



## School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

### Federal Education Funding Priorities

The School Social Work Association of America believes that a quality education for all of the nation's children should be a major priority for the federal government. In order to provide a quality education to each child, the federal government must significantly increase its investment in public education. This includes a strong commitment to programs aimed at enhancing the social and emotional strength of students, a factor critical to achieving academic success. School social workers are an integral part of the school team helping students achieve positive academic and social outcomes.

Federal education programs must address the needs of specific student populations, including historically excluded and underrepresented groups, low-income, students with disabilities, second language learners, students experiencing abuse or neglect, migrant, LGBTQ+, and youth experiencing homelessness. SSWAA believes that targeting resources to these populations provides the best opportunity for all students to meet high academic expectations.

SSWAA urges Congress to substantially increase funding and expand programming for school social work services. This includes continued funding for specific legislation (e.g., the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) and new funding to address social justice, disparities in educational access, disproportionality, and trauma informed services. SSWAA also supports full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, providing educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Federal education programs provide critical funding to local school districts to hire additional school social workers. School social workers not only provide direct services to students, but also provide consultative and support services to staff. School districts also use these funds to offer professional development opportunities for school social workers to enhance their capacity to address the broad range of student needs. A strong federal investment in school social work services will strengthen linkages among schools, families, and communities to help students overcome barriers to learning and achievement.

#### ***SSWAA 2021 Legislative Priorities***

##### ***Provide evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services***

- **School-Based Mental Health Services:** The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant, long-lasting effect on the mental health of our students. However,

schools facing pandemic-related budget cuts are unable to expand services to meet demand, with some districts even laying off school-employed mental health professionals such as school social workers. SSWAA advocates for policies that provide school districts with the resources to hire and retain school social workers and other qualified mental health professionals, and for policies which support the development and improvement of school-based mental health services.

### ***Promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence***

- **Recognition for the School Social Work Profession:** School social workers are the vital link between the home, school, and community, and provide a wide range of services to support students' academic, social, physical, and emotional needs. SSWAA is working to ensure that legislators in Congress understand the importance of the school social work profession, and that legislation related to educators and school support personnel includes explicit mention of school social workers.

### ***Maximize access to school-based and community-based resources***

- **Education Funding:** Providing federal funding to support state and local education agencies is critical to ensuring that school social workers have the tools needed to do their jobs, and that students have equitable access to resources and opportunities.
- **Student and Family Wellbeing:** It is the responsibility of school social workers to advocate for the students we serve, be it on the individual, local, or Congressional level. Issues such as homelessness, hunger, inequitable opportunities, and harmful immigration policies have detrimentally impacted our students at an alarmingly increasing rate. Policies which promote housing and food security, pathways to citizenship, educational equity and racial justice would have a profoundly positive effect on students' ability to succeed.

## **Threats to Educational Funding and Professional Educators**

The School Social Work Association of America is very concerned about efforts at the state and national levels to reduce services to children and families, including cuts in educational funding. SSWAA believes that the path to true engagement in a global economy lies in a strong educational system that maximizes the potential contribution of all students to our workforce. Reductions in educational funding represent the worst possible choice for our nation's future.

SSWAA is further concerned that the current crisis is being seen by some as an opportunity to demand disproportionate sacrifices from public employees, including professional educators and school social workers. We urge decision makers at the state and national levels to engage in dialogue that will result in policies based on the principle of the importance of public education and the promotion of the basic values of our democracy.

SSWAA is proud to offer a network of professionals and tools to support your practice, such as the above recommendations. Continue to access the SSWAA website, SSWAA professional development opportunities, and SSWAA Board to meet your needs.

**Approved by the Board of Directors, 8/17/2021**

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