

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

NASW Standards for

School  
Social Work  
Services



2012

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School  
Social Work  
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## Introduction

For over a hundred years, school social workers have been providing a critical link between school, home, and community. The school social work profession has consistently focused on coordinating the efforts of schools, families, and communities toward helping students improve their academic achievement and social, emotional, and behavioral competence by using its unique perspective of viewing the person in his or her environment. School social workers seek to ensure equitable education opportunities; ensure that students are mentally, physically, and emotionally present in the classroom; and promote respect and dignity for all students.

School social work is a complex and specialized field of practice that is affected by changes in education policy, research, and practice models that continue to evolve. NASW periodically revises the *NASW Standards for School Social Work Services* to meet the changing needs of school social workers, the clients they serve, and local education agencies. NASW has revised these standards to reflect the values of our profession and current practice trends.

## The Evolving Context of Education

Passage of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, addresses school social work services and was written to create a stronger, more accountable education system with an emphasis on parental involvement, evidence-informed educational strategies, and data-informed decision making.

emphasize primary prevention; (2) early screening and intervention; (3) approaches to intervention that target multiple risk factors in home, school, and community settings and involve parents, teachers, and administrators; (4) approaches that seek to improve individual and system factors contributing to academic success; and (5) data-informed decision making and intervention fidelity.

These policy, research, and practice themes are reflected in these standards.

## **Guiding Principles**

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The following guiding principles address multiple domains of practice and are reflected in these standards.

**1. Education/School Reform:** Legislators, policymakers, and the general public will continue to demand reform and increased accountability as economic stressors require cutbacks in expenditures for education. It is important that social workers be proactive to address these pressures and advocate for resources. School social workers actively help school systems meet expectations of federal, state, and local mandates; particularly those designed to promote equal educational opportunity, social justice, and the removal of barriers to learning. School social work practice is consistent with these mandates and promotes the academic mission of schools by fostering educational environments that are safe; have supportive, fair, and responsive policies; and emphasize early intervention and positive behavioral interventions.

demonstrating a lack of response to tier 1 interventions, students are referred for the additional support offered at tier 2. These strategies should be efficient to apply and effective in terms of producing rapid improvement in students' ability to learn and be successful in school.

Tier 3 refers to the use of evidence-informed individual and long-term interventions. Tier 3 interventions are provided to students who have serious academic, behavioral, or social-emotional problems that constitute a chronic condition that has not responded to data-driven tier 1 or tier 2 interventions. The goal of this tier is to reduce the negative impact of the condition on a student's functioning. Tier 3 interventions involve intensive individualized strategies that are implemented for extended periods of time and frequently involve community agencies. Data from tier 3 interventions may indicate the need to consider eligibility for special education services.

In summary, school social workers not only provide direct services to children who require basic needs or exhibit challenging behavior, but also lead prevention efforts that support children through building the capacity of family members, other school staff, and community agencies to improve student outcomes.

## Goals of the Standards

These standards were developed to broadly define the scope of services that school social workers shall provide, that school administrators should support, and that students and families

## **Standards**

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### **Standard 1. Ethics and Values**

School social workers shall adhere to the ethics and values of the social work profession and shall use the *NASW Code of Ethics* as a guide to ethical decision making, while understanding the unique aspects of school social work practice and the needs of the students, parents, and communities they serve.

### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall demonstrate core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. In addition, school social workers shall adhere to the professional ethical responsibilities delineated in the *NASW Code of Ethics*.

School social workers shall have knowledge of and comply with local, state, and federal mandates related to informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and access to records within the context of legal and ethical rights of minors and parents. Students, families, and other professionals shall be informed of the limits of confidentiality when services are initiated. Employers and school administrators should be informed of the ethical responsibilities of the social work profession. In the event that conflicts arise among competing expectations, school social workers are directed to the *NASW Code of Ethics* as a tool in their decision making.

### **Standard 3. Assessment**

School social workers shall conduct assessments of individuals, families and systems/organizations (namely, classroom, school, neighborhood, district, state) with the goal of improving student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

#### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall possess skills in systematic assessment, data gathering, and interpretation at multiple levels using a variety of methods (for example, interview, direct observation, standardized instruments, surveys, focus groups) to assess the needs, characteristics, and interactions of students, families, and school personnel. School social workers shall conduct reliable and valid assessments of students and organizations to inform the design of interventions to remove barriers to learning. Assessments shall use ecological perspectives and functional approaches to enhance understanding of barriers to learning and the interventions that foster improvement of student well-being and academic progress.

### **Standard 4. Intervention**

School social workers shall understand and use evidence-informed practices in their interventions.

#### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall remain current with school-based intervention research and use evidence-informed practices in service delivery. Interventions shall be designed to enhance positive educational experiences and involve the student, the family, other team members, school personnel, and community resources as

and community. Records shall be maintained according to federal, state, and local laws.

#### **Standard 7. Workload Management**

School social workers shall organize their workloads to fulfill their responsibilities and clarify their critical roles within the educational mission of the school or district in which they work.

#### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall manage their work in an efficient and effective manner. Priorities for practice shall be developed collaboratively between the school social worker and the supervisor. Priorities shall be established on the basis of the needs of students, professional skills of the school social worker, program needs, research, and availability of other resources. School social workers shall perform roles and responsibilities across a multitier framework for service delivery and use technology to enhance communication, obtain and organize information, demonstrate accountability, and complete workload assignments.

#### **Standard 8. Professional Development**

School social workers shall pursue continuous enhancement of knowledge and skills to provide the most current, beneficial, and culturally appropriate services to students and their families.

#### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall adhere to the *NASW Standards for Continuing Professional Education* and follow state professional regulation regarding continuing education requirements. School social workers shall access

**Standard 10. Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration**

School social workers shall provide leadership in developing a positive school climate and work collaboratively with school administration, school personnel, family members, and community professionals as appropriate to increase accessibility and effectiveness of services.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall serve as leaders and consultants in promoting positive school climate. School social workers shall also serve as leaders and consultants to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, school and community that affect students' educational experiences. School social workers shall provide training and engage parents, school personnel, other professionals and community members in the removal of barriers to learning. School social workers shall also provide leadership and collaboration in the implementation of comprehensive school-based and school-linked programs that promote student well-being and positive academic outcomes.

**Standard 11. Advocacy**

School social workers shall engage in advocacy that seeks to ensure that all students have equal access to education and services to enhance their academic progress.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall advocate for students and their families. This advocacy includes helping them gain access to and effectively use formal and informal community resources that enable families to self-advocate. School social workers, as systems' change agents, shall identify

“family collaborative worker,” “family specialist,” or “home family specialist,” project incomplete and misleading notions of school social workers’ qualifications and functions and should not be used.

All social workers in school settings should adhere to the *NASW Standards for School Social Work Services*.

### **Roles of State Education Agencies/ Credentialing/Licensing Boards**

State departments of education or other state entities that license or certify educational personnel should regulate school social work practice.

State departments should support a state consultant position to oversee quality assurance of school social work practice. A state consultant should have an MSW degree, have direct experience as a school social worker, and be knowledgeable about current trends in school social work practice and policy. The state consultant should work closely with state, regional and national professional organizations that support school social work practice and are knowledgeable about the field of school social work.

### **Roles of Local Education Agencies**

**Administrative Support.** The administrative structure of the local education agency should delineate clear lines of support and accountability for the school social work program and provide for optimum use of the school social workers’ knowledge and skills. Realistic job descriptions, working conditions, and workload standards are essential for

confidentiality for students and families. These basic resources include an office, clerical support, current information technology, and an adequate budget for professional materials, supplies, and activities. Adequate, confidential space at each school site for meeting with students, families, and local education agency personnel is essential.

**Professional Development.** The local education agency should provide opportunities for school social workers to engage in professional development activities that support school social work practice and continued licensure/certification. Funding support and an adequate number of professional leave days enable school social workers to strengthen and broaden skills required to better serve students, families, the local education agency, and the community.

**Leadership.** The local education agency should involve school social workers in developing and coordinating partnerships with community health, mental health, and social service providers linked with or based at school sites to ensure that these services promote student educational success. Because of their extensive knowledge of community resources, school social workers play a critical role in facilitating the provision of community services in the local education agency and help orient community providers to school climate, culture, and structure and to the laws and regulations governing practice in educational settings.



