



SSWAA TALKING POINTS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR MACRO ADVOCACY PRACTICE School Social Workers' Role in Addressing Students' Mental Health Needs, Increasing Academic Achievement and School Violence Prevention

Create folders and share any of the following SSWAA documents to support your talking points

- [SSWAA National Model Graphic](#)
- [Clinical School Social Work: Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Students](#)
- [Advocating for the Use of the Title: "School Social Worker"](#)
- [School Safety: The School Social Work Role in Violence Prevention](#)
- [School Social Workers' Role in Addressing Students' Mental Health Needs and Increasing Academic Achievement](#)
- [School-Based Mental Health Providers](#)

The Value of Positive Mental Health

- Mental health is an essential component of a child or adolescent's healthy development. Mental health affects how we think, feel and act.
- A child or adolescent's mental health is critical for the development of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness that supports learning and academic success.

Who Are School Social Workers - Professional Standards and Training

- School social work is a specialized area of practice within the broad field of the social work profession with a rich history of serving children and families dating back to the early 1900's,
- Although there are many adults in a school who provide mental health support to students, ***school social workers are highly qualified mental health professionals who offer comprehensive approaches that specifically address the emotional, social and academic needs of students.***
- According to **School Social Work Association of America's National Practice Model**, all school social workers are expected to possess advanced knowledge and technical skills in the following 3 areas (SSWAA 2013):
 - (1) provision of evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services;
 - (2) promote a positive school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence and
 - (3) ability to maximize access to school-based and community-based resources
- School social workers' hold a Master's degree in social work from an accredited institution which encompasses specialized preparation and training in cultural diversity,

systems theory, social justice, risk assessment and intervention, consultation and collaboration, and clinical intervention strategies to address the mental health needs of students.

- The roles and responsibilities of school social workers may vary based on the needs of the students, the school and community.
- School social workers support teachers, administrators, parents, and other educators by providing coordinated interventions and consultation designed to keep students in school and help families access the supports needed to promote student success.
- Depending on one's job description and qualifications, many school social workers may also provide clinical services but all school social workers are trained to provide emotional support and resources directly to students and families especially in times of crises.
- School social workers often focus on providing supports to vulnerable populations of students at high risk for truancy and dropping out of school, such as homeless, foster, and migrant children, students transitioning between school and treatment programs or the juvenile justice system, and students experiencing domestic violence.
- School social workers' knowledge of and ability to navigate community resources make them the vital link between the school, home and community.

School Crisis Prevention and Intervention

- As we reflect on 2018, tragedies at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School February 14, 2018 and the school shooting at Great Mills High School in Maryland March 20, 2018; Noblesville Middle School in Indiana, Santa Fe High School in Houston, TX, etc. our nation has continued to be engaged in essential dialogue and advocacy related to school safety and violence prevention.
- Safety is a top concern for our communities and those of us who work within a school setting.
- Violence, injury and unaddressed student mental health concerns can create climates within the school setting that inhibit learning while adversely affecting the wellbeing of students and school personnel across the United States (Astor, Benbenishty, & Marachi, 2010).
- We are faced with a public health crisis which requires a balanced and comprehensive integrated approach with a focus on the physical and mental wellbeing of **ALL** individuals connected to the school community including students, families, school personnel and community members.
- Schools have valuable resources to assist in the recovery and healing efforts needed after a crisis. School social workers are uniquely positioned to assist all members of the

educational community when a crisis occurs with their crisis management expertise, clinical proficiency and leadership skills (NASW, 2013).

- Depending on licensing requirements in the state in which they operate, school social workers are able to arrange for or provide suicide screenings and/or risk assessments, as well as follow-up services, to promote students' social and emotional safety and overall wellness.

Prevalence of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Needs

- Students' unmet mental health needs can be a significant barrier to student academic and personal-social development and even compromise school safety.
- **One in 10 youth has serious mental health problems** that are severe enough to impair how they function at home, in school, or in the community (Stagman & Cooper, 2010).
- **The onset of major mental illness may occur as early as 7 to 11 years old.** (Stagman & Cooper, 2010).
- **Suicide is the second leading cause of death for children, adolescents, and young adults age 5 to 24 year-olds.** (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2017).
- **One out of four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event** such as physical/sexual abuse, domestic violence, bullying, community violence, death, illness, homelessness, natural disaster, etc. (National Child Trauma and Stress Network, 2008).
- **Poverty is a major contributing factor to children and youth's mental health problems**, and it has direct and indirect effects on the development and maintenance of emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric problems. (American Institutes for Research, 2017).
- Exposure to traumatic events especially during a child's early years can adversely ***affect a child's sense of security, attention span, memory and ability to process information resulting in a lower GPA, inconsistent school attendance, more suspensions/expulsions as well as a decreased ability to read and can lead to poor outcomes later in adulthood*** (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008).

Growing Need and Value of School Social Workers

- The foundation of a school-based system for supporting the emotional, physical and academic needs of all students is an interdisciplinary team approach comprised of a variety of specialized instructional support personnel with different backgrounds, perspectives, training and skill sets.

- Utilizing an interdisciplinary team approach of school based mental health providers including **school social workers**, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and other specialized instructional support personnel enhances students' positive mental health, healthy social development and academic achievement. (Gearity, 2014; SSWAA, 2013)^{[1][SEPP]}
- Often viewed as the hidden helpers, school social workers are ***trained mental health professionals who are prepared to recognize and respond to student mental health crises and needs as well as provide support to administration and staff when school crises occur.***
- School social workers not only provide direct services to students and families in the form of individual or group therapeutic support but also serve as a resource to administrators and other educators, providing consultation and training on identifying students with mental health needs and a referral process when services are sought.
- In times of crises, school social workers are uniquely positioned to assist in crisis management and postvention, helping students, families and staff process their pain and fears.
- Our expertise in navigating resources and collaborating with community mental health providers is pivotal in the recovery process. As mental health professionals, we understand learning cannot occur when students, families, staff and administration are profoundly impacted by a crisis or unmet mental health needs.

School Social Workers are Leaders in Creating Trauma Informed Schools

- Many states are calling for additional school social workers as part of the national school safety discussion recognizing that **"school social workers can assist their school communities in developing trauma-responsive practices by helping the school community:**
 1. focus on culture and climate in the school and community
 2. train and support all staff regarding trauma and learning
 3. encourage and sustain open and regular communication for all
 4. develop a strengths-based approach in working with students and peers
 5. ensure discipline policies are both compassionate and effective (restorative practices)
 6. weave compassionate strategies into school improvement planning (consider "whole child")
 7. provide tiered support for all students based on what they need
 8. create flexible accommodations for diverse learners
 9. provide access, voice, and ownership for staff, students, and community
 10. use data to identify vulnerable students and determine outcomes and strategies for continuous quality improvement

Integrating Services through Collaboration and an Interdisciplinary Approach

- Best practice to meet mental health needs uses a combination and a continuum of school based mental health providers like school social workers, school linked mental health providers and in collaboration with culturally responsive community mental health supports and providers.
- To effectively address barriers to learning, ***schools must weave resources into a cohesive and integrated continuum of interventions that promote healthy development and prevent problems***; allow for early intervention to address problems as soon after onset is feasible; and provide assistance to those with chronic and severe problems.
- The foundation of a school-based system for supporting the emotional, physical and academic needs of all students is an interdisciplinary team approach comprised of a variety of specialized instructional support personnel with different backgrounds, perspectives, training and skill sets.
- This team approach utilizes an integrated collaborative pooling of skills and exchange of expertise among SISP to support academic achievement.
- School-employed mental health providers serve in critical leadership roles related to school safety, positive school climate and providing school-based mental health services. (SSWAA, 2013)
- To effectively address the mental health needs of students in schools, ratios alone do not provide an accurate measure of what is best practice in meeting the mental health needs of children and youth. Incorporating a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and services has proven to be most effective.
- Due to our training in cultural diversity school social workers to create culturally responsive community connections to meet the student and family needs as well as build partnerships with various community supports and mental health providers. Not all families have the same definition of mental health and we can access strengths and supports within one's cultural community to holistically meet the social, emotional and physical needs of students.

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