

# Policies Outlining the Role of Sworn Law Enforcement Officers in Public Schools

**DATA POINT**  
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The data in this report are from the 2017-18 administration of the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS). SSOCS is a nationally representative sample survey of public elementary and secondary schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey asks principals about the prevalence of crime and violence in their schools as well as the practices and programs their schools have in place to promote school safety.

During school year 2017-18, some 51 percent of U.S. public schools had a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week.<sup>1,2</sup> Some of these schools or their districts may have a formalized policy or written document, such as a Memorandum of Understanding, in place to outline the role and responsibilities of sworn law enforcement officers while at school. This report examines how prevalent these policies are and what topics the policies cover. It also examines whether these policies are aligned with the activities that officers

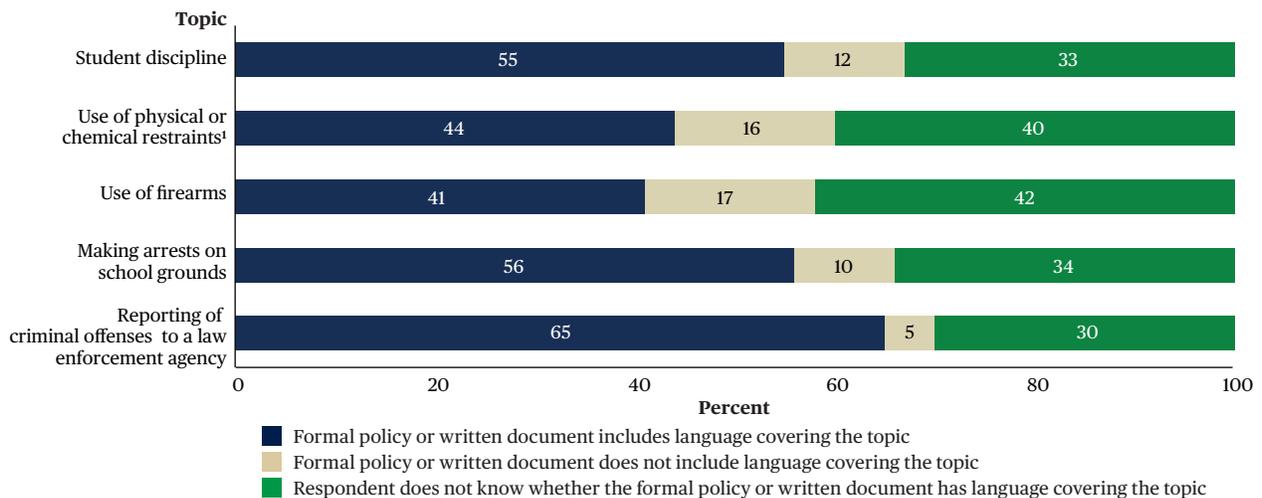
participate in while at school, focusing on the topic of officers' responsibilities related to student discipline.

During the 2017-18 school year, among schools that had a sworn law enforcement officer present at least once a week, about two-thirds of those schools (64 percent, or 33 percent of all schools) had a policy outlining the officers' role and responsibilities (data not shown in figure).

## Which topics are covered by policies regarding sworn law enforcement officers in schools?

Principals in schools with both an officer present and a policy were asked to report, to the best of their knowledge, whether their school's policy included language covering various topics related to officers' roles and responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> In school year 2017-18, the most commonly covered topic was the reporting of criminal offenses to law enforcement agencies, with 65 percent of schools reporting that this topic was covered (**FIGURE 1**).

**FIGURE 1. Among U.S. public schools with a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week and whose roles and responsibilities are outlined in a formalized policy or written document, percentage distribution of schools by whether the policy or document includes language on certain topics: School year 2017-18**



<sup>1</sup> Examples of physical and chemical restraints provided to respondents were handcuffs, Tasers, Mace, and pepper spray.  
NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about school crime and policies to provide a safe environment.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2017-18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018.

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In schools with both an officer present and a policy in place, many principals reported being unsure whether the policy covered various topics. For example, 42 percent of schools with a policy reported being unsure whether the policy included language about officers' use of firearms.

### In schools that report whether sworn law enforcement officers participate in specific activities, how often do these schools have policies that cover the role of officers in these types of activities?

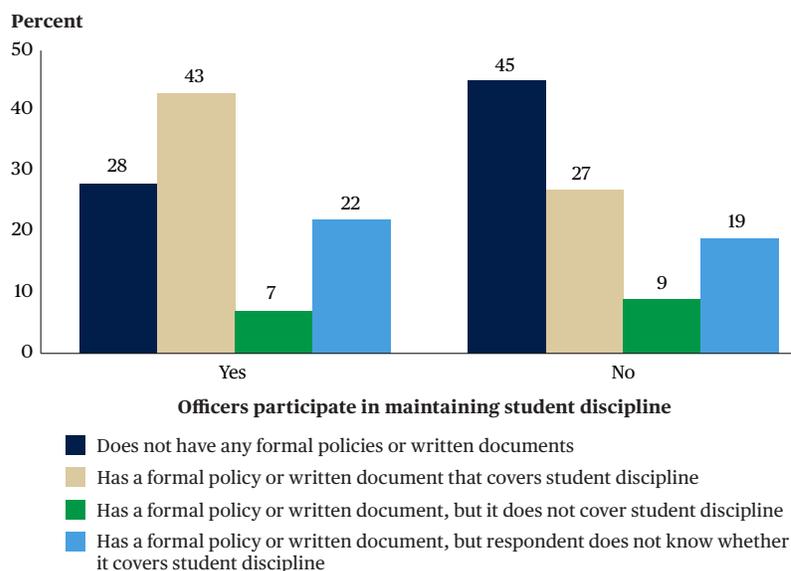
Principals were asked about specific activities sworn law enforcement officers participate in at their school, such as controlling motor vehicle traffic or maintaining student discipline.

Since principals also reported if student discipline was a topic covered in formalized policies or written documents, this report investigates this topic further to see whether schools have officers who participate in this activity and whether those schools have policies that cover the role of officers related to student discipline.

Among schools with a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week in school year 2017-18, some 51 percent had officers who participated in maintaining student discipline (data not shown in figure).

However, fewer than half of these schools (43 percent) reported they knew their school or district had a formal policy that included language defining the role of officers related to student discipline (**FIGURE 2**).

**FIGURE 2. Among U.S. public schools with a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week, percentage distribution of schools by whether the officer actually participates in maintaining student discipline and whether the school (or school district) has a formalized policy or written document that includes language defining the officer's role in maintaining student discipline: School year 2017-18**



NOTE: Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about school crime and policies to provide a safe environment.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2017-18 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2018.

Among schools with an officer present who participated in maintaining student discipline, about 28 percent knew there was not a formalized policy or written document outlining officers' roles at school.

Among schools with an officer present who did not participate in maintaining student discipline, 27 percent knew there was a formalized policy or written document that included language regarding student discipline, while 19 percent were unsure if discipline was covered in their school's policy.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Sworn law enforcement officers" include School Resource Officers and other sworn law enforcement officers who are not School Resource Officers.

<sup>2</sup> "At school" was defined for respondents to include activities happening in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities

<sup>3</sup> The survey elements discussed in the text of this report are limited to the topic that the highest percentage of principals reported was covered in policies and the topic with the highest percentage of principals reporting they were unsure whether it was covered in policies.