Kindergarten Cop: A Case Study of How a Coalition between School Districts and Law Enforcement Led to School Resource Officers in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Adopting school resource officers (SROs) is a popular response to school shootings. Using the advocacy coalition and multiple streams frameworks, we explore how school districts in one county formed a coalition with the Sheriff's Department, adopting SROs in elementary schools following the Sandy Hook shooting. We describe how this coalition was bound together by shared beliefs on school safety and the goodness of law enforcement. The implementation activities of SROs related to the beliefs of the coalition, focusing on security and relationship building. The beliefs were not uniformly understood by SROs – many interpreted their role to include student discipline and managing behavior of students with disabilities. The findings show the utility of comparing policy adoption processes with implementation activities.

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Since 1970, the number of school shootings and school shooting casualties has steadily increased (Riedman & O'Neill, 2019). While, in general, these increases have trended upwards with growing enrollment in public schools (authors' analysis; "National Center for Education Statistics," n.d.), 2018 was a record-breaking year with 97 shooting incidents and 56 casualties (Riedman & O'Neill, 2019). Following the shootings in Parkland, FL and Santa Fe, TX in 2018, both states quickly implemented several policies aimed at preventing future school shootings including additional school resource officers (SROs) and funding for mental health services (Abbott, 2018; Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, 2018). This reaction is not uncommon. Prior school shootings, in particular the shooting at Columbine High School, have led to increased use of school security measures like metal detectors, locking entrances, SROs, and security cameras (Addington, 2009; Crepeau-Hobson et al., 2005; Curran et al., 2020).

We focus on one of these policy responses: SROs. SROs are sworn members of law enforcement with full- or part-time placement in K-12 educational settings (NASRO, n.d.). The use of SROs in schools has skyrocketed over the last twenty years. In the 1990s, the majority of SROs were placed in urban areas and secondary schools with only one percent of elementary schools and rural schools having a full-time SRO on site (Heaviside et al., 1998). By 2016, over a third of elementary schools had an SRO with rural schools having the same likelihood of having an SRO as urban schools (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Millions of dollars are being spent hiring and training the increasing number of SROs across the country (Blad, 2019; Kallergis, 2018; Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, 2018).

Unfortunately, the literature assessing the impacts of SROs finds no consistent benefits associated with implementing SROs, and identifies several detrimental consequences. For

example, even though SROs are responsible for crime prevention, longitudinal studies have shown that the number of crimes recorded at school increases following the adoption of SROs (Curran, 2020; Gottfredson et al., 2020; Na & Gottfredson, 2013), although this may be attributed to increased detection of crime. Punishment of students also is more common in schools with SROs. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found that school discipline rates increased following the adoption of SROs (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016). Related longitudinal research has found that receiving federal funding to place police in schools has led to higher suspension rates (Weisburst, 2019) and referrals to law enforcement (Owens, 2017), often for relatively subjective offenses such as disorderly conduct (Theriot, 2009). Moreover, some studies show evidence of racially disparate effects such that Black students might be disproportionate recipients of exclusionary discipline and arrest when SROs are placed in schools (Homer & Fisher, 2020; Weisburst, 2019). Qualitative research examining SROs' effects on schools points to the erosion of school climate (Devine, 1996; Nolan, 2011), racially disparate patterns of surveilling students (Fisher et al., 2020; Shedd, 2015), and an increased focus on controlling student behavior rather than academic learning (Kupchik, 2010). Moreover, no evidence exists that SROs prevent gun violence in schools or reduce the number of casualties when shootings occur (Livingston et al., 2019).

In spite of this body of evidence, both the Obama and Trump administrations have supported the adoption of SROs nationwide (*Final Report on the Federal Commission on School Safety*, 2018; Kerlikowske, 2013), and schools have continued to add SROs (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). While several large school districts decided in the summer of 2020 to remove SROs from schools as a response to increased attention to police violence, many other districts that considered such a move ultimately decided to continue with a law enforcement presence

(Camera, 2020; Kunichoff, 2020). Given this renewed discussion of whether law enforcement belong in schools, it is important to understand why districts have historically made the choice to employ SROs even when the research evidence points to potential harms.

To understand this seeming paradox of SRO adoption, we draw on a case study of a suburban county that added SROs to all of their elementary schools following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary to explore why this was the chosen policy solution and how the SRO role is structured based on this reasoning. We use the multiple streams and advocacy coalition frameworks to explain SRO expansion to elementary schools in this county and then extend these frameworks to help explain how shared beliefs between law enforcement and school district leaders structured implementation activities of SROs in elementary schools. We find that the original intent of adopting SROs in elementary schools directly connected to actual activities of SROs in many ways but that SROs would engage in unanticipated activities that the SROs interpreted as part of their role. Some of the discretion given to SROs in structuring their activities had implications for their interactions with vulnerable groups of students including students with disabilities and those being disciplined. These findings highlight the utility of examining both policy formation and implementation activities concurrently. In addition, this case study helps inform both why SROs have become a popular response to school shootings and how law enforcement could be capitalizing on school shootings as policy windows to expand their influence and reach into elementary schools.

Literature on the Adoption of SROs

As noted above, the use of SROs has grown dramatically since the 1990s. This expansion has been driven in part by federal and state policy shifts. Millions of dollars of funding for SROs have come from the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and recent

policy responses to mass shootings have prompted further funding for SROs at the state level. For example, following the 2018 tragedy in Parkland, FL, the state of Florida passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act which required the presence of a "safe-school officer" (i.e., SROs or other armed school staff) at every school in the state (Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, 2018). Similarly, the state of Maryland passed the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 which required an SRO or "adequate local law enforcement coverage" at each school in the state (Klausmeier, 2018). In Texas, in the wake of the Santa Fe shooting, the governor enacted a school safety plan that allocated 120 million dollars to various safety initiatives including the hiring of more SROs and school marshals (Abbott, 2018).

In spite of the lack of empirical support for the use of SROs in improving outcomes for schools and students, they remain an attractive policy option. Although a robust literature has documented what SROs do in schools and the effects they have on schools and students, very little empirical attention has been given to the processes related to deciding to initiate SRO programs and implementing SROs in schools. At a local level, fear of gun violence in schools has been one driver for schools' decision to implement SROs. In a series of interviews with school administrators, Madfis (2016) found that heightened fears and perceived risks of school violence prompted decision-makers to take on additional security measures—like SROs—even if they thought the changes might be an overreaction. Their logic was that any efforts to save a life in a school would be worth any potential costs. However, this study did not address the systems and stakeholders that allowed for various interventions to be taken up.

Addressing this limitation, a few studies have examined these broader systems and stakeholders to understand the drivers of SRO adoption. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) provides one useful example (Kafka, 2011). In the 1970s, a growing fear of

student violence drove LAUSD to implement police in schools through a variety of programs. This adoption of police was possible because of an existing strong and cooperative relationship between LAUSD and the Los Angeles Police Department. A more recent study found that in the wake of the economic recession in the late 2000s, federal agencies—namely, the Department of Education and Department of Justice—created and controlled a network of actors within the federal Supportive School Discipline Initiative to advance the adoption of SROs (Koon, 2020). These agencies defined the school-to-prison pipeline as a problem driven by schools' inability to control students and privileged perspectives of groups in favor of adding SROs while excluding more critical voices (Koon, 2020). In this sense, pro-SRO advocates were brought into a network to shape policy while critics of SROs were excluded.

Other studies have also found that the SRO adoption process has largely ignored critical perspectives and the research evidence, focusing instead on pursuing local stakeholders' agenda for expanding police presence into schools. In fact, one school district's adoption of SROs was grounded in the idea that adding SROs was an anti-racist policy that would support the needs of students they viewed as troubled (Turner & Beneke, 2020). This is particularly striking given that some of the major concerns expressed about having SROs in this district were grounded in concerns about racist policing. This adoption process again marginalized critical voices and privileged those that coalesced around the idea that SROs were a source of support rather than a source of violence and criminalization. A similar process of privileging pro-SRO perspectives at the expense of critical voices has been found elsewhere as well (Nolan, 2015).

Together, these prior studies of SRO adoption point to two overarching trends. First is the concern about violence, either from outsiders coming into the school (Madfis, 2016) or from students themselves (Kafka, 2011). Second, the coalescing of like-minded agencies or

individuals who were in favor of SROs (Koon, 2020; Turner & Beneke, 2020) paved the way for the adoption of SROs, often with the justification that they would provide solutions to the very problems that critics attributed to SROs. This coalescing of actors occurred at the expense of perspectives critical of SROs (Koon, 2020; Nolan, 2015; Turner & Beneke, 2020). Together, these trends point to the salience of what Nolan (2015) and Turner and Beneke (2020) refer to as "a neoliberal discourse" that views violence as inevitable, crafting policies in response to fear of violence without regard to potential unintended negative consequences.

The current case study draws on these themes of fear of violence and the coalescing of actors with shared perspectives to understand why and how SROs were rapidly implemented in elementary schools in a single county following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. This study builds off of this prior work on SRO adoption in several ways. First, prior work has examined SRO adoption using neoliberalism and political economic theory. We integrate the frameworks on policy process (advocacy coalition and multiple streams frameworks) to examine SRO adoption and implementation activities. Second, this study focuses specifically on elementary schools which is practically significant since elementary school SROs have fundamentally different roles than in a high school setting, and elementary schools have experienced the largest increase in SRO presence in recent years (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Third, this study focuses on a novel setting – suburban, affluent, high-performing schools – examining if processes discovered in previous literature are also apparent in this context.

Context of the Study

The addition of SROs to elementary schools is the focal policy change addressed in the present study. Our study centers on two school districts in one suburban county in the southern region of the United States. One, Washington City Schools (pseudonym), serves students who

live within a small city while the other, Fairfield County Schools (pseudonym), serves students living in the surrounding county. The two school districts operate in tandem for many policy and practice decisions and, due to unique feeder patterns, serve a number of the same students across their K-12 trajectories. Both school districts placed SROs in their middle and high schools beginning in the early 2000s. Until 2012, these positions were staffed by county Sheriff's deputies and city police officers.

Despite the presence of officers in middle and high schools for the last 10-15 years, the county did not have a history of placing SROs in elementary school settings. In the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting, however, this changed as the county rapidly moved to expand the SRO program to all elementary schools in the county. Within days of the Sandy Hook shooting, approval and funding had been allocated for this expansion, and, within weeks, SROs provided by the Sheriff's Department were expanded to all elementary schools.

Theoretical Framework

Policy adoption is a complicated process involving people at various levels of government and from the public whose motivations might be hard to discern. Focusing on the most obvious or simplistic elements of the policy process could lead to other important areas being ignored. Various theories have been developed to give researchers analytical tools to analyze the policy process in a systematic way (Weible, 2018). Among these theories, we use the multiple streams framework (MSF) and advocacy coalition framework (ACF) as tools to understand how the case study county quickly adopted SROs in response to Sandy Hook. MSF, as an agenda setting framework, helps to explain the conditions that led to the policy change occurring. ACF allows us to effectively frame why SROs were chosen as the policy response. A graphical representation of our framework is in Figure 1.

Several prior studies in education policy have analyzed policy change (or failed policy change) through integrating MSF or ACF, mostly focusing on federal and state-level policy adoption processes. Studies have applied MSF or ACF to explain policy adoption on topics like performance-based funding in higher education, teacher tenure, multicultural education, teacher accountability, a national sales tax plan, reading policy, and coalitions bound together by their religious beliefs (Cibulka & Myers, 2008; DeBray-Pelot, 2007; Dougherty et al., 2010; Holliday, 2013; Lewis & Young, 2013; Lugg & Robinson, 2009; McDermott, 2005; Piazza, 2019; Stout & Stevens, 2000; Venters et al., 2012; Vergari, 2007; Young et al., 2010). A particularly robust set of studies applies ACF specifically to school choice and charter school coalitions, focusing on the use of research evidence, the role of philanthropists, and opposing advocacy coalitions (DeBray et al., 2014; DeBray-Pelot et al., 2007; Lenhoff et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2015).

Few studies have focused on school district-level policy processes, although prior work has examined the state's role in setting policy for specific, large urban school districts (Diem et al., 2018; Lenhoff et al., 2019; Lieberman, 2002). A notable exception is a study using social network analysis to identify advocacy coalitions in Oakland, California (Ansell et al., 2009). Overall, these studies have tended to focus on the policy adoption step of the policy process: why certain policies are considered, who is supporting those policies, and why certain policies are enacted. Few, if any, studies in education policy have followed the policy process through to implementation activities (how policies are enacted by school-based staff), a common critique of studies of the policy process (Herweg et al., 2018; Howlett et al., 2017; Weible, 2018).

Multiple Streams Framework

Kingdon's MSF is particularly useful for explaining agenda setting, or the process by which particular issues become defined as salient policy problems (Cohen et al., 1972; Herweg et

al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). The policy process in MSF is coordinated through policy entrepreneurs, supporters of a particular position who can feasibly gain (materially or symbolically) from adoption of their selected solution. Policy entrepreneurs take advantage of policy windows by coupling the problem, political, and policy streams. The *problem stream* refers to when the status quo— defined through indicators, focusing events, and feedback—is seen by policymakers and/or practitioners as unacceptable. Viewing the status quo as problematic is based on values because problems are socially constructed. Because of this, people can have wide-ranging opinions about whether and to what extent current conditions are problematic, with opinions based on perception, not objective facts. The *political stream* is made up of the views of the electorate (i.e., the national mood), government, and legislature. In the *policy stream*, solutions are discussed in policy communities or loose connections of practitioners, academics, researchers, consultants, and policymakers. During a *softening up* stage, ideas are discussed and modified by members of the policy community (Herweg et al., 2015).

Streams are coupled (i.e., purposefully connected to each other) during policy windows. Focusing events and worsening conditions open a window in the problem stream. These windows close quickly and, within that window, a solution from the policy stream needs to be coupled with the problem (Kingdon, 2011). Policy entrepreneurs actively couple streams during policy windows to enact certain policies, or policymakers can react to the opening of a policy window by *commissioning*, as in actively selecting a solution (Ackrill & Kay, 2011).

Advocacy Coalition Framework

While Kingdon's MSF has more utility in explaining agenda setting, ACF is useful for explaining group formation and how actors coalesce around specific policy recommendations. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith developed ACF to help explain the policy process by taking a long-

term view of how policy change occurs within policy subsystems (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994; Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). The term *advocacy coalition* refers to a formal or informal alliance among those who share similar beliefs about a particular policy subsystem. Advocacy coalitions are made up of members who can come from a broad range of stakeholders including those in government, interest groups, and members of the community. The most notable premise of ACF is that policy change happens over time as actors from different institutions interact with one another and are bonded together in advocacy coalitions based on a stable, shared belief system (Sabatier, 1988).

Belief systems are characterized by a three-tiered, hierarchical structure. The first tier is deep core beliefs including general assumptions about human nature and fundamental values. Recent advances in ACF suggest defining deep core beliefs as general enough to encompass the worldview of participants, regardless of the policy subsystem (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018; Kim, 2003; Ripberger et al., 2014). This is done by categorizing people based on the basic social dimensions of grid and group, or the extent to which a person believes in defined rules and identifies with a social group, respectively. For instance, being ranked as having high group and grid preferences indicates that they prefer to be part of a group and prefer externally-imposed rules, respectively (Kim, 2003; Ripberger et al., 2014; Trousset et al., 2015). The second tier of belief systems includes policy core beliefs which are the application of deep core beliefs to a specific policy area. When extended to a policy subsystem, deep core beliefs about the proper role of government (i.e., rules) are interpreted as the role of government officials, policy-related values, and the relative seriousness and causes of policy problems. Policy core beliefs are highly salient to individuals, as they represent “normative beliefs that project an image of how the policy subsystem ought to be, provide the vision that guides coalition strategic behavior, and

[help] unite allies and divide opponents" (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 195). The third tier is secondary beliefs which are narrower in scope. Secondary beliefs are informed by policy core beliefs but are more easily changed. Secondary beliefs pertain to policy details, the localized nature of problems, and rule application (Sabatier, 1988; Weible et al., 2009).

In ACF, beliefs are the causal drivers for political behavior and the formation of advocacy coalitions (Sotirov & Memmler, 2012). Policy participants seek allies who hold the same policy core beliefs and then engage in sustained coordination to form advocacy coalitions (Henry, 2011). The advocacy coalitions might be relatively informal or formalized, but they are distinguished by the members of the advocacy coalition seeking to translate their beliefs into policy, in particular before their opponents can do so (Sabatier & Weible, 2007).

Incorporating MSF and ACF Into a Unified Framework

Researchers have often integrated insights from both MSF and ACF to study the policy process. We describe the agenda setting process and policy change using MSF. While doing so, we follow the example of others (e.g., Ritter et al., 2018; van Gestel et al., 2018) by integrating ACF to help explain the actors within each stream and how their shared beliefs lead to certain policy outcomes. That is, we use the strengths of MSF to explain the policy change process (Weible & Nohrstedt, 2012), bolstered by ACF to help define each of the streams (see Figure 1). We also define the appropriate scope of the subsystem including how interactions between governance units are structured since this is an important aspect of ACF and MSF.

We use recent insights (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017) on combining ACF and MSF into a five stream policy process, adding a process stream and program stream that become relevant following the uptake of a particular policy. A *process stream* includes the tasks that lead to policy outputs. The process stream is shaped by citizens and policy administrators who make

decisions about what the policy will look like when implemented. The *program stream* includes those actors involved in implementation activities including those who are affected by the new policy and street-level bureaucrats who are tasked with implementing the policy (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). In addition, we follow the advice of Howlett (2019) by locating shared beliefs within the policy stream (see Figure 1) to clarify the softening up process using the belief structure of ACF. To combine ACF and MSF terminology, the shared beliefs are the glue uniting the policy community with the policy stream.

While combining MSF and ACF is common in policy studies generally (see Cairney, 2013; Howlett et al., 2017), this approach has potentially been underutilized in education policy research. We extend the literature using MSF and ACF to explain policy change in the education policy subsystem by combining multiple frameworks to more comprehensively examine coalition building, agenda setting, and policy change. We also use recent insights into the combination of MSF and ACF to explore the connection between these processes and policy implementation activities (Howlett, 2019) through a case study of SRO adoption and implementation in a suburban county. Extending MSF/ACF to street-level actors implementing a policy helps to explain how policies do and do not reflect the original intent of policymakers.

Research Questions

As described above, the case study county added SROs in direct response to the Sandy Hook tragedy, but the choice to expand SROs was by no means the only possible response to Sandy Hook. Given both the financial cost of SROs (the additional annual cost to this county was estimated at 2-3 million dollars) and the research evidence that SROs can have negative impacts on a variety of student outcomes, the choice to expand SROs as a response to Sandy Hook rather than investing in other forms of security (cameras, security guards, etc.) or

prevention (mental health services, school climate interventions, etc.) warrants examination.

Further, even once the stakeholders decided on SROs as the preferred solution, the rapid expansion of SROs was not guaranteed. The ability to align stakeholders around the solution and to secure the necessary resources might have been expected to take far longer. This case study explores this rapid expansion, seeking to understand the political antecedents, coalitions, and mechanisms by which an expansion of SROs to elementary settings was chosen as the preferred policy response to Sandy Hook and implemented in such a quick fashion following the event. We then explore how this coalition's beliefs were translated into on-the-ground implementation activities of SROs in elementary schools. We address the following research questions:

1. How did the agenda setting process, including informal and formal institutional coalition building, lead the two case study school districts in this suburban county to adopt SROs in all elementary schools in response to Sandy Hook?
2. What were the predominant beliefs that informed the adoption of SROs across all case study elementary schools?
3. How did the policy adoption process relate to implementation activities of SROs across elementary schools?

Methods

We approach our study using a case study design with qualitative data collection. The case study approach, in this instance focusing on the expansion of SROs in a specific county, provides an in-depth yet bounded approach to understanding the phenomenon of interest. Long used in educational research and sometimes contested (Stake, 1978), case studies are particularly well suited for understanding the "how" and "why" of an event (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2002). While other research methodologies, such as event history analysis, exist for understanding the policy

decision-making process, such research designs tend to focus on a limited set of measurable variables and on isolating the marginal effect of a particular input on the policymaking process rather than providing a more complete and contextualized view of the factors contributing to a policymaking event. In contrast, the case study design with qualitative data collection allows for the examination of "many more variables of interest than data points" meaning that it can provide a more complete picture of the factors leading to a particular policy (Yin, 2002). In this regard, a qualitative case study represents an emergent design in which important factors are allowed to arise from the data collection and analysis process, rather than a more positivist approach that seeks to test for the existence of theoretically motivated factors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Noor, 2008). While a quantitative study could examine the relationship between a particular event like a school shooting and changes to school security, such a study would potentially miss other unanticipated causal contributors to the decision and would do little to explicate the how and why of the policy decision.

The post-positivist view of qualitative case study designs is particularly relevant in this study as our theoretical framing posits a central role for beliefs (in ACF; Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Weible, 2007) and the social construction of shared policy priorities (in MSF; McLendon et al., 2014). As we were particularly interested in understanding the beliefs and processes that led to the choice to expand SROs as well as the contextual factors that made the rapid expansion of SROs possible, the qualitative case study design was particularly appropriate. What it may sacrifice in terms of generalizability (Stake, 1978) is more than compensated for in its ability to provide rich, contextualized perspectives on the process of SRO expansion.

Setting

This study occurred within a single suburban county in the southern United States that

contained two closely tied school districts and a single Sheriff's Department that provided SROs for both districts. The setting is particularly relevant to address our research questions for several reasons. First, the schools were known to have SROs present in elementary schools. Elementary schools were a particular focus of our broader research study, as elementary settings have seen the most rapid growth in the presence of SROs over the last several decades (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Next, the county's demographics, being generally suburban, more affluent, and relatively White, were similar to the setting of a number of high-profile school shootings, including Columbine and Sandy Hook, and non-urban schools have seen some of the greatest expansion of SRO presence in the past two decades (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). This setting, therefore, reflects the type of counties and schools that have seen some of the greatest growth in SRO presence, providing insight into the policy adoption process among similarly situated counties. Finally, the districts were engaged partners that provided access for data collection to a wide set of stakeholders, allowing for a potentially rich and multi-faceted perspective on the policy adoption process.

Combined, the county served approximately 40,000 students across a range of urbanicities including a small city, suburban settings, and rural areas. Table 1 provides summary statistics on the characteristics of elementary schools in each district. As shown, Fairfield County Schools' elementary schools was significantly larger than Washington City Schools; however, Washington City Schools was more diverse in terms of student race/ethnicity and socio-economic status. Nearly half of elementary students in the Washington City Schools were Black or Hispanic and 40 percent were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Both school districts were among the highest achieving in the state academically, generally considered to be well-functioning and desirable systems for students. The communities they served had relatively little

crime and were generally considered to be safe.

As mentioned before, the two school districts frequently cooperated on policy and practice decisions and served a number of the same students at various points in their academic trajectories. We found this cooperation to be particularly true around issues of school safety, with the safety coordinators of each district in near constant contact with each other, attending meetings together, and making many decisions about the research process together. While we recognize the potential of multiple case studies to enhance generalizability and provide varied perspectives, the case of expanding SROs was, as we expected and empirically observed, a policymaking decision made in tandem by both districts. This was particularly so given that there was a single law enforcement agency serving both school districts and a single municipal government funding the presence of SROs. As we did not see differences in the expansion approach in each district in our data and because the SRO expansion process in both districts was concurrent and intertwined with the other, we treat the two school districts as a single case in the analysis (i.e., at the county level) and results that follow.

We define the community in this study as all those who lived within the county, not just those with direct ties to the school systems. At times, state-level actors were mentioned as being part of this political subsystem. However, the involvement or influence of those outside of the county within this political subsystem was rather limited.

Data

The data in this study come from multiple sources, including interviews as a source of primary data and multiple publicly-available document repositories as a source of secondary data (primary data are publicly archived in the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data). We invited all leaders in the school districts and Sheriff's Department in addition to all elementary

school SROs to participate in the study and over 80 percent agreed. In addition, we conducted interviews with principals and assistant principals in Washington City Schools with 100 percent participation. In those schools, we conducted focus groups with teachers and parents using a convenience sampling approach based on timing of teacher planning periods and parent meetings.

We conducted interviews with individuals in leadership positions within both of the school districts (n = 5), the county Sheriff's Department (n = 4), and the local schools (n = 10). We interviewed the SROs themselves (n = 25) and conducted focus groups with parents (n = 4 focus groups; with 14 total participants in groups of 2-5) and teachers (n = 8 focus groups; with 30 total participants in groups of 2-5). The participants in the interviews and focus groups we conducted were mostly White, reflecting the population of school leaders, teachers, and SROs in this area, but we did have several non-White SROs and teachers participate in interviews/focus groups. The parents participating in focus groups were particularly non-representative of the parent population of Washington City Schools and reflected overall differences between the parent population and which parents were available to participate in parent focus groups that often occurred during the school day.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured approach such that, while interviewers had pre-determined topics and questions, the interviews and focus groups were kept conversational and were open to emergent lines of discussion. The interviews and focus groups focused largely on the participants' perceptions of school safety and security, the use and roles of SROs, and, of particular note for this study, the history of the adoption of SROs in the county as well as the process of implementing SROs in the schools. Specifically related to the expansion of SROs in the county, we asked participants questions like "What were the

problems that led to expanding SROs?", "Why were SROs the response to this problem rather than another strategy or approach?", and "What impact did the Sandy Hook shooting have on the decision to place SROs in the school?" Given the semi-structured nature of the data collection, these questions were generally embedded in a more general conversation about the process by which SROs were expanded in the county. In general, interviews and focus groups ranged from about 20 minutes to over an hour in length with an average time of around 45 minutes. We include the full interview and focus group protocols in the Online Appendix A.

While the interviews and focus groups were our primary data source, we also completed three half-day observations of elementary school SROs (as part of a broader set of observations that included SROs in middle and high schools). These observations provided insight into the day-to-day activities of SROs, allowed us to triangulate the descriptions of SRO activities made in the interviews, and, in some cases, allowed for informal discussion of the decision to expand SROs. That said, while we note the observations here, they were more valuable for understanding the activities of SROs than for gaining insight into SRO adoption.

In addition to these primary data, we collected secondary data from three local newspapers and meeting minutes from the county commission and both local school district boards. To gather these data, we searched publicly available repositories, reaching out directly to newspapers/school districts when applicable, restricting the dates to December 2012 and the months following, as this was the timeframe during which SROs were adopted into the county's elementary schools. In total, we reviewed three sets of minutes and resolutions from the local government, 19 sets of minutes and agendas from the school boards, and 37 local news articles.

Analysis

We followed an iterative approach to the coding and analysis of interview and focus

group transcripts. In the first stage, all of the transcripts were coded by at least two project personnel to identify a set of pre-determined and emergent themes related to a variety of domains within school safety, discipline, and the use of SROs. Given that we anticipated studying the policy adoption process and implementation activities at the outset of data collection, we had two pre-determined themes related to SRO adoption and implementation activities and the purpose of SROs. Segments of text were coded to these two themes by two independent readers with the goal of achieving crystallization in coding, an analytic approach that seeks to achieve fuller coverage of a concept rather than seeking to perfectly align coding across coders (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2010, 2013). The *SRO adoption and implementation activities* theme included participant discussion of why SROs were expanded, the process by which they came to be expanded, the actors that took part in the expansion, and any discussion of how the expansion proceeded into implementation activities. The *purpose of SROs* theme included participant discussion of why SROs were in schools and what goals they sought to achieve by having SROs. All coding was conducted in NVivo 11.

Following this initial round of coding to the broad themes, we pulled all relevant transcript data that aligned with the themes of SRO adoption and implementation activities or purpose of SROs. For the first two research questions (the antecedents of adoption), we focused on responses coded to these themes from school district leaders and the Sheriff's Department leadership. We also incorporated the minutes, agendas, and news stories we compiled from the county board, school boards, and local news sources in analysis of the first two research questions. For the third research question (which examined implementation activities), we expanded to include SROs, school-level administrators, teachers, and parents.

The excerpts of text that aligned with these codes were then read by research team

members through the lens of MSF and ACF. In particular, we sought to identify segments of text and cross-cutting concepts as well as divergent views that aligned with key concepts from MSF and ACF. We first sought to identify external or internal perturbations—changes that might prompt a policy or practice shift. We aligned our data to systematically identify the three streams. At the same time, we sought to identify the relevant actors and stakeholders who played a role in the policy adoption process. Then, consistent with ACF, we sought to identify the belief structures that drove the policy actors. In particular, we read for three types of beliefs: deep core beliefs (general worldviews), policy core beliefs (application of the worldview to the policy subsystem), and secondary beliefs (beliefs that are narrow in scope and focused on the particulars of specific social problems or policies). Finally, we defined the process and program streams and the ways in which these beliefs related to how SROs were implemented across schools, namely the day to day activities and roles that SROs take on. Research team members completed memos in which they detailed emergent commonalities within these domains, noted divergent cases, and recorded exemplars and quotes. The lead author then synthesized findings from across each coder's memo, and the research team collectively discussed the findings and their meaning.

Findings

We begin by focusing on the agenda setting stage, structuring our findings according to each of the three agenda-setting streams from MSF (i.e., political, problem, and policy), using key principles from ACF to further define and understand these streams. We then describe how these three streams were coupled in response to a focusing event that created a policy window. Moving on to the policy formation and implementation activities stages, we explore the process and program streams, particularly how the advocacy coalition's belief system related to

implementation activities of the SROs in elementary schools.

Political Stream and the Advocacy Coalition

Coalition formation occurred at the county government level. The formal relationship between the Sheriff's Department and the school districts began with the adoption of SROs in high schools in the early 2000s. Officials who were present during this time did not recall a pressing need for placing SROs in high schools. Instead, the relationship began because of the availability of funding from the federal government to hire SROs. One Sheriff's Department leader stated, "There was nothing that said, 'Hey, we need the police in the school system.' We didn't have any incident. … That was the growing trend at that time. And you could get funding through the federal government" (Sheriff's Department Leader 1). Over time, SROs were placed in the middle schools because of the continued funding available to support these positions. One school district leader noted high schools and middle schools were prioritized over elementary schools because of their higher level of crime but that SROs became "a common thread through the fabric of public education in the United States. They kind of all started cropping up at the same time. It started very much in urban school districts, and then slowly worked its way out" (Fairfield Leader 3). As described above, this relationship was initially rather casual with the SROs sometimes coming from the local police or the Sheriff's Department.

The Scope of the Political Stream/Subsystem and Parameters Defining the Subsystem

We focused on county-level government including two school districts each with their own superintendents and central office staff. In this county, the Sheriff's Department had jurisdiction over all areas outside of those covered by local police departments, and—by virtue of the presence of SROs from the Sheriff's Department in every school—over every public school in the county (post-Sandy Hook). Although separate, Washington City Schools showed

deference to Fairfield County Schools on many policy decisions, and the two school districts purposefully had many common policies and programs. For example, the Safety Director of the city district noted how "I work closely with the [County] Safety Director, so we are all streamlined as best as we can across the county for our students" (Washington Leader 1). Due to how the district lines were drawn, a significant portion of students attended both school districts, so this continuity of policies and programs was intentional to avoid conflict in students' schooling experiences, a point the county safety director explicitly made. These districts were closely aligned such that a coalition between one school district and an external agency was likely to extend to the other school district.

The formation of the coalition between the school districts and Sheriff's Department was guided by several dynamic factors that made it possible for the coalition to form. Although the school districts and Sheriff's Department had static organizational structures, district superintendents and county Sheriffs are highly political positions that bring a possibility of leadership change at any given time. When SROs were adopted in elementary schools, it represented a time of relatively consistent leadership. The Sheriff had enjoyed a long tenure and both superintendents, while not natives to the area like the Sheriff, were several years into their time in their roles. In Fairfield County Schools, the assistant superintendents were newer to their roles, but the assistant superintendent overseeing elementary schools had been a principal in the district before being promoted to central office. Although not all SROs in both districts had been staffed by the Sheriff's Department prior to Sandy Hook, a significant proportion of the SROs were employed by the Sheriff allowing for the relationship between school districts and his agency to develop over time. As one SRO shared, Sheriff's Department leadership was periodically looking for ways to extend this relationship, even before Sandy Hook: "The Sheriff

was looking at putting school resources officers in the high schools. And in the background had been talking about funding for that" (SRO 115).

Problem Stream – A Diverse Set of Problems, Superseded by the Shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School

Several members of the advocacy coalition over many years engaged in sustained dialogue about their perceptions of the problem. When the Sandy Hook shooting occurred, it acted as a focusing event that superseded prior problem definitions. As a key part of the ACF framework, the problem stream was likely an important mechanism for coalition formation.

As predicted by ACF, coalition formation occurred over several years. In this case, much of the coalition formation initially occurred informally. The Sheriff had a close relative who worked in a Fairfield elementary school whose principal was later promoted to an assistant superintendent position in that district. While principal, she developed a professional relationship with the Sheriff who would often come by the school to visit his relative. They discussed several problems that aided the formation of the coalition. The Sheriff and assistant superintendent recalled many informal conversations about how there should be an SRO at that elementary school. As stated by the assistant superintendent when recalling her time as a principal,

> So even before Sandy Hook, …[the Sheriff] would come into my office and I would constantly say to him, 'It would be nice if we had SRO officer. One of these days I would like for us to have what the secondary schools have.'… He totally agreed with me (Fairfield Leader 4).

First, they observed that elementary schools regularly had parents who would enter the school aggressively, particularly parents who were engaged in contentious custody disputes,

> I'm sure [my relative working in an elementary school] had some influence on me. I'd be

> probably mistaken if I wasn't, but, being in her school, seeing some of the parents and knowing about some of the issues... The custody battles they've been through ... I'm sure that did have some influence on me (Sheriff's Department Leader 2).

Second, they also discussed how it was "unfair" that middle and high schools were given SROs and not elementary schools. Third, both parties were concerned that youth were being taught to view law enforcement negatively due to anecdotal stories of specific bad actors in law enforcement. While the Sheriff and assistant superintendent specifically recalled having these conversations years earlier, we heard these same concerns from those in leadership positions in both school districts. As the Sheriff held that role for many years and the principal was promoted to assistant superintendent, these problem definitions became more prominent.

However, the problem stream shifted in response to a specific focusing event: the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary. As stated by an assistant superintendent, "It always came down to, is there really that kind of need [for SROs in elementary schools]? So when Sandy Hook happened, it changed the whole conversation" (Fairfield Leader 4). In interviews, those in leadership in the school districts and Sheriff's Department overwhelmingly described the problem as the threat of school shootings. While the other problems were noted after some probing, the problem stream was dominated by the threat of school shootings after Sandy Hook.

Policy Stream as Defined by the Belief System that Bound the School Districts with the Sheriff's Department

Below we describe the shared belief systems of the coalition. Because the description of the belief system is an integral part of how we are connecting agenda setting with implementation activities, we have more data presented on this stream than the other streams. As we describe the belief systems, refer to Table 2 for a list of beliefs and connections of beliefs

across levels and Online Appendix B for more illustrative quotes for each belief.

Deep Core Beliefs

We identify the advocacy coalition in this study as having a high group identity where they strongly identified with their respective organizations and the county, overall, and a high grid preference where they preferred externally-imposed rules. As leaders in schools and law enforcement, rules and regulations governed their everyday interactions. School district leadership and Sheriff's Department leadership mentioned the importance of "chains of command". Those with a high group high grid orientation (HGHG) prefer organizations to be stratified by positions and place value on procedures, authority, and order and believe that humans are flawed and unequal (Ripberger et al., 2014). One school district leader noted how school administrators are "given the MOU between our school district and the Sheriff's Department, and then they were given a chain of command chart so they would know who to contact" (Washington Leader 1), indicating the importance of established procedures (MOU) and organizational stratification (command chart). Especially relevant to the policy stream, those with HGHG prefer government solutions to market solutions (Ripberger et al., 2014) and tend to agree with the statement, "Most of the time, I trust those with authority and expertise to do what is right for society" (Trousset et al., 2015, p. 56). This position was largely reflected by the stakeholders who generally expressed positive views and trust in police and SROs; this mirrors prior SRO implementation processes that were driven by advocates with positive views of police who also express the neoliberal sentiment that violence is inevitable (Koon, 2020; Nolan, 2015). One school district leader noted that the "community as a whole has been extremely positive and supportive. I honestly don't hear any complaints about our SROs" (Fairfield Leader 2). The final point about HGHG relevant to this study is that they see people as having potential to do good

and bad things. Rules and structures encourage people to be good and civilized (Kim, 2003; Ripberger et al., 2014). As one SRO explained "our students, just like adults, need boundaries. If they have a good foundation and boundaries through good school discipline, like listening to authority, doing what they're supposed to do, obeying rules, most likely they're not going to escalate to breaking the law" (SRO 112).

Policy Core Beliefs

We now assess how the deep core beliefs influence the policy core beliefs. The advocacy coalition in this study saw it as the responsibility of the school officials to keep students safe, connecting to the preference of those with a HGHG orientation for stratified organizations with some having authority over others. Correspondingly, they all agreed that SROs help to keep schools safe. As expressed by the Sheriff,

> I think the main mission … is the safety and security of the children, the staff, and the facility. After the Sandy Hook incident, that's when we placed the school resource officers in our elementary schools and that was for that purpose, is to make sure that the people inside the facilities are safe in order for the students to be able to learn and study and get their education. (Sheriff's Department Leader 2)

The implication of this statement is that, without the direct authority of an SRO, students would be unsafe, leaving them unable to learn.

Because the advocacy coalition viewed threats to safety as unpredictable, they believed that steps to address threats needed to be comprehensive, regardless of the probability that the threat will occur. As is the case in law enforcement, addressing safety concerns was always urgent—it was better to act quickly in order to do something then to wait and figure out exactly the right way to address a safety concern. Similar to the findings of Madfis (2014), leadership in

all three organizations agreed that threats were unpredictable, so one cannot be too cautious. As the Sheriff said, “Here's my thought on it. First of all, how do you know which school somebody's gonna do a shooting in? There's no way to predict that” (Sheriff’s Department Leader 2). This idea that safety concerns are urgent regardless of actual risk was clearly connected to the deep core belief that humans are flawed individuals since there is a looming threat of someone coming to a school to do harm. Along this same line of reasoning, SROs helped to keep schools safe by acting as a deterrent for those seeking to do harm in the school. The implication being that there are those who seek to disrupt the school will be dissuaded from doing so because of the presence of an SRO.

The advocacy coalition believed that law enforcement would be more effective than security guards, a view related to the HGHG orientation which sees government solutions as preferable to market solutions. The Fairfield County Schools superintendent commented,

> I am not a fan of not having non-law enforcement security officers in buildings that don't have law enforcement powers and/or skills…I think security guards are a way to provide evidence that you're making an attempt, but they don't have arrest powers. They don't have the training that law enforcement officers have. (Fairfield Leader 2)

SROs were seen as helping to keep students safe because of their arrest power and training.

Part of preferring rules and authority is to trust that those in power will do what is right. We saw that this meant the advocacy coalition agreed in the general *goodness* of law enforcement. Although it was predictable that those in the Sheriff’s Department would believe that law enforcement should be viewed as trustworthy and acting in the best interest of the community, we found school district officials agreed:

> I think that is desperately needed to understand that law enforcement are a positive in our

> society, that are needed in our society, and they're an important part of our society. …Because in America, you very well know that it's not hard to find a news story, in which law enforcement is seen in a bad light. Doesn't mean that the law enforcement in that particular area, in that particular situation doesn't need to be seen in a bad light, but it is not indicative of all law enforcement. (Fairfield Leader 1)

Despite evidence of SROs' potential negative effect on student outcomes (Kupchik, 2010; Nolan, 2011; Owens, 2017; Weisburst, 2019) and pervasive media attention on police misconduct, school district leadership agreed with the Sheriff's Department that law enforcement should be seen in a positive light and be trusted by their students. Prior research has identified similar scenarios, with school administrators' fear and perceived risk motivating the uptake of safety-related interventions without concerns about negative effects or supporting empirical evidence (Koon, 2020; Madfis, 2016; Nolan, 2015).

The roles of SROs were not seen as restricted to school safety with the SROs seen as positive role models for students, helping to shape the students' views of law enforcement. This is similar to the HGHG worldview belief that institutions, rules, and regulations can steer individuals onto the right path. Leadership across the three agencies agreed that SROs were placed in elementary schools to act as a sort of goodwill ambassador to students and their families on behalf of all of law enforcement. In the Washington City Schools, one of their leaders pointed out that SROs all have the secondary responsibility "to make connections with the kids" (Washington Leader 1). She saw one of the benefits of this relationship building was to encourage students to become informants to law enforcement in the future. An inherent aspect of this policy core belief is that SROs are good at building relationships with children, or, in other words, if children get to know SROs then they will see law enforcement as trustworthy.

These positive relationships were seen as a way to dispel negative views of law enforcement. As stated by a Fairfield County Schools leader, “They [students] could say ‘Well, I saw on the news that this officer did something really wrong, but I know officer so-and-so, and he or she is great to me and they give me high-fives and they protect me’” (Fairfield Leader 3). This perspective was confirmed by leadership in the Sheriff’s Department,

> Number one is safety and security of the children and the staff at the school. And then, number two, becoming involved with the children in the school and being a role model for them. And, just being there for them, getting to develop a relationship with the children, an official relationship with the children to nurture the respect for law enforcement and let them know that we're there for them when they need something, for them to come to us when they're in trouble. (Sheriff’s Department Leader 1).

The Sheriff also confirmed that the initial training for SROs going into elementary schools included the clear message that part of the SROs’ job was to build relationships with students.

Just as predicted by the ACF, these three agencies were bound together by a set of interrelated policy core beliefs. The leaders of these agencies agreed that SROs help to keep school safe through deterrence and law enforcement training. They also believed SROs should build relationships with students so that children learn to trust law enforcement and see law enforcement as a public good.

Secondary Beliefs

The connections between policy core beliefs and secondary beliefs are shown visually in Table 2, although there is likely more interconnection between policy core and secondary beliefs than is shown in the table. Many of the SROs’ duties were connected to the policy core beliefs that schools officials must keep children safe, one cannot be overly cautious, and SROs are a

deterrent to those seeking to do harm. Thus, schools needed a full-time SRO. Another shared secondary belief was that SROs' daily routine should include regular security duties like monitoring security cameras, perimeter checks, and supervising visitor sign in.

Law enforcement leadership stressed that SROs used their law enforcement training to keep schools safe. The advocacy coalition believed that SROs would bring their law enforcement training to help in somewhat nebulous ways like assisting in an emergency or assessing threats in the school. An important part of law enforcement training was an emphasis on being unpredictable, as a Washington City Schools leader noted when reflecting on whether SROs should have a schedule, "people that are out to do something bad are gonna pay attention to that" (Washington Leader 1). The SROs were expected to perform basic security functions but to not do so in a predictable manner that would compromise the safety of the school.

Since the advocacy coalition believed in the goodness of law enforcement and that SROs should act as positive role models while building relationships with students, they also agreed that SROs should interact with students on a daily basis. School district leaders talked about having SROs help with bus duty or carpool in the morning to greet students and help them in and out of their cars (particularly for very young students).

The Coupling of Streams: Sandy Hook as a Policy Window

The shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School occurred on Friday, December 14, 2012. By the end of the weekend, the Sheriff's Department and both school districts had agreements from the county board of supervisors to provide funding for the Sheriff's Department to hire an SRO for every school that did not already have one. Minutes from meetings of the county board and the two school boards from December through February confirmed that the funds were appropriated by the county board to both allow all elementary schools to have a Sheriff's deputy

as an SRO and for a Sheriff's deputy to replace any SRO in a secondary school that was employed by local police. These changes were approved unanimously. As recalled by a Fairfield County Schools leader,

> [The process to put SROs in elementary schools] started before [Sandy Hook] because we knew we had a need…to put them in …the elementary schools. However…the financing of that probably, honestly, would never had happened without Sandy Hook. I got the phone call on Saturday after Sandy Hook, from the superintendent, who said he wanted to put school resource officers in elementary schools and we talked about what a challenge it would be because of the cost, but that that was the right thing to do. We met on Sunday and had a conversation with the county mayor and told him we thought it was the right thing to do. He agreed at that time and in a very short period of time we had the county commission on board and spent the multimillion dollars it took to get those school resource officers. (Sheriff's Department Leader 2).

The shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary acted as a focusing event that clearly defined the problem stream, making it ready for coupling. The political stream was ready for coupling because of the development of an advocacy coalition that was able to mobilize the top leaders (i.e., the superintendents and Sheriff) from all three organizations as policy entrepreneurs. The advocacy coalition had coalesced around shared beliefs on SROs, making the policy stream ready for coupling. The decision to adopt SROs happened very quickly with the policy entrepreneurs coupling the three streams, convincing the county mayor and commission to appropriate funds to place SROs in all elementary schools. Considering the lack of clear differentiation between the participants in the policy stream and policy entrepreneurs, this is potentially an example of commissioning (Ackrill & Kay, 2011).

While MSF predicts that policy windows are only open for a short amount of time, making it important for policy entrepreneurs to act quickly, ACF also provides a key insight into the urgency displayed in this policy adoption process. One aspect of ACF that we have not explored is the concept of competing advocacy coalitions. Although we did not find evidence of a specific competing coalition as has existed elsewhere (Koon, 2020; Turner & Beneke, 2020), leadership in the school districts and the Sheriff were concerned about the adoption of a competing policy. The state had been considering arming teachers, and the advocacy coalition we focus on was vehemently opposed to arming teachers. Arming teachers could also be conceptualized as an alternative policy solution in the solution stream, although conversations about arming teachers were occurring at a different level of the policy stream. When asked if there was any pushback to SRO adoption in response to Sandy Hook, the superintendent of Fairfield County Schools responded, "No, honestly, with the exception of just a few citizens who were more concerned about the cost associated with providing an SRO …. They thought teachers should be armed and therefore making SROs a waste of taxpayer dollars" (Fairfield Leader 2). The Sheriff also commented that they wanted to act quickly to adopt SROs to dissuade the state legislature from seeing the need to arm teachers. The Fairfield County Schools superintendent was quoted in articles from two different local newspapers on how he was against arming teachers, and they did not have a need to arm teachers in his district because they had SROs in every school. Fairfield County Schools organized a statewide meeting following Sandy Hook to act as a model for other school districts who wanted to avoid arming teachers in favor of increased law enforcement presence. The shooting at Sandy Hook acted as a policy window that allowed the adoption of SROs in elementary schools, and this policy change was likely accelerated by another competing policy with the advocacy coalition seeking to translate their

beliefs into policy before those advocating for arming teachers could do so.

Implementation Activities in the Process and Program Streams

The set of beliefs that guided the adoption process of school and law enforcement leadership directly influenced how SROs were implemented in elementary schools. While SROs are the most obvious parts of the program stream, school administrators, teachers, and parents were also part of the program stream because they were directly involved with or adjacent to implementation activities. We use data collected from those involved in the program stream to define the process stream, connecting the activities in the process stream to the beliefs of the advocacy coalition.

Process/Program Streams and Policy Core Beliefs

SROs consistently told us that their most important activities focused on keeping the school building secure. As an SRO said, “Basically we’re there to keep the school safe and keep intruders out. But we are supposed to at least do rounds to check security” (SRO 131). A parent offered a similar perspective, stating “They are here, one for security. That is their main thing cause there have been too many incidences. I could probably name off four or five alone where they've had someone with a gun walk into a school over the last 10 to 15 years. The second reason he is here is to help the staff implement all of their security and safety protocol” (Parent Focus Group 122). In line with the belief that SROs bring their law enforcement training to the job, two specific features of being an SRO were noted as being particularly important for school safety. First, SROs help to keep schools safe because they are armed at all times. For instance, a school principal said, “And that involves greater weaponry, when a guy's coming in or someone that'll slow them down … So the fact that hired gun is here on campus for us, that is what has brought, in my opinion, a sense of security” (Principal 113). Unlike other armed security guards,

SROs have arrest power which was seen as an important aspect of keeping schools safe, "[SROs] are well-schooled, well-credentialed, well-trained, and they do that training on a more frequent basis and have law enforcement powers, which means they carry the weight of state law and can enforce that" (Fairfield Leader 3). SROs carrying weapons and having the ability to make arrests were important aspects of the process stream and part of carrying out the policy core belief that SROs keep schools safe through the law enforcement training.

The other noteworthy aspect of policy core beliefs was the focus on law enforcement as a good in society, and how SROs could reinforce this view by building positive relationships with young children. In the process stream, SROs commented on how being seen on a daily basis by students, specifically not engaging in activities that can be construed as police aggression, helped to reinforce a positive view of law enforcement, "I think building relationships with [students] just to let them know, 'Hey, we're not all out here shooting people like you see on the news and in the media. You know, we're here for you. And we're here to help. And, we're a good guy'" (SRO 137). A teacher stated "it just gives our students a positive role model for law enforcement" (Teacher Focus Group 122). Similarly, a parent noted "Part of what I like about having [the SRO] here is that my kids have a relationship with somebody that's in the police force. I like that they are getting acquainted with them at a personal level so that there's a respect and there's not as much fear" (Parent Focus Group 113). For SROs, they saw building relationships as also helping to reinforce the safety of the school building by encouraging students to come to them with issues,

> I try to really be that person in their corner. Because, unfortunately, not every kid has that. So I try to be their encouragement, their role model, someone that they can you know rely on to be in their life and be a positive influence, build that relationship so that when

> they're older, maybe they have that good foundation law enforcement is you know someone they run to, not from. (SRO 131)

In the field, building relationships was seen by SROs as part of helping to triage the public view of law enforcement while also cultivating students as future informants.

Process/Program Streams and Secondary Beliefs

Across elementary schools, we observed SROs were highly present and visible as would be predicted by the secondary beliefs of the advocacy coalition. Specifically, all schools had a full-time SRO that usually arrived before the students and stayed after the school day ended to be present during after school activities. SROs would often comment that they parked their cars right outside of the main office. For instance, as one SRO noted,

> I'm also a deterrent too because we've got our patrol cars out in the parking lot and then I walk around the school a lot during the day so I'm seen. I'm at assemblies; I'm at events. They know when they see my car here that there's a deputy here. (SRO 132)

SROs also maintained a consistent presence by having offices next to the main entrance to the building, when possible. However, SROs often commented on avoiding spending too much time in their office as it would lessen their visibility in the school and make them more predictable. As an SRO said, "I certainly don't sit in my office...maybe in there an hour total" (SRO 131). During our observations of SROs, we observed them walking the hallways, visiting classrooms and common spaces (cafeteria's, gymnasiums), and patrolling the perimeter of schools.

Just like we would predict based on the secondary beliefs of district and Sheriff's Department leadership on SROs providing basic security, SROs almost universally discussed monitoring cameras, doing perimeter checks of school building, and being especially cognizant of open, exterior classroom doors as part of their role in helping to keep school safe. Particularly

in elementary schools, the buildings tended to be designed such that most classrooms had an exterior door that opened directly to the outside. Making sure teachers kept these exterior doors shut was seen as one of the main jobs of SROs. During several observations of SROs, we observed a repetitive routine of checking that every exterior door was locked by physically trying to open each door.

Some SROs also took their charge to keep schools safe to mean additional duties. When we asked SROs if they were involved in school security planning, we received mixed responses. A school district leader commented that during his time as a principal, he made the SRO part of all security and emergency planning, but many SROs we interviewed said they are not involved in security planning. Another inconsistent SRO activity was educating teachers on how to keep the school safe. We heard from some teachers that their SRO would hold trainings for staff, "every once in a while ... [the SRO] would have, like an after-school, almost like a professional development, what to do in situations. ...If this really happened this is what you would be feeling, this is what would be happening, and this is what you need to do" (Teacher Focus Group 2, 132), but other SROs said they had never offered to train teachers on school safety. Although leadership had sent a clear message about certain responsibilities in keeping schools safe, SROs would sometimes take on additional duties that were not necessarily part of their intended role when SROs were adopted into elementary schools.

Forming relationships with students was the other major set of responsibilities SROs were given. SROs universally discussed being friendly with students with giving high fives and fist bumps as common ways of being approachable. They would wear their less-formal uniforms and try to smile at students in the hallways. One parent noted "It's good to have him as a role model. To see some of the kids who are in here seeing someone in that position, who's nice, but

also they know that he has a position of authority" (Parent Focus Group 114). Overall, we found how SROs actually built relationships varied based on whether the SRO prioritized being unpredictable. Many SROs noted regularly being present during lunch, on the playground, or during dismissal. SROs who did not engage in regular activities (i.e., to be unpredictable) often relied on being friendly in the hallway to build relationships.

Although all SROs were instructed by their supervisors to build relationships with students, we saw differences in how SROs would attempt to do so in schools. For instance, this SRO commented that he would show some vulnerability with students, "letting the kids see me like in gym class, maybe messing up because I'm terrible at basketball. You know like that it's okay. You know to mess up and keep going" (SRO 131). At the same time, another SRO didn't believe that this kind of behavior was appropriate for a member of law enforcement, "Just be present, be polite, be open to the kids. I mean don't be playful with the kids, because they'll get the wrong idea as to your responsibility as an SRO" (SRO 119). The members of the advocacy coalition believed that SROs would be good at building relationships with students (a policy core belief), but it is unclear if there was a complete understanding of the various levels of comfort among SROs in engaging in relationship building.

Finally, we noted two areas where the stated intent during the adoption process differed from implementation activities: school discipline and interactions with students with disabilities. First, school district and Sheriff's Department leadership did not see school discipline as part of keeping schools safe, at least not part of the SRO's role in keeping the schools safe. This message was clearly laid out in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the three agencies specifying that SROs were not to engage in school discipline. This logic is based on criminalization theories (e.g., Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006) that suggest a net-

widening effect in which police presence in schools increases legal interventions for behaviors that would not otherwise require them. Ethnographic research has found that SROs' involvement in discipline can lead to more severe exclusionary disciplinary for students (Kupchik, 2010). In contexts where SROs' actions are particularly controlling of student behaviors, their involvement in managing students' behavior can weaken students' relationships with their teachers (Devine, 1996) and lead to more problem behaviors as students resist the increased control exerted on them at school (Nolan, 2011). SRO programs across the country appear to be aware of this criticism, and thus typically require SROs to remain uninvolved in violations of school rules that are not law violations (Canady, 2018).

In practice, the lines between discipline enforcement, law enforcement, and safety were not as clearly drawn. This elementary school principal summarized much of this conflict here,

> Because from [the Sheriff's Department] viewpoint, they don't want the SRO to become the assistant principal, the disciplinarian of the school… but there are times where if I catch a kid stealing, or I catch a kid bullying or being extremely disrespectful to a teacher, I'll have the SRO come in and talk to them. I'll say, you know, "Officer [redacted], this is what this young man has done. Talk to him about what might happen to him if he continues to do this, if he continues down this road." (Principal 113)

Stealing, bullying, and teacher disrespect can all be construed as violating school rules, but the principal would often involve the SRO since these minor act of misbehavior could lead to more serious acts of lawbreaking. Many teachers expressed appreciating the SRO's assistance with student behavior as noted by one teacher, "if a student's behavior was such, you could have lunch with SRO or just go read with him for fifteen minutes or he would take them out on the track or something, just to get out some energy. ... We've done that before" (Teacher Focus Group 132).

While many SROs echoed that they took part in disciplinary actions, other SROs would refuse to take part in school discipline, even if their principal asked them to be involved, “I have to draw the line and tell them like, ‘I'm not getting involved in that, that's a school issue.’ Don't use me as the guy that, you know, as the intimidator or any of that kind of thing. That's not what we're here for” (SRO 116). These divisions reflected differences across schools, with disagreements among SROs and among school officials, as we also heard from principals who preferred the SRO was not involved in student discipline (see Curran et al., 2019, for more details).

Those in schools also had different interpretations from those at the school district level of whether SROs’ mandate to keep schools safe included monitoring or responding to the behaviors of students with disabilities (SWD). The potential source of this conflict was the Sheriff himself who noted that he was uncomfortable with the behavior of the SWD at the elementary school his relative worked at. Many SROs were managing the problematic behaviors of SWD on a daily basis and were asked to do so by school staff. For instance, one SRO interview was interrupted twice by a school administrator asking the SRO to intervene with problem behaviors of a SWD. SROs often commented on regularly being asked to observe when teachers restrained or secluded SWD. SROs were often asked to block exits when a SWD was attempting to flee. This behavior was framed as protecting SWD from themselves, protecting school staff from SWD, or maintaining overall safety. For instance, an assistant principal said,

> We have a behavior class. … for your more severe needs. And so you would see more extreme behaviors there. Outbursts, kids who might try to run. … just having an SRO, having a police officer just the presence of a police officer, makes a difference... Having someone there purposely to protect you just gives I think everyone a safer feel knowing you've got backup” (Assistant Principal 126).

We did not hear in our interviews with school district officials that their intent was for SROs to interact on a regular basis with SWD, and SROs were not trained to do so. However, SROs often did engage in these types of interactions, sometimes at the request of school officials/ teachers.

We found many instances where the beliefs that undergirded the adoption of SROs in elementary schools were reflected in the process stream. This was particularly true when those working in schools (SROs, school administrators, teachers) shared the policy core beliefs of the advocacy coalition, either because of the actions of the advocacy coalition or because the individuals independently shared these beliefs. For example, there was widespread agreement around policy core beliefs such as the need to keep students safe, the effectiveness of SROs at security and student relationships, and the general goodness of law enforcement. Yet, other aspects of the policy stream varied by context. Secondary beliefs which pertain to specific policy details are often influenced by the localized nature of problems and decisions about rule application (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible et al., 2009). A secondary belief such as SROs not being involved in discipline, while shared by district and law enforcement leadership, was easily altered in local contexts in which principals and teachers interpreted policy core beliefs around SROs' roles in safety, deterrence, and student mentoring as extending to discipline. Such variation is not unexpected, particularly since the advocacy coalition that drove the expansion of SROs (district and law enforcement leadership) by and large did not include the street-level bureaucrats tasked with implementation (SROs, school leaders, and teachers). As a result, schools varied in specific choices regarding SRO implementation, particularly when it came to student discipline and interactions with SWD.

Discussion

As SROs continue to expand into elementary schools, MSF and ACF provided

compelling explanations for why this occurred in this suburban county. ACF showed how adopting SROs in secondary schools allowed a coalition to form between the Sheriff's Department and the school districts in such a way that made expansion into elementary schools seem more feasible. This kind of logic could be occurring nationwide, as school districts with SROs in secondary schools consider adopting SROs in their elementary schools. From MSF, we understand that school shootings can be focusing events for policy entrepreneurs nationwide to couple the three streams. Insights from MSF and ACF can help us to understand the potential role of competing coalitions or competing policies within the policy stream to allow for the possibility that the school districts in this county were responding to calls to arm teachers by proposing an alternative solution: an increased presence of SROs. These frameworks allowed us to systematically analyze the policy process within this case study, providing key insights into both the agenda setting process and how that process informed implementation activities.

There is little empirical evidence that SROs make schools safer, particularly elementary schools which already tend to be extremely safe places. Consequently, SROs were primarily acting as a kind of goodwill ambassador for law enforcement. This is especially true since the most consistent secondary beliefs that filtered down into implementation were roles that could easily be filled by a security guard (parking a patrol car outside of the school, checking the perimeter of the building for open doors, maintaining visibility in the building and in the main office, and monitoring security cameras). While having security guards was a potential solution in the policy stream, we used ACF to understand why the shared beliefs of this coalition, mainly about the importance of law enforcement training, led to SROs being the preferred solution.

Considering compensation and other costs (office space, patrol car, supplies) that the public was financing, it was noteworthy that there was little consideration that SROs' adoption in

elementary schools was largely a public relations campaign for law enforcement. In fact, pro-law enforcement advocates had an outsized voice in these discussions, mirroring processes in other settings (Koon, 2020; Nolan, 2015; Turner & Baneke, 2020). There are real questions here about the costs and benefits of this funding for the general public as well as for the students (see Nance, 2016). School district leadership never questioned the narrative that there were only a few bad apples in law enforcement, and children should learn to trust law enforcement. These results echo similar findings from prior work on SRO adoption that was based on racial neoliberal principles (Koon, 2020; Nolan, 2015; Turner & Beneke, 2020). At the same time, this study challenges the view that only certain populations or areas of the country hold negative views of law enforcement. In many ways, those living in this county would be expected to unconditionally trust law enforcement already (predominately White with low crime rates). There were no high-profile incidents of police brutality in this area at the time. The fact that local law enforcement and school district officials even saw improving views on law enforcement as a particular need shows that negative views on law enforcement were pervasive.

Relatedly, likely one of the most disputed positions on the role of SROs in this case study was the extent to which they participated in school-based discipline. School-based discipline was never brought up during the agenda setting phase but was a notable aspect of implementation activities. As prior research has shown, SROs' involvement in school discipline can lead to harsher disciplinary outcomes (Kupchik, 2010), particularly Black students (Weisburst, 2019), and foster a sense of distrust and alienation (Devine, 1996; Nolan, 2011). However, in practice, it is difficult to discern if student misbehavior is breaking a school rule or the law. In speaking with SROs, we found that almost any act of misbehavior could be considered at least a misdemeanor: bullying is harassment, fighting is assault, and disrespect against a teacher is disorderly conduct.

One study found that the cases in which SROs became involved with student discipline primarily included cases of "disorderly conduct"—a highly subjective charge that likely would not have been made in the absence of police in the school (Nolan, 2011). As we describe in more detail elsewhere (Curran et al., 2019), in our study, some SROs would not get involved in these gray areas; they refused to take part in any conversations about student behavior. Other SROs regularly participated in school disciplinary proceedings usually under the guise of being a mentor or role model. These kinds of differences in role interpretation could have consequences in either direction with an SRO either ignoring warning signs of extreme student misbehavior or an SRO escalating minor misbehavior to a criminal charge. Prior research on SROs found it is more likely that SROs will exacerbate pervasive discipline disproportionality leading to more severe consequences for misbehavior of Black and Hispanic students (Homer & Fisher, 2020; Kupchik, 2010; Weisburst, 2019), making it even more important in more diverse school districts to have specific expectations for SROs' involvement in discipline.

SROs' interactions with SWD especially showed the lack of agreement on the bounds of the SROs' responsibility to keep a school safe. We have no reason to believe that SROs in this county had the training to successfully navigate stressful situations involving SWD. While police are generally not trained to interact differently with people based on their physical or intellectual capacity, SWD are a protected class in schools whose rights could be infringed upon rather easily, particularly in heated situations that are often caused by their disability.

Overall, we found that combining MSF and ACF helped to tease apart the various interactions, interpretations, and beliefs that led to the adoption of SROs in all elementary schools in this suburban county. We were then able to use recent additions to these frameworks to extend these logics into implementation activities through the process and program streams

(Howlett, 2019). We found that much of what informed the shared beliefs in the policy stream filtered down to the process and program streams through implementation activities. However, these frameworks likely do not fully account for how street-level actors will structure their activities when given broader leeway on their roles. SROs in this study understood the original intent that they would keep the school safe and interact with students, but their activities would sometimes take different forms than anticipated during the agenda setting process. School district leadership did not intend SROs to specifically interact with SWD and all three agencies prohibited involvement in student discipline (i.e., through the MOU). Future studies might also consider extending these frameworks into implementation activities to examine the extent to which agenda setting does or does not inform what occurs on the ground.

The results presented here should be interpreted within the context of this case. This suburban county was majority White with a minority of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. While this county was similar to many of those that experienced mass casualty school shootings (e.g., Columbine, Sandy Hook), the agenda setting and implementation activities in other areas might look very different. For instance, all of the members of the leadership teams at the school districts and Sheriff's Department were White, potentially making it more likely they would share similar ideologies that led these groups to form a coalition. While school districts in other contexts are adding SROs to elementary schools, there might be different rationales and processes undergirding this expansion than those presented in this case study.

Conclusion

As SROs expand into elementary schools nationwide, this case study provides some potentially useful insight into why SROs were the chosen solution in this county and the implications of this policy. Analyzing this case using MSF and ACF helped to elucidate these

relationships and implementation processes in a way that might be helpful in analyzing other cases of the adoption of SROs more broadly in schools.

Implications for Policy and Practice

While there are some aspects of this case study that are likely unique to this setting (e.g., the Sheriff having a relative working in a school), other aspects of this coalition are likely mirrored in other districts. For states and districts considering expansion of SROs, we suggest considering whether there is agreement on the general question of the goodness of law enforcement. School leaders, parents, students, and community members might have legitimate concerns about having a full time staff member in the school who is advocating this message to young children. The stance taken by the school districts in this case study ignored real concerns about the structures of law enforcement and its effect on vulnerable populations.

For leaders at the federal and state level, aspects of the adoption process in this case suggest the importance of careful consideration of the incentives provided to local actors. The original decision to put SROs in secondary schools in this county was at least in part a response to the availability of federal funds to support law enforcement expansion rather than a direct response to a perceived need for SROs. After the Parkland shooting, the federal government initiated funding streams that supported continued expansion of SROs. Our results suggest these incentives will likely have real impacts on the number of districts placing SROs in schools.

We found that SROs would often take latitude in interpreting their role when the beliefs of those who led the adoption of SROs were unclear about how SROs would meet those intended purposes. Specifically, if states and districts decide to expand SROs into elementary schools, we suggest they consider the role of SROs in school discipline and SROs' interactions with SWD. Given the relative rarity of school shootings, the day-to-day activities of SROs are likely to focus

more on the goal of building positive relationships with and improving views of law enforcement among students. As we have noted, there are both positive and negative consequences of such interactions and attempts at relationship building. Frequent interactions with students are likely to bring SROs into disciplinary situations and into situations where they interact with SWD, potentially inappropriately. In this county, the MOU stated, simply, that SROs were to not engage in student discipline. Agreements that define what discipline means, more clearly states when SROs can be involved (e.g., safety-related discipline like running in the hallway), and the limits of their involvement (e.g., verbal correction only) could help to clarify expectations for SROs' involvement in discipline. The interaction with SWD was somewhat unanticipated (i.e., not included in the MOU), so future MOUs and SRO trainings should consider the appropriate level of interaction between SROs and SWD. This suggestion is also shared by the National Association for SROs (NASRO) which recommends training on SWD for all SROs (NASRO, 2015). While mandates that SROs not be involved with discipline or interact with SWD might be attractive, they ignore the structural realities of having a full-time placement in a school. Policies/trainings would benefit from recognition that SROs are adults working in elementary schools and structuring SROs' roles based on those realities (e.g., what an SRO does when a student is running in the hallway).

Finally, we note the implications of our study for the adoption of alternative responses to school shootings. As our study demonstrates, the Sandy Hook shooting was the focusing event that provided a policy window to expand SROs to the elementary setting, but the policy stream was already focused on SROs and ready for coupling prior to this event. To the extent that the research evidence suggests that other approaches—such as greater resources for mental health services, counselors, and so forth—are more appropriate, our study suggests that advocates need

to actively work on building support for these responses prior to the occurrence of a policy window, such as a future shooting. In the absence of such ongoing work, the existing coalitions that support SRO expansion are likely to find success at times when leaders are looking for quick ways to demonstrate responsiveness to a perceived threat.

Implications for Future Research

While our study lays the groundwork for understanding the processes and beliefs that led to expansion of SROs, it also suggests a number of next steps for research. First, while the case study design employed here offers insight into the contributors to SRO expansion, there are certainly aspects of the findings that are specific to the context of this study. It is important that future research explores similar questions in different settings, particularly those that are less affluent and more racially diverse. Recent calls to abolish police have partially focused their efforts on SROs because of the potential disproportionate, negative impact of SROs on Black and Brown students (Balingit et al., 2020). This movement highlights the importance of more research on SROs in racially diverse settings. While the demographics of the county, overall, and school district leadership made it difficult to examine questions about how SROs interact with students of color, future work should examine the adoption and implementation of SROs in elementary schools with more diverse leadership and student bodies. These studies should attend to continued questioning about the motivation for why SROs are the solution, paying even more attention to how SROs are seen as interacting with students, as well as how SROs actually interact with students of different racial backgrounds.

Our study focused on a setting where SROs were adopted through a coalition of the willing—schools, law enforcement, and local government funders—who came together to support the expansion in response to Sandy Hook. With several states passing laws recently that

induce the expansion of SROs, a number of local districts will now be faced with expanding SROs perhaps in cases where school leaders and law enforcement leadership do not necessarily have established relationships or even share the belief that SROs are the proper solution. In many cases, the locales will also face challenges in finding funding given that the state mandates are generally underfunded. Future research could examine the adoption process and implementation of SROs where SROs have expanded through mechanisms outside of local control.

SROs will likely continue to be a presence in many of our nation's schools. Our research sheds light on the reasons why this is the case while also pointing to important considerations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers as the expansion of SROs continues.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on Elementary Schools in the Two School Districts

	Fairfield County Schools	Washington City Schools
Number of Schools	20 [a]	5 [a]
Enrollment	13,000 [b]	2,000 [b]
Percent Black	5% [a]	15% [a]
Percent Hispanic	5% [a]	25% [a]
Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch	10% [a]	40% [a]
Per-Pupil Expenditures	$9,000[b]	$14,000[b]

Note: Source: The state's Department of Education and Common Core of Data.

[a] Rounded to the nearest five.

[b] Rounded to the nearest thousand.

Table 2

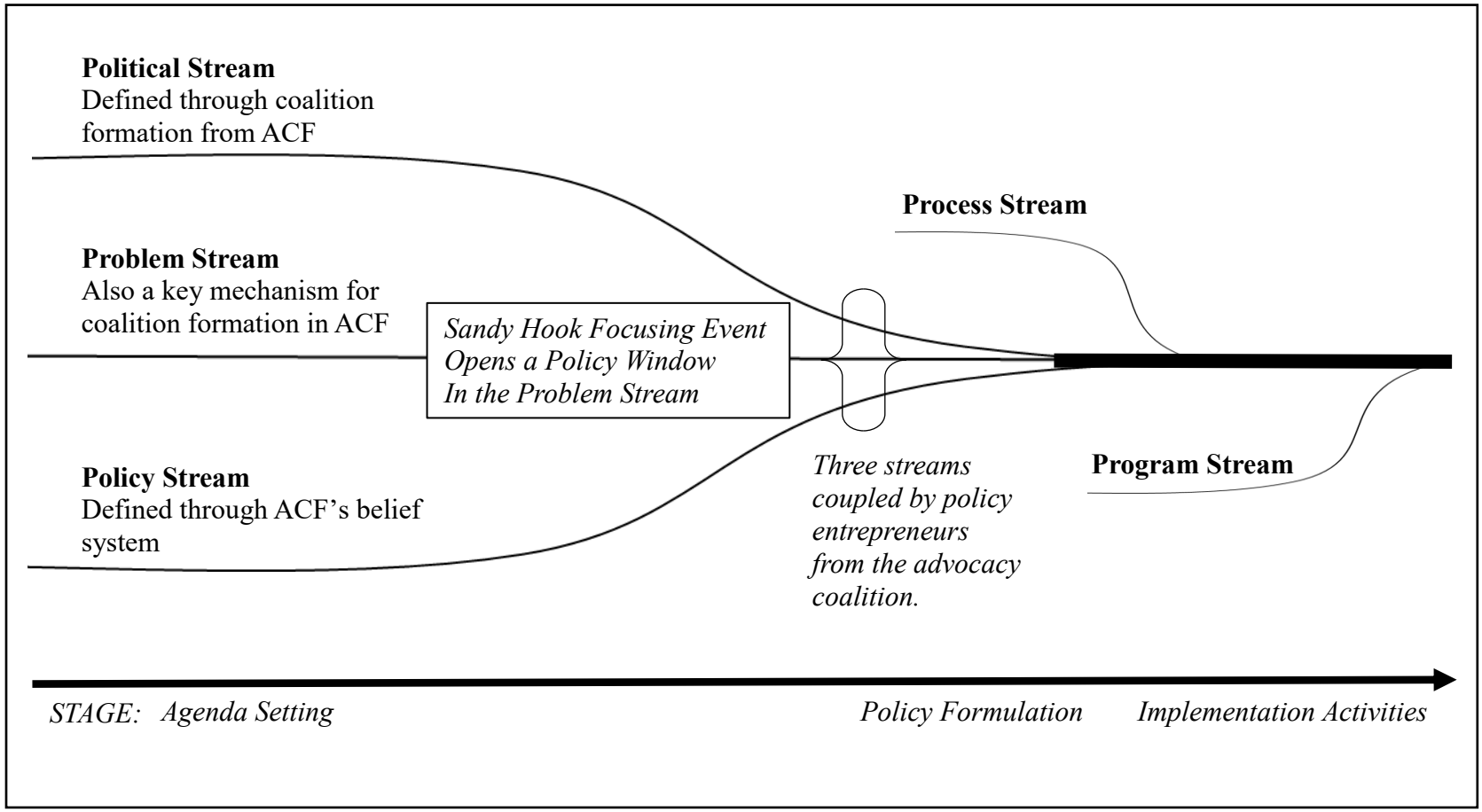
Belief System of the Advocacy Coalition

<table>
<tr><th>Deep Core Beliefs</th><th>Policy Core Beliefs</th><th>Secondary Beliefs</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Value hierarchical organizations.</td><td>School officials need to protect children in their schools.</td><td rowspan="2">SROs need to be in all schools at all times.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Safety is always an urgent matter, and one cannot be too cautious.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Human beings are flawed and unequal.</td><td>SROs provide basic security.</td></tr>
<tr><td>SROs are a deterrent.</td><td>SROs are present and visible.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Government solutions to problems instead of market solutions.</td><td rowspan="2">SROs’ law enforcement training and arrest powers make them more effective.</td><td>SROs keep schools safe using their discretion/training.</td></tr>
<tr><td>SROs are unpredictable.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Trust those in power to do what is right.</td><td>General “goodness” of law enforcement.</td><td rowspan="3">SROs effectively interact with students on a daily basis.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Institutions, rules, regulations encourage flawed individuals to be good.</td><td>SROs are positive role models</td></tr>
<tr><td>SROs are good at building relationships with students.</td></tr>
</table>

Note. The table neatly connects each category, but in reality there is clear overlap between the columns with connections between multiple beliefs in every category.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework: How the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) is combined with the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and Extended into Implementation Activities



ONLINE APPENDICES BEGIN HERE

Online Appendix A: Interview and Focus Group Protocol Questions

SRO Interview Questions

Introduction Questions

- Are you the only SRO that works in this school? How long have you been at this school? What did you do before? How long has the school had an SRO?
- What purpose do you serve in the school?

SROs' Roles and Activities

- What is a typical day in your shoes look like? In other words, can you walk me through a typical day from before school starts until the day ends?
- Can you describe how you interact with students on a daily basis?
    - Can you tell a story about a recent interaction between you and a student that was particularly meaningful to you?
    - What about how you interact with students who are having behavioral problems?
- Many schools have SROs that are involved in education—to what extent are you involved in education?
    - Probe: Impact of this on student behavior and sense of connectedness or belonging?
- Many schools have SROs that are involved in informal counseling of students—to what extent are you involved in informal counseling of students?
        - Probe: Impact of this on student behavior and sense of connectedness or belonging?
- Many schools have SROs that are involved in law enforcement—to what extent are you involved in law enforcement?
    - Probe: Impact of this on student behavior and sense of connectedness or belonging?
- Have you ever had to use force in your role as an SRO? Please explain.
        - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the decision to use force?
    - Have you ever had to arrest students? If so, why?
        - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the decision to arrest?
- Do you feel that you interact differently with different groups of students?
            - Probe: Boys/girls, grade levels, race?
- What is your perspective on what the ideal roles of an SRO should be in <DISTRICT>?
    - To what extent do does your role conform to these ideal roles?
    - How is the official job description of the SROs defined?
        - Who has access to that information?
        - How closely is that followed?

Impacts of SROs

- From your perspective, what impacts have you had on the school?
- What impacts have you had on the security strategies used by the school/district?
    - More security or making other structural changes to the school?
    - Changes to the code of conduct?
    - Have you influenced any changes in the responsibilities of other school personnel? For example, have you invited any teachers or staff to work with you on safety-related issues?
    - New emergency management plans?

People have suggested that there may be possible benefits and drawbacks about having SROs in schools. I would like your opinion on the benefits and drawbacks of having SROs across several different processes.

- What are the benefits and drawbacks about your presence in this school/district?
    - Probe on student behavior, feeling safe in school, teaching and learning, school discipline, sense of connectedness to school community, sense of freedom and autonomy.

Understanding the school context

- What is your school like? How do you describe the school?
- Do you believe your school is safe? Why or why not? Examples?
- What do you perceive as the biggest threats to school safety in this school in particular?
    - Any threats within the school?
    - Any threats from outside the school?
- How big of a priority is maintaining school safety?
- How do you work to maintain safety in the school/district?
- What are the biggest obstacles to maintaining a safe school environment?
- Are there unique aspects of being a suburban school district that affect your approach to school safety?

Now, I want to talk a bit about one tool that many schools utilize as part of their efforts for maintaining safe schools. Specifically, I would like to ask you a few questions about school discipline in your school.

- How do you take part in the school discipline system?
    - What sorts of behaviors do you deal with most frequently?
        - How do you address illegal behaviors in the school?
        - How do you address violations of school rules that are not illegal?
    - How is you involvement with school discipline documented, if at all?
- How would you describe the school's system of discipline?
- Probe for zero tolerance approaches, restorative approaches, and/or approaches that

address social/emotional skills.

- How does the system of school discipline relate to your efforts to maintain school safety?
- As you may know, inequitable school discipline by race has gathered a fair amount of attention in the media recently. How do you work to ensure school discipline is utilized in an equitable manner?
    - Do you feel that the district is successful in this regard? Why or why not?

SRO Adoption and Implementation (These should only be asked of SROs that have been in the district 5+ years)

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about why and how SROs have been implemented and used in the district.

- How many different people have filled the SRO position(s) in this school since they were created?
- Why were SROs placed in the district originally? [for folks who have been there a long time]
- What were the problems that led to expanding SROs into elementary schools?
    - What impact did Sandy Hook have?
    - Were there issues within <DISTRICT> specifically that led to this?

Closing Questions:

- What do you see as the overall strengths of this school with regard to safety, discipline, and SRO use?
- What would you most like to see done differently?

School Administrator Interview

Understanding the school context

- Do you believe your school is safe? Why or why not? Examples?
- What do you perceive as the biggest threats to school safety in this school in particular?
    - Probe: Any threats within/outside the school?
- What do you think school safety is important for? How big of a priority is maintaining school safety? How would you say it compares to your competing priorities (academic achievement, faculty management, and so forth)?
- How do you work to maintain safety in the school?
    - Are there particular policies the board has in place (zero tolerance policies, etcetera)? Particular safety initiatives or programs?
- What are the biggest obstacles to maintaining a safe school environment?
    - Implementation issues at the school level?
    - Parent pressure?
- Are there unique aspects of being a suburban school district that affect your approach to school safety?

Now, I want to talk a bit about one tool that many schools utilize as part of their efforts for maintaining safe schools. Specifically, I would like to ask you a few questions about school discipline in the district.

- Can you, from your perspective, talk a bit about your school's use of discipline?
- Probe for zero tolerance approaches, restorative approaches, and/or approaches that address social/emotional skills.
- What role does the school board have in setting disciplinary policy for district schools?
    - To what extent are school administration and teachers given discretion over discipline, and how is this discretion exercised?
    - To what extent does state or federal law influence district decisions over discipline?
- How does your system of school discipline relate to your efforts to maintain school safety?
    - Does discipline in your school serve purposes other than maintaining a safe environment? If so, what purposes and how?
- As you may know, inequitable school discipline by race has gathered a fair amount of attention in the media recently. How does your school work to ensure school discipline is utilized in an equitable manner?
    - Do you feel that your school is successful in this regard? Why or why not?

SRO Adoption and Implementation

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about why and how SROs have been implemented and used in the district.

- How many SROs are currently in your school?
- How long has the school had at least one SRO?
- How many different people have filled the SRO position(s) in this school since they were created?
- How long has the current SRO been in place?
- Why were SROs placed in the district originally? [for folks who have been there a long time]
- Why are SROs in your school?
- Were you a principal when SROs were expanded to all schools, in <YEAR>?
- If YES, proceed to following questions. If NO, move to SRO Role's and Activities section

    - What were the problems that led to expanding SROs?
    - What impact did Sandy Hook have?
    - Were there issues within <DISTRICT> specifically that led to this?
- Why were SROs the response to this problem rather than another strategy or approach?
    - Because they were already in other schools?
    - Were there certain people or groups who were pushing for SROs?
        - If so, what do you think their motivations were?
        - Who were the leaders in making it happen?
        - If not, to what extent was there a consensus that SROs should be expanded into elementary schools?
    - Were there other changes at the school or district level that occurred alongside the implementation of SROs?
- Can you describe the process by which these changes came about?
    - Probes:
    - Who initiated the idea of expanding SROs?
    - Who else was given the opportunity to voice their opinions on the matter?
    - Where did the funding for SROs come from?
    - Where did the SROs come from?
    - To what extent did existing research evidence inform the decision?
    - What other ideas were considered instead of or in addition to SROs?
    - During this initial implementation process, what were the perceived benefits of having SROs in all the schools?
    - How did this go from the idea stage to actually having SROs in schools?
- What was your initial response to finding out that SROs would be implemented districtwide?
    - Probes:
    - What were those first few months like?
    - How do you feel about the decision now?

<u>SROs' Roles and Activities</u>

- In what capacity do you interface with the SRO in the school?
    - Does the SRO meet with the principal on a regular basis?
        - What is discussed in those meetings?

    - Does the SRO contribute to making changes to school policies or discipline processes?
        - Please explain.
    - Does the SRO advise school leadership on school security or safety strategies?
        - In what ways?
- What is your perspective on what the ideal roles of an SRO should be in <DISTRICT>?
    - To what extent do the SROs in your school/district conform to these ideal roles?
    - How is the official job description of the SROs defined?
        - Who has access to that information?
        - How closely is that followed?
- Can you describe how the SRO interacts with students?
    - Can you tell a story about a recent interaction you saw between the SRO and students that was particularly meaningful to you?
    - Probe for SRO involvement in education, in informal counseling, and in law enforcement activities. Probe for impacts of these interactions on behavior and sense of belonging.

    - When do SROs rely on the use of force?
        - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the decision to use force?
    - When do SROs arrest students?
        - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the decision to arrest?
- How do SROs take part in the school discipline system?
    - What sorts of behaviors do SROs deal with most frequently?
        - How do SROs address illegal behaviors in the school?
        - How do SROs address violations of school rules that are not illegal?
    - How is their involvement with school discipline documented, if at all?
    - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the involvement of SROs in school discipline?
- Do SROs interact differently with different students?
    - Probe: boys and girls, students of different race, grade level

<u>Impacts of SROs</u>

- What impacts have SROs had on the security strategies used by the school/district?
    - Probes:
    - Did you start adding more security or making other structural changes to the school?
    - Did the code of conduct change?
    - Different responsibilities for other school personnel?
    - New emergency management plans?

People have suggested that there may be possible benefits and drawbacks about having SROs in

schools. I would like your opinion on the benefits and drawbacks of having SROs across several different processes.

- What are the benefits and drawbacks for you personally about having an SRO in this school/district?
    - Probe on student behavior, feeling safe in school, teaching and learning, school discipline, sense of connectedness to school community, sense of freedom and autonomy.
- Are you aware of the presence of any weapons in the school?
    - Probe: What about the SRO?
    - Probe: To what extent does the presence of the loaded weapon that SROs carry make you feel more or less safe in school?

- What do you see as the overall strengths of your school with regard to safety, discipline, and SRO use?
- What would you most like to see done differently?

Teacher Focus Groups

Understanding the school context

- Do you believe your school is safe? Why or why not? Examples?
- What do you perceive as the biggest threats to school safety in this school in particular?
    - Probe: Any threats within the school?
    - Probe: Any threats from outside the school?
- How big of a priority is maintaining school safety? What do you think school safety is important for?
- How do you work to maintain safety in the school?
- What are the biggest obstacles to maintaining a safe school environment?
- Are there unique aspects of being a suburban school district that affect your approach to school safety?

Now, I want to talk a bit about one tool that many schools utilize as part of their efforts for maintaining safe schools. Specifically, I would like to ask you a few questions about school discipline in the county.

- Can you, from your perspective, talk a bit about your school's use of discipline?
    - Probe for zero tolerance approaches, restorative approaches, and/or approaches that address social/emotional skills.

- What role do you have in setting disciplinary policy for your school?
    - To what extent are you given discretion over discipline, and how is this discretion exercised?
    - To what extent does the principal, school board, state or federal law influence decisions over discipline?
- How does your system of school discipline relate to your efforts to maintain school safety?
    - Does discipline in your school serve purposes other than maintaining a safe environment? If so, what purposes and how?
- As you may know, inequitable school discipline by race has gathered a fair amount of attention in the media recently. How do you work to ensure school discipline is utilized in an equitable manner?
    - Do you feel that your school is successful in this regard? Why or why not?

SRO Adoption and Implementation

Another strategy around school safety that <DISTRICT> uses is having school resource officers, or SROs, in the schools. Next, I would like to ask you some questions about why and how SROs have been implemented and used in the district.

- What is your impression of why the school district decided to have SROs in

your school?
- What are your thoughts about having an SRO here?

SROs' Roles and Activities

- In what capacity do you interface with the SRO in the school?
- Can you describe how the SRO interacts with students?
    - Can you tell a story about a recent interaction you saw between the SRO and students that was particularly meaningful to you?
    - Probe for SRO involvement in education, in informal counseling, and in law enforcement activities. Probe for impacts of these interactions on behavior and sense of belonging.
    - When do SROs rely on the use of force?
        - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the decision to use force?
    - When do SROs arrest students?
        - What role do teachers or school administrators play in the decision to arrest?
- How do SROs take part in the school discipline system?
    - What sorts of behaviors do SROs deal with most frequently?
        - How do SROs address illegal behaviors in the school?
        - How do SROs address violations of school rules that are not illegal?
    - What role do teachers play in the involvement of SROs in school discipline?
- Do SROs interact differently with different students?
    - Probe: boys and girls, students of different race, grade level
- What is your perspective on what the ideal roles of an SRO should be in <DISTRICT>?
    - To what extent do the SROs in your school/district conform to these ideal roles?

Impacts of SROs

People have suggested that there may be possible benefits and drawbacks about having SROs in schools. I would like your opinion on the benefits and drawbacks of having SROs across several different processes.

- What are the benefits and drawbacks for you personally about having an SRO in this school/district?
    - Probe on student behavior, feeling safe in school, teaching and learning, school discipline, sense of connectedness to school community, sense of freedom and autonomy.
- Are you aware of the presence of any weapons in the school?
    - What about the SRO?
    - To what extent does the presence of the loaded weapon that SROs carry make you feel more or less safe in school?

- What do you see as the overall strengths of your child's school with regard to safety, discipline, and SRO use?
- What would you most like to see done differently?

Parent Focus Group

Understanding the school context

- Do you believe your school is safe? Why or why not? Examples?
- What do you perceive as the biggest threats to school safety in this school in particular?
    - Probe: Any threats within the school?
    - Probe: Any threats from outside the school?
- How big of a priority is maintaining school safety? What do you think school safety is important for?
- Are there unique aspects of being a suburban school district that affect your feelings about school safety?

Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about school discipline in the school.

- Can you, from your perspective, talk a bit about your child's school's use of discipline?
    - Probe for zero tolerance approaches, restorative approaches, and/or approaches that address social/emotional skills.
- What role do you have as a parent in influencing school discipline policy?
- How does the school's discipline system relate to efforts to maintain school safety?
    - Does discipline in your child's school serve purposes other than maintaining a safe environment? If so, what purposes and how?
- As you may know, inequitable school discipline by race has gathered a fair amount of attention in the media recently. In your view, does the school work to ensure school discipline is utilized in an equitable manner?
    - Do you feel that your school is successful in this regard? Why or why not?

SRO Adoption and Implementation

Another strategy around school safety that <DISTRICT> uses is having school resource officers, or SROs, in the schools. Next, I would like to ask you some questions about why and how SROs have been implemented and used in the district.

- Do you know that there is an SRO in your child's school?
- What is your impression of why the school district decided to have SROs in your child's school?
- What are your thoughts about having an SRO there?

SROs' Roles and Activities

- In what capacity do you interface with the SRO in the school?
- Can you describe how the SRO interacts with students?
    - Can you tell a story about a recent interaction you know about between the SRO and students that was particularly meaningful?
    - Probe for SRO involvement in education, in informal counseling, and in law enforcement activities. Probe for impacts of these interactions on behavior and

sense of belonging.

- What is your understanding of how SROs take part in the school discipline system?
- Do SROs interact differently with different students?
    - Probe: boys and girls, students of different race, grade level
- What is your perspective on what the ideal roles of an SRO should be in <COUNTY>?
    - To what extent do the SROs in your child's school conform to these ideal roles?

Impacts of SROs

People have suggested that there may be possible benefits and drawbacks about having SROs in schools. I would like your opinion on the benefits and drawbacks of having SROs across several different processes.

- What are the benefits and drawbacks of having an SRO in this school/district?
    - Probe on student behavior, feeling safe in school, teaching and learning, school discipline, sense of connectedness to school community, sense of freedom and autonomy.
- Are you aware of the presence of any weapons in the school?
    - What about the SRO?
    - To what extent does the presence of the loaded weapon that SROs carry make affect your feelings of the safety of the school?

- What do you see as the overall strengths of your child's school with regard to safety, discipline, and SRO use?
- What would you most like to see done differently?

Sheriff's Department Interviews

Understanding the school context

- Do you believe schools in <DISTRICT> are safe? Why or why not? Examples?
- What do you perceive as the biggest threats to school safety in the schools your officers work in?
    - Probes:
    - Any threats within the school?
    - Any threats from outside the school?
- How big of a priority is maintaining school safety? What do you think school safety is important for?
- How do you work to maintain safety in the districts?
- What are the biggest obstacles to maintaining a safe school environment?
- Are there unique aspects of being in a suburban setting that affect your approach to school safety?

SRO Adoption and Implementation

Next I would like to ask you some questions about why and how SROs have been implemented and used in the districts.

- Does your relationship differ with between the two districts? How so?
- Why were SROs placed in the districts originally? [for folks who have been there a long time]

- What were the problems that led to expanding SROs in this county?
    - Probes:
    - What impact did Sandy Hook have?
    - Were there issues within the county specifically that led to this?
- Why were SROs the response to this problem rather than another strategy or approach?
    - Because they were already in other schools?
- Were there certain people or groups who were pushing for SROs?
    - Probes:
    - If so, what do you think their motivations were?
    - Who were the leaders in making it happen?
    - If not, to what extent was there a consensus that SROs should be expanded into elementary schools?
- Can you describe the process by which these changes came about?
    - Probes:
    - Who initiated the idea of expanding SROs?
    - Who else was given the opportunity to voice their opinions on the matter?
    - Where did the funding for SROs come from?
    - Where did the SROs come from?
    - To what extent did existing research evidence inform the decision?
    - What other ideas were considered instead of or in addition to SROs?
    - During this initial implementation process, what were the perceived benefits of having SROs in all the schools?
    - How did this go from the idea stage to actually having SROs in schools?
- What was your initial response to finding out that SROs would be implemented districtwide?
    - Probes:
    - What were those first few months like?
    - How do you feel about the decision now?

SROs' Roles and Activities

- In what capacity do you interface with the SROs in the district?
- What is your perspective on what the ideal roles of an SRO should be in this district?
    - To what extent do the SROs in your school/district conform to these ideal roles?
    - How is the official job description of the SROs defined?
        - Who has access to that information?
- How closely is that followed? How do SROs take part in school discipline practices?
- What are the regulations on when an SRO could use force or arrest a student?

Impacts of SROs

- What impacts have SROs had on the security strategies used by the school/district?
    - Probes:
    - Did you start adding more security or making other structural changes to the school?
    - Did the code of conduct change?
    - Different responsibilities for other school personnel?
    - New emergency management plans?

People have suggested that there may be possible benefits and drawbacks about having SROs in schools. I would like your opinion on the benefits and drawbacks of having SROs across several different processes.

- What are the benefits and drawbacks for you personally about having an SRO in these school districts?
    - Probe on student behavior, feeling safe in school, teaching and learning, school discipline, sense of connectedness to school community, sense of freedom and autonomy.

- What do you see as the overall strengths of the district schools with regard to safety, discipline, and SRO use?
- What would you most like to see done differently?

Online Appendix B. Supporting Quotes Matched with the Findings in Table 2

Deep Core Beliefs	Policy Core Beliefs	Secondary Beliefs
Value hierarchical organizations. Interviewer: "You appointed the sergeants over the SROs as well, so you're a supervisor in the supervisory chain of command?" Sheriff's Department Leader 1: "Yes. My supervisor is the chief deputy and then the Sheriff. Then, for me it goes to my lieutenant, and then down to my sergeants, and then the SROs." Interviewer: "Do you ever communicate with the Sheriff's Department about those kinds of concerns?" Fairfield Leader 1: "I don't think it's warranted from a chain of command perspective for me to actually delve into that conversation."	**School officials need to protect children in their schools.** "It's Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It's the first thing you've got to do is provide a safe and secure environment" (Principal 113)	**SROs need to be in all schools at all times.** "I think that schools work to provide as safe of an environment as they can, however, tragedy can happen at any time. … I think that at any given day no matter how, um, secure a facility is whether it's a school or otherwise, that if somebody wants to commit a felony and they have the means to do it and the will do it, they're going to do it. Now, does that mean you shouldn't lock your doors and- and all those kinds of things? No. But I ... but I think that we have to be proactive ... as proactive as we can knowing that the potential for a threat is always there." (Fairfield Leader 1)
Human beings are flawed and unequal. "Because of their background [referring to low income and racial minority students], they're gonna look away. But if my daughter did the exact same thing, they would not look away. Does that make sense?" (Parent Focus Group 114)	**Safety is always an urgent matter, and one cannot be too cautious.** "he's here just in case you know? For all those just in case situation that have not happened" (Principal 122) "folks from the department of ed and homeland security and several people came to the district and we ended up convincing both the school board and	**SROs provide basic security.** "My big thing for them is they're here for the safety of the kids. ... my biggest thing loving them here is that extra level of safety and security if something happened. If someone came in off the street who wasn't supposed to be here, they're that first line besides the teachers"

Deep Core Beliefs	Policy Core Beliefs	Secondary Beliefs
"I think there are a lot of reasons why there's less discipline here. It could be socio-economic. It could be perceptions of teachers. It could be that the kids know how to act during school and they're misbehavior is at the movie theater. There are a lot of things wrapped up in it, but I would reiterate, yes, I agree with you. I think the setting, I think the high affluence, I think that the highly involved parents, by and large, the lack of diversity, all those things we can't ignore and say that all that's part of why we ... from a student's discipline standpoint, don't have a lot in place" (Fairfield Leader 1)	the county funding body and the general public that we couldn't afford to take the risk of not having SROs" (Fairfield Leader 2) **SROs are a deterrent.** "it's a deterrent. It is a visual deterrent to know there is an armed SRO officer protecting these children during the day" (Fairfield Leader 4) "they're a deterrent for someone sees it. Like she said, the police car, I love it's out front. To me, even if it's just parked there, you even see that out in the community. Police will park a car at a high speed zone with no one in it, cause people see the car and they slow down." (Parent Focus Group 132)	(Parent Focus Group 132) **SROs are present and visible.** "he even comes by and checks even that the theater door is locked, which of course I would try to keep that locked, he comes through so it's great. His presence is very visible" (Teacher Focus Group 115) "walking around often during the day, checking the doors, just making themselves visible" (Teacher Focus Group 126)
Government solutions to problems instead of market solutions. "On that morning when they called [after Sandy Hook] and said, "What are we doing about security," what they meant was, "Are you going to have a gun on premises in the hands of a good guy?" (Principal 113) "I mean, we are the government. We represent the government." (SRO 116)	**SROs' law enforcement training and arrest powers make them more effective.** "And the law enforcement is a professional; just like doctors and lawyers and everyone else in between, and educators. They're a professional. They are well-schooled, well-credentialed, well-trained, and they do that training on a more frequent basis, and they have law enforcement powers, which means they carry the	**SROs keep schools safe using their discretion/training.** "The benefits are this. You have somebody who's trained in law enforcement… when those sticky legal type situations, those law enforcement situations, my SROs were essentially a part of my admin team. And so when we were planning for pep rallies, they were in the discussion. When we were planning for homecoming parade, they were in the discussion. When we were

Deep Core Beliefs	Policy Core Beliefs	Secondary Beliefs
	weight of state law and can enforce that. They have many, many, many more capabilities than just an armed security guard, who has no arrest powers, no investigatory abilities" (Fairfield Leader 3)	obviously doing the safety plan, they're in the discussion… They can give the wisdom of a law enforcement perspective on those things where we may want to file a petition on a kid and they're like, 'Mm. It's not going to fly. You're going to have to talk to the Magistrate.' So they provide wisdom that maybe we don't have. Another strength is that they see things that I'm not trained to see. They can alert me to a potential situation and they also hear things out in the community or from student relationships that I may not hear." (Fairfield Leader 1)
		SROs are unpredictable. "For our SRO officers it's important that it's not a regimented this is when this happens this is when that happens because it's important an SRO to be unpredictable" (Principal 114)
Trust those in power to do what is right. "From the top down, we are just so lucky with the quality of people. … That's why I trust them so much that they're making the right decision. I can't picture [a member of the city board of education] or anyone on the board hiring people that aren't capable of doing why we have them." (Parent	**General "goodness" of law enforcement.** "in today's political environment, especially for minority students, it is super important to have a friendly SRO so that they start interacting with law enforcement in a positive way from the very early point. I think in the long run, that is a better investment than all of these safety protocols"	**SROs effectively interact with students on a daily basis.** "some of these kids don't have perfect home lives and some of these kids do have parents that are in jail, you know just seeing the positive side that the SROs can have the influence on a school. They can transfer that to home. And I've always been in schools where they had a good relationship, the kids have loved it,

Deep Core Beliefs	Policy Core Beliefs	Secondary Beliefs
Focus Group 132)	(Parent Focus Group 122)	the I feel like [the SROs] make a difference" (Teacher Focus Group 133)
Institutions, rules, regulations encourage flawed individuals to be good. "How people and kids make bad decisions, and so if we don't lock the locker room, we give a kid unfettered access to a room where there's no supervision … we have a responsibility to monitor because I believe it may minimize, I don't know that it can prevent bad things. I don't think we can ever, that's what I was trying to say from the outset, prevent bad things." (Fairfield Leader 1)	**SROs are positive role models** "it just gives our students a positive role model for law enforcement" (Teacher Focus Group 122) "It's good to have him as a role model for ... To see some of the kids who are in here seeing someone in that position, who's nice, but also they know that he has a position of authority" (Parent Focus Group 114)	
	SROs are good at building relationships with students. "law enforcement officers in our building, not only do they provide safety and security, but they also function as in building relationships between law enforcement and students and school officials" (Fairfield Leader 2) "Which I think too, part of what I like about having her here is that my kids have a relationship with somebody that's in the police force. I like that they are getting acquainted with them at a personal level so that they so that	

Deep Core Beliefs	Policy Core Beliefs	Secondary Beliefs
	there's a respect and there's not as much fear." (Parent Focus Group 113)	

Note. The relevant finding in each cell that is from Table 2 in the manuscript is bolded.