative education setting participants engaged in a much higher and more collaborative level of shared problem-solving for student behavioral issues. This suggests that, as student needs increase, so does the partnership between administrators and police. The second finding was that training related to trauma is absent in pre-service learning and inconsistent in existing training opportunities. Lack of training is especially evident in pre-service education for administrators and academy curriculum for police officers. The third finding was that school administrators and police officers operate in distinct roles. The principals were solely responsible for disciplinary decisions and interventions with the police intentionally avoiding those situations. The SROs most identified with the role of mentor/counselor and referenced their relationships with students as a key function of their position.

Three recommendations for future research were made based on these findings. First, future research including urban participants could advance the understanding of a vastly different setting than suburban, rural, or alternative education settings. Exploring the lived experiences of urban administrators and police officers would provide a unique perspective. Second, employing a quantitative methodology in the form of a survey is recommended to garner more candid responses from all participants and to allow for a larger sample of participants. This expansion of participants would allow generalizability of findings. Third, an extension of the study would be to explore the perspectives of the participants who do not have established professional partnerships. A random sample of participants without connections to each other would offer a novel viewpoint on the developmental stages of collaboration between schools and police.
Recommendations for practice were also made in three specific areas aligned with the original research questions. The first recommendation is consistency of principal–police collaboration around student needs. Establishing clear expectations and parameters for collaboration will enhance problem-solving and decision-making to support students. This collaboration needs to occur through a multisystems model of support and can include structures such as professional learning communities. The second recommendation for practice is to provide comprehensive, trauma-informed training. Provision of thorough and relevant training on trauma and adolescent development is necessary for school administrators and police officers. Colleges offering administrator coursework and police academies both lack curriculum related to trauma. This practice needs to change. Similarly, school districts and police departments need to make a commitment to providing training to all administrators and officers. Combined training opportunities would support a multisystems structure of student support and would allow shared understanding of roles and perspectives. The third recommendation for practice is to clearly define roles and responsibilities for principals and police officers. Determining explicit and agreed-upon roles for school principals and officers benefits students and should be made a priority. Agreement on roles must include buy-in by senior leadership of the school districts and police departments. Articulation of functions will promote more consistent adult responses and interactions leading to more positive outcomes for students.

Over the course of this study, many societal shifts and events occurred. Flawed police responses to individuals in crisis gained international attention and created an outcry against law enforcement and its established practices. As a result, police presence
in many schools was eliminated. The COVID-19 pandemic struck the world creating a
dramatic shift in all aspects of daily life. Schools had to redefine their operations and
instructional practices. Fewer students were in school buildings and fewer interactions
occurred between students, principals, and police officers. Another outcome of the
pandemic and social unrest was a perceived increase in mental health needs. While these
factors may suggest that an examination of school administrators and the police is now
less relevant, the opposite is true. It is during these times that coming together and
collaboratively supporting students is vitally important. Student needs and trauma
responses will likely be exacerbated by current events.

Addressing differences between school and police responses and establishing
productive ways to work together is crucial to supporting students who have experienced
trauma. Strong collaboration must focus on a shared realization and recognition of
trauma paired with effective response options that actively resist re-traumatization.
Actions and decisions must be grounded in informed, evidence-based training to ensure
student needs are properly identified and addressed. Through these commitments, school
administrators and police officers, including SROs, will be equipped to continually
provide evolving student support during challenging and changing times.
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Appendix A

Introduction Email and Study Information

Date

Dear ____________,

My name is Ellen Howe and I am the Assistant Director of Human Resources with Monroe #1 BOCES. I am also a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. I am conducting a research study involving current collaborative practices between law enforcement and secondary school administrators through a trauma-informed lens. I would like to invite your participation in this research study. I will be conducting individual interviews with participants via Zoom.

The topic of my study is an exploration of how law enforcement and school administrators currently collaborate, their perception of each other's roles in the school setting, and their understanding of trauma. Participants will be those who serve suburban, rural, and alternative education settings across multiple counties in Upstate New York.

As previously stated, the interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviews will be recorded with only the audio files being maintained. Video files will be immediately and permanently deleted at the conclusion of the interview. There is no preparation needed for the interview.

If you participate and become uncomfortable answering any questions, you may choose to not answer. This study is voluntary and you may end your participation at any time.

All information shared including your identity will be kept confidential. The only identifying characteristic that will be shared is the setting in which you serve (suburban, rural, or alternative education). Confidentiality information will be reiterated at the time of the interview and you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form prior to participation.

Please respond to this email and let me know your preference for time of day and day of week to conduct the interview. I will then send a Zoom invitation. If you are unsure on how to use Zoom, please indicate that as well and I will send detailed instructions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at (___) ___-____ or __________@sjfc.edu. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Ellen Howe
Education Doctoral Candidate, Executive Leadership
St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY
Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participants

Examination of Collaborative Practices Between Law Enforcement and Secondary School Administrators Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:

- You are being asked to be in a research study of collaboration between law enforcement and secondary school administrators in suburban, rural, and alternative education settings. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.
- The purpose of this study is to explore whether law enforcement and administrators currently collaborate, their perception of each other’s roles in the school setting, and their understanding of trauma.
- Approximately 12 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for completion of the researcher’s dissertation.
- If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for one individual interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes.
- If you decide to participate, you will be asked to engage in one individual interview lasting 45-60 minutes. The interview will take place via a Zoom video meeting. More detail is provided in the body of the consent form.
- We believe this study has no more than minimal risk. Minimal risk and/or inconvenience include sitting for the duration of the interview via video conference.
- You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may inform future collaborative practices for law enforcement officers and school administrators working with students with traumatic histories.

DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION (some information may be repeated from the summary above):
You are being asked to be in a research study of collaboration between law enforcement and secondary school administrators in suburban, rural, and alternative education settings. This study is being conducted at multiple school districts and police departments in Upstate New York. This study is being conducted by Ellen Howe, supervised by Dr. Marie Cianca, in the Executive Leadership Doctoral Program at St. John Fisher College.
You were selected as a possible participant because of your role as a (school administrator/law enforcement officer) working with secondary school-aged students in a suburban, rural, or alternative education setting.

Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: If you participate, you will be asked to sit for one individual interview conducted via Zoom. You will be asked questions related to the roles school administrators and police play in addressing behavioral needs of secondary students; the collaboration between school administrators and law enforcement officers, particularly when working with students with traumatic histories; and your current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices including any training opportunities related to trauma.

The individual interview will take place via Zoom and will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviewer may follow up with you if there is a need for clarification of a response.

The interviews will be video and audio recorded with only the audio files being maintained. Video files will be immediately and permanently deleted at the conclusion of the interview. Audio files will be transcribed. Agreement to be recorded is required for participation in this study.

COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:

You will not receive compensation/incentive.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records of this study will be kept private and your confidentiality will be protected. In any sort of report the researcher(s) might publish, no identifying information will be included.

Identifiable research records will be stored securely and only the researcher(s) will have access to the records. All electronic data will be kept as a private, locked, and password-protected file. This information will be stored on the private, password-protected computer of the researcher and maintained in the private residence of the researcher. All participants will be identified by pseudonym only for all research materials. All other materials, including research notes or paper files related to the interview data collection and analysis will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s private residence. Zoom interviews will be recorded resulting in both video and audio files. Only the audio files with participant pseudonyms will be maintained for transcription purposes. Videos will be deleted immediately in a manner that prevents restoration of the electronic files. All study records
with identifiable information, including approved IRB documents, tapes, transcripts, and consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting after 3 years.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**
Participation in this study is voluntary and requires your informed consent. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. John Fisher College or with your current or future employers. If you decide to participate, you are free to skip any question that is asked. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

**CONTACTS, REFERRALS AND QUESTIONS:**
The researchers(s) conducting this study: Ellen Howe. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) at _____-____-____ or _______@sjfc.edu. Advisor: Dr. Marie Cianca, St. John Fisher College, _____-____-____; _______@sjfc.edu

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact the SJFC IRB administrator by phone during normal business hours at (585) 385-8012 or irb@sjfc.edu.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT:**

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understood the above information. I consent to voluntarily participate in the study.

Signature:__________________________________________ Date: _________________

Signature of Investigator:______________________________ Date: ________________

I agree to be audio recorded/transcribed ____Yes ____No If no, there is no alternative for participation.

Signature:__________________________________________ Date: _________________

Signature of Investigator:______________________________ Date: __________________

I agree to be videorecorded/transcribed ____Yes ____No If no, there is no alternative for participation.

*Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records.*
Appendix C

Interview Protocol – School Administrator

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to learn more about your thoughts on the roles school administrators and police play in addressing behavioral needs of secondary students. We will also talk about how you may currently collaborate with law enforcement officers, particularly when working with students with traumatic histories. Finally, I will ask about your current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices. This includes any training opportunities or other sources of information related to trauma. I may ask follow-up questions as needed. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes. As a reminder related to the Informed Consent form you signed, all your responses today will remain confidential and at no time will your personally identifiable information be shared. Because we are using the Zoom platform, this interview will be video and audio recorded. At the conclusion of the interview, the video recording will be permanently deleted. They audio file will be transcribed. All recordings and notes will be securely stored for three years from the publication of my dissertation. At that time, all electronic and paper recordings and notes will be permanently deleted and destroyed. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1) The roles of police in schools are often characterized as law enforcer, counselor/mentor, and educator. How would you describe or explain the role of police in schools when addressing student behavioral issues?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Have you had the opportunity to work with police in your school? Can you provide an example of when you experienced an officer acting in the role you identified? Are there additional roles you think describe how police operate in schools?

2) How would you describe or explain the role of school administrators when addressing student behavioral issues?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you provide an example of when you experienced yourself or another administrator acting in the role you identified?
3) If a student is engaged in misconduct or a negative behavior, what do you consider when deciding how to respond to that student? What does the response look like?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Are there other factors you might consider? How do you feel your response may be the same or different for students?

4) What is your understanding of collaborating in the area of student discipline?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: What do you see as benefits to collaboration? What do you see as detriments to collaboration?

5) How often, if at all, do you feel you engage in collaboration with police?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: If you don’t feel you engage in collaboration, why do you think that is/what might prevent it from happening?

6) If you engage in collaborative practices with police, what does that look like?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: What are your thoughts on the police level of collaboration?

7) How might you enhance or improve collaboration with police?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: What are some obstacles you might face in trying to enhance collaboration?

8) What is your understanding of the concept of trauma?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Have you had any experience with an individual who may have experienced trauma?

9) For students with trauma, how might trauma be identified in school or in classrooms?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Do you have any specific examples of a time you worked with a student with known trauma? What impact do you think trauma may have on students?

10) What, if any, pre-service or in-service training have you received related to trauma in general?
    a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you think of any training that you might find valuable? Why or why not do you feel that way?

11) What, if any, training have you received related to trauma as it impacts adolescent development?
    a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you think of any training that you might find valuable? Do you want to learn more about trauma in adolescents? Why or why not do you feel that way?
Appendix D

Interview Protocol – Law Enforcement Officer

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to learn more about your thoughts on the roles school administrators and police play in addressing behavioral needs of secondary students. We will also talk about how you may currently collaborate with school administrators, particularly when working with students with traumatic histories. Finally, I will ask about your current level of knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed practices. This includes any training opportunities or other sources of information related to trauma. I may ask follow-up questions as needed. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes. As a reminder related to the Informed Consent form you signed, all your responses today will remain confidential and at no time will your personally identifiable information be shared. Because we are using the Zoom platform, this interview will be video and audio recorded. At the conclusion of the interview, the video recording will be permanently deleted. They audio file will be transcribed. All recordings and notes will be securely stored for three years from the publication of my dissertation. At that time, all electronic and paper recordings and notes will be permanently deleted and destroyed. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1) The roles of police in schools are often characterized as law enforcer, counselor/mentor, and educator. How would you describe or explain the role of police in schools when addressing student behavioral issues?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you provide an example of when you experienced yourself or another officer acting in the role you identified? Are there additional roles you think describe how police operate in schools?

2) How would you describe or explain the role of school administrators when addressing student behavioral issues?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you provide an example of when you experienced an administrator acting in the role you identified?

3) If a student is engaged in misconduct or a negative behavior, what do you consider when deciding how to respond to that student? What does the response look like?
a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Are there other factors you might consider? How do you feel your response may be the same or different for students?

4) What is your understanding of collaborating in the area of student discipline?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: What do you see as benefits to collaboration? What do you see as detriments to collaboration?

5) How often, if at all, do you feel you engage in collaboration with school administrators?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: If you don’t feel you engage in collaboration, why do you think that is?

6) If you engage in collaborative practices with school administrators, what does that look like?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: What are your thoughts on the administrator’s level of collaboration?

7) How might you enhance or improve collaboration with school administrators?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: What are some obstacles you might face in trying to enhance collaboration?

8) What is your understanding of the concept of trauma?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Have you had any experience with an individual who may have experienced trauma?

9) For students with trauma, how might trauma be identified in school or in the classroom?
   a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Do you have any specific examples of a time you worked with a student with known trauma? What impact do you think trauma may have on students?

10) What, if any, pre-service or in-service training have you received related to trauma in general?
    a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you think of any training that you might find valuable? Why or why not do you feel that way?

11) What, if any, training have you received related to trauma as it impacts adolescent development?
    a. Potential follow-up questions/prompts: Can you think of any training that you might find valuable? Do you want to learn more about trauma in adolescents? Why or why not do you feel that way?