

Social Work & Schools

General Background

The education of our nation's children and young adults continues to be a top priority of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). We recognize the urgent need to better identify and provide services to vulnerable student groups, such as children with disabilities, poor rural youths, children of migrant laborers, other economically disadvantaged children, children of color, pregnant adolescents, children of adolescent single parents, new immigrants, abused and neglected children, latchkey children, and children who move frequently.

A high functioning school system must provide supportive services to its students. School social workers are one of the few resources in schools for addressing personal and social problems that inhibit students' ability to learn. Thousands of social workers each year serve students in education jurisdictions across the country in early intervention, preschool, elementary and secondary settings. With uneven distribution of social workers their availability is inadequate and some districts have social worker to student ratio of as much as 1:400. This is a staggering number when one considers the enormous challenge that a social worker with such high caseloads faces in supporting students with academic, social or behavioral concerns and their families.

Recommendations

- Assess and intervene to meet the social and emotional needs of students to enhance learning.
- Provide group and individual counseling for students when necessary.
- Strengthen the connections among families, schools, and communities to link these components in creating the best learning environment for the students.
- Develop preventive and remedial intervention programs for systemic problems.
- Ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate educational services.
- Provide training and support for conflict resolution programs and other student support programs such as drug use prevention, sex education, alternative suspension programs, and parent education programs.
- Ensure that families are provided services within the context of multicultural understanding and competence that enhance families' support of students learning experiences.
- Federal funds should be used to expand the workforce that supports students in schools. There must be a multidisciplinary team model of school social workers, psychologists, pupil services personnel, teachers, administrators, and families in the identification and evaluation of students for special services. This could be accomplished by urging Congress to support legislation that will expand the workforce of school social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors.

Additional Resources

Council on Social Work Education. (2009). www.cswe.org.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Early Childhood Care and Services. Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 91-95). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Education of Children and Youth. Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 96-104). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Loan Forgiveness for Social Workers*. www.socialworkers.org/loanforgiveness.