

Please share my comments with all three sub-committees.

I am writing in support of having school social workers in place in public schools as a way to help reduce school violence. Having been a school social worker for 13 years I know how we not only address individual student issues, but we become uniquely connected with families in need and under multiple stressors. I have specialized in working with younger students (grades PreK through 5) and see how our position can be crucial in the EARLY identification of developing mental health issues. We work hand in hand with educators and families to help get these mental health issues identified and addressed, as well as acting as brokers to help families navigate what can be cumbersome systems to access services.

In addition to helping with early identification and intervention, as a school social worker I have also helped build a school climate of trust and caring so peers look out for each other and trust the adults so they will speak up when something seems wrong. Sometimes comments are made by students only to other students about wishes to harm themselves, others, or letting kids know they have brought a dangerous item into school. Through classroom lessons and making strong connections with all students I have been able to convey to children that when a situation as described above arises, it is unsafe and it is IMPORTANT for them to tell an adult to make the situation safe again. Students have learned they need to speak up in these situations and they DO! These messages need to be imbedded in the school culture and trust in mental health professionals such as school social workers can best be built when they are an intrinsic part of the school environment, not an outside clinician who visits from time to time or only sees kids for counseling sessions. This allows students to know their actions will be taken seriously and all students, even the ones who may not seem safe at that time, will be treated with dignity and caring to keep their school a safe place.

I thank you for your time and attention. I know you face a very complex task. Thank you for all your hard work in attempting to address these very weighty issues to keep our children safe!

Megan Duffy
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Sent from my iPad