



Introduction

Purpose of the Macro Level Advocacy Toolkit:

- As leaders of our profession, SSWAA hopes to empower you to find your advocacy comfort level and to reach beyond it.
- This toolkit will provide tools to increase your knowledge about how to be an effective advocate for the children and families you serve as well as how to promote the role, expertise and value that School Social Workers bring to the Educational Team.
- Each module will provide you with the components to develop a Strategic Plan around Macro Level Advocacy for your State Association.

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Module 1

The Art of Advocacy for School Social Work Boards: Introduction

Purpose of the Macro Level Advocacy Toolkit:

- A. As leaders of our profession, SSWAA hopes to empower you to find your advocacy comfort level and to reach beyond it.
- B. This toolkit will provide tools to increase your knowledge about how to be an effective advocate for the children and families you serve, as well as how to promote the role, expertise and value School Social Workers bring to the educational team.
- C. Each module will provide you with the components to develop a Strategic Plan around macro-level advocacy for your State association.

Why is Macro Level Advocacy Essential for State School Social Work Associations?

- A. Embedded in our professional code of ethics is a commitment to the value of Social Justice. As social workers, challenging social injustice is fundamental to our practice as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics:

“Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.”

- B. Therefore, for State associations, macro level advocacy is a critical component not only to promote the profession but to be a voice for students and families. Our unique understanding of systems such as family, education, and mental health provides us with the knowledge to educate others about how these systems intersect and impact each other positively and negatively.
- C. Unfortunately there is lack of understanding regarding who is considered a mental health professional/practitioner, their scope of practice, and whether schools should and can provide mental health services.



The intentional development of a macro level advocacy plan at the Board level is critical to ensuring the State association engages in every opportunity to communicate the realities, needs and barriers facing students and their families and how to support positive outcomes in school and beyond.

Effective communication is vital to achieving the goals and objectives of School Social Work, whether trying to improve services at the building level, advocating for state policies or shaping national policy.

Advocacy is advocacy whether at the local, state or national level.

Assignment:

- A. As a State Board, review what is working well in the advocacy arena and identify the strengths of your State's Legislative Committee OR Initiatives.
- B. Next review and discuss what is missing and consider what current barriers you are facing related to advocacy on a macro level.
- C. Most important, if you do not currently have a Legislative Committee, form one! Identify a few key members of your association with an interest in advocacy, policy, and/or legislative activities, and start by making an advocacy plan!



Module 2

Creating a Legislative Committee to Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

- I. SSWAA recommends that each State School Social Work Association develop a LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE.
- II. This committee should have a chair appointed by the State President and consists of a group of volunteer state association members who meet monthly to achieve the following goals:
 - A. Educate policy makers on the professional role of School Social Workers in helping students meet the social and emotional needs of the students with whom we work.
 - B. Monitor and address legislative action
 - C. Produce and endorse legislative priorities outlined in an agenda.
 - D. Host an annual Day at the Capitol training for School Social Workers.
 - E. Contract with a lobbyist to assist your state association in meeting your legislative goals and keep your state association current on relevant education and mental health policy being proposed or pending that may have an impact on the students we serve, families or our profession.
- III. Role of the Chair:
 - A. Schedule monthly meetings
 - B. Create an agenda for the meeting
 - C. Document minutes from the meeting to report back to the State School Social Work Association Board and to share with committee members.
 - D. Set up meetings with decision-makers such as legislators, Secondary Principals' Association, Elementary Principals Association, School Boards Association, Superintendents Association, etc. These meetings allow you to educate state leaders about the value and expertise of School Social Workers to ensuring academic achievement for all children and youth. Building alliances is essential. Setting up yearly meetings with Secondary Principals' Association, Elementary Principals Association, School Boards Association, Superintendents Association, Special Ed. Directors etc. not only extends the understanding and builds necessity for hiring school social workers but they may have legislation that your state may support and vice versa.
 - E. Send action alerts
 - F. Develop a Legislative Agenda
 - G. Facilitate and Coordinate with the State School Social Work Association Board a "Day at the Capitol" as a Professional Development opportunity.
- IV. How do you solicit volunteers to support the work of the Legislative



- Committee?
- A. On your membership form, you can create a section specific for committee membership.
 - B. The Legislative Chair can write a quarterly newsletter article or email to inform membership about the committee's activities and updates on state legislative priorities.
 - C. State President can send a brief description of committees to membership with chairperson contact information.
 - D. During the annual meeting held during your state conference, the President can introduce the committee chairs and have each chair talk about the goals and mission of each committee. Remember to have a sign-up sheet at the registration booth for members to sign up for particular committees.
- V. Committee Meetings:
- A. If you have a lobbyist, that person will be integral in helping your state develop legislative and advocacy priorities by monitoring education, mental health and other policies being proposed that could positively or negatively impact the work we do every day. Your lobbyist can also help you set up meetings with specific legislators assigned to education policy committees or legislators that can help author legislation your state may develop.
 - B. If you do not have a lobbyist at this time, connect with NASW's lobbyist to develop a partnership where that individual can help monitor legislation that may impact school social work, children, mental health, education, etc.
 - C. Invite your lobbyist or NASW lobbyist to your committee meetings.
 - D. In the fall develop legislative priorities and create an agenda which can be disseminated to policy makers, membership, etc. Please see the attached example from Minnesota.
 - E. Disseminate information to the committee related to state, regional and national policies and create a plan on how to share information with members on a consistent basis.
 - F. Develop strategic goals on how to fulfill your state legislative or advocacy priorities such as setting up meetings with specific decision-makers, creating materials such as talking points for members, offer an advocacy breakout session at your conference, plan a Day at the Capitol etc.
 - G. Create action alerts with your specific message so all your membership has to do is add their name, contact information as a constituent and instructions on how members can find the name, email, phone number of their state representative or state senator.
- VI. Upcoming modules will give you more specific information on how to create a Day at the Capitol, developing your state message, Tips on How to Talk to Your Legislators, etc.



Module 3 Creating a Legislative Committee

One of the most valuable committees for State School Social Work Associations is a Legislative Committee. Legislative committees should meet monthly and will be most active during the legislative session. Like all other committees, State Presidents appoint a Legislative Chairperson. The role and responsibilities can be adapted per the needs of the state. Here are some suggestions of various duties the Legislative Chairperson would be responsible for fulfilling:

- I. Plan committee meeting dates and times.
- II. Set Legislative Committee Meeting Agendas.
- III. Create a Legislative Agenda that outlines the priorities and goals determined by the Board. This module has samples of state legislative agendas to use as a model. Once your state association has created an agenda, this can be uploaded to your association's website and should be used as a tool in your advocacy efforts.
- IV. Develop additional grassroots advocacy goals such as plan to present at your State's Secondary Principals, Elementary Principals, School Boards or Special Education Directors Conferences.
 - A. Presenting at various conferences establishes a greater understanding of our valuable role, expertise and background as mental health professionals on the educational team.
 - B. For example, MSSWA members and Board members provided a breakout session at the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association annual conference titled **Leadership, Equity and Trauma**. As school social workers, we were able to demonstrate our knowledge and expertise in the areas of mental health, children and education. This presentation focused on the following objectives (a) helping participants to explore the role of how mental health, poverty and trauma impact educational equity; (b) increasing their understanding of the educational background, knowledge and expertise that school social workers (SSWs) bring to the school community; (c) how demonstrated how SSWs support school leaders in creating initiatives and facilitating discussion around system change and cultural responsiveness and (d) participants received tools to effectively address barriers to educational equity.
 - C. By establishing relationships with other educational organizations and highlighting our expertise such as outlined in the example above your state association becomes a respected resource based on our expertise. In addition, the establishment of creating alliances can be essential when your organization



may need to garner support for future or current legislative initiatives.

- V. Work in collaboration with state lobbyist.
- VI. Write quarterly reports to share at state association board meetings.
- VII. Develop action alerts and email to state association members.
- VIII. Work with the Board to establish goals for state strategic plan and monitor progress towards the attainment of these goals.
- IX. Attend SSWAA Leadership Institute to strengthen skills, obtain tools and resources to enhance macro-advocacy efforts at the local, state and national levels.

The Legislative Committee typically consists of a **group of volunteer state school social work members**. One idea for soliciting volunteers to serve on this committee is to advertise in your state newsletter as well as have a section on your membership form that asks for interested parties who may want to serve on various committees like the Legislative Committee. Make sure to include a description of each committee.

The Legislative Committee attempts to meet monthly to achieve the following goals on behalf of their state organization as well as SSWAA.

1. Educate policy makers on the professional role of SSW in helping students meet their social, emotional and academic needs.
2. Monitor and address legislative action.
3. Produce and endorse legislative priorities and agenda.
4. Create and facilitate a Day at Your State Capitol including CEU's for this staff development opportunity by offering keynote speakers and training on how to get your message across to various stakeholders.
5. Contract with a lobbyist to assist your state association in meeting your legislative goals and to keep your state association current on relevant education and mental health legislation proposed or pending that may have an impact on the students we serve, families or our profession.
6. Provide professional development to members in the area of macro-advocacy

Below is an example from Maryland illustrating how this state implemented various macro-advocacy goals:

Legislative Efforts in Maryland on behalf of SSWIM and SSWAA

1. Share lobbyist with NASW on Behalf of SSWIM. Maryland was able to partner with NASW Maryland Chapter to contract with a lobbyist.
2. SSWIM members have provided written and spoken testimony to State legislature-opinion letters written to local newspapers.
3. SSWIM members and Board serve on Baltimore Education Coalition and Maryland State Education Coalition.



4. SSWIM members participate in Legislative Leadership activities sponsored by SSWAA Lobbyists and support efforts of our Lobbyists.
5. SSWIM member is on the Board of the Baltimore Teachers' Union, a contract negotiator, and a VP at Large AFT-MD and a delegate to AFT conventions.
6. SSWIM members review state legislative agenda every January and select Bills to provide comments.
7. SSWAA Northeast Representative consults with States regarding their advocacy efforts and needs. She also serves on SSWAA's Legislative Committee to share state needs as well as bring resources back to states.

Attached is an example of a [Legislative Agenda](#) created by the Minnesota School Social Work Association.



Module 4
Developing Your State Message

- I. What is Your Message?
 - A. *Brainstorm:* What are your top priorities as an association? Some examples might be educating legislators about specific legislation on the value of school social work services, defining the role of school social worker, increasing the knowledge of your role, or more funding and jobs.
 - B. *Come up with 2 or 3 key messages.*
 - C. Create talking points around these messages so all school social workers in the State are providing the same information, no matter the forum.
 - D. Be prepared with an "ask." In other words, what do you want the legislator to do? Is your "ask" to support a piece of legislation? Talk to other legislators? Host a town hall? Or something else...?

- II. Before Initiating Contact:
 - A. Consider Your Audiences.
 1. Level of knowledge and awareness.
 2. Primary concerns/expectations.
 3. Perspective.
 - B. Know the background of the legislator or staff member
 1. with whom you are meeting
 2. On what committees do they serve
 3. What bills or types of bills have they sponsored
 4. What are some of their current projects
 5. About what issues are they passionate
 6. Which district does the legislator represent, and is there a current issue in the district to which you can tie your message
 - C. Possible barriers to understanding.
 - D. Ability and likelihood to take action.
 - E. Amount of time in a meeting to get your message across.

- III. Developing a message to ensure impact:
 - A. Focus on your objective: Use the list of questions below as a guide to help you formulate your message and achieve your goals.
 1. Raise awareness of your role as a school social worker and your value as a member of the educational team in supporting students and reducing the social/emotional barriers to learning.
 2. Raise awareness of a specific issue such as bullying prevention and intervention or the achievement gap and connect the expertise and ability of school social workers to address the issue.
 3. Questions to consider: What other movements or activities are happening in your State to which you can tie your message? Some examples might be fully funding basic education, closing the



opportunity gap, chronic absenteeism, disproportionality in discipline, or increasing graduation rates.

4. Build support for specific policy/resource needs.
5. Be relevant by articulating the impact on students/school.
6. Include supporting points and data, and provide personal examples and stories.
7. Appeal to emotion as well as intellect.
8. Be clear and concise.
9. Encourage people to see you as *the* expert and resource on the issue at hand.
10. Have printed materials with your contact information (business cards), your message, data from your State (where are school social workers working – in which districts), primary roles fulfilled, outcomes for students, and any other relevant information that you can leave behind.
11. Consider leaving them with something tangible as a reminder: Cookies, candy, seeds for planting. Have your message/ask attached to your "reminder!"

IV. Action Steps: Emails and Letters



- A. Your State association and SSWAA can often make this easy for members by sending an action alert. The "Alert" would include the background of the issue and the message for legislators, especially the "ask." Members just add their information, including any relevant personal story. Individual letters should be personalized to send to your specific representatives. Letters or emails should have the following information in place:

- I. Identify yourself as a constituent and member of your State association and SSWAA



- II. Briefly describe the issue.
 - III. State what action you want: the ask.
 - IV. Share personal stories.
 - V. Offer to be a resource.
 - VI. Answer questions about your position or offer to find the answers.
 - VII. Provide contact information.
- V. Action Steps – Phone Calls
- A. Utilizing the same format as you would in an email or letter above be clear and concise. Often your first point of contact is a Legislative Assistant; therefore, identify the purpose of the phone call and schedule an in person meeting.
- VI. Example of Minnesota School Social Work Association’s Message:
- A. Continuum of Care that includes Specialized Instructional Support Personnel such as SSWs, collaboration with school-linked mental health services and community mental health providers.
 - B. Support the need for local control – School districts, schools, school boards should determine the needs of the students and the appropriate staffing to address those needs versus a ratio that mandates the number of students to a particular Specialized Instructional Support Professional.
 - C. Need for a multidisciplinary approach to meet the needs of students.
- VII. Example of Washington’s Message:
- (We have focused our efforts on defining the role of a school social worker {only one message}). The language included below is directly from the legislation for which we are soliciting legislator support.)*
- A. The WASSW strongly encourages you to support SHB 1900, an ACT relating to defining the role of the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist.
 - B. School Social Workers
 1. Are the integral link between home, school, and community in helping students achieve academic and social success.
 2. Remove barriers and provide services that include mental health counseling, case management, crisis support, collaboration, and advocacy.
 3. Provide leadership and professional expertise regarding the formation of school discipline policies and procedures.
 4. Work with students, families, school administrators, and the community as part of an interdisciplinary team.



Module 5 Overview of School Social Work Services

As your state associations begin developing your message and a plan to educate legislators and other decision makers on the value and necessity of school social work services for students, it is essential to have tools to share that provide an overview of our services. Although the roles of school social workers can vary from school to school, district to district and state to state; it is important for legislators and other decision makers like building administrators, school boards, Special Education Directors, community leaders, etc., to know that our roles are based on the needs of the students, the school and funding. Whether a School Social Worker is providing direct services to students in the regular education setting or the special education setting, they can expect core competencies from their social worker to fulfill the needs of their students and responsibilities of their role as a mental health professional on the educational team. Unfortunately, some people still believe that school social workers only provide direct services to students with identified educational disabilities receiving special education support. Remember to always share examples from your work as you are the expert. Your examples bring awareness and understanding of a day in the life of a school social worker and the value you provide to the educational community.

Within this Module, there are several tools to allow you to have conversations regarding the services we provide. Providing copies of these materials as a reference when you are meeting with legislators and other decision-makers is also helpful in getting your message across.

- I. First you will find the SSWAA National Practice Model. This one-page handout illustrates the professional competencies built into school social work practice. You can also find a power-point of SSWAA's National Practice Model to assist you in your educational and advocacy endeavors.
- II. Second is an example of Venn Diagram showing some of the unique skills that school workers, school counselors and school psychologists possess while also demonstrating how combining our skills sets as a multidisciplinary team enhances our ability to holistically meet the social, emotional, physical and academic needs of all students.
- III. The next resource is from Nevada. This diagram demonstrates school social work services outlining an example of a referral process to obtain these services and what that service delivery would entail.
- IV. The fourth example provides an outline of school social work services at each of the Tiers using a Multi-Tiered Services and Supports Model.
- V. SSWAA's Position Papers on the "Clinical Social Work: Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Students" and the "Definition of a Highly Qualified School Social Worker" are also a useful tools in clarifying our education, knowledge and expertise while also explaining the essential role for a multi-



disciplinary team approach to thoroughly meet the needs of students and their families ensuring academic achievement.

- VI. Finally, you may want to make a one-page handout to provide during your advocacy sessions that is specific to your state. Minnesota has offered an example of this one-page handout titled “An Overview of School Social Work Services”.

These are just a few examples of tools you can use to build awareness and understanding regarding the pivotal connection between our role in reducing barriers to academic success and the attainment of positive educational outcomes. As a SSWAA member, you have access to other valuable position statements that can further your advocacy efforts. Simply visit the website to find a plethora of resources you can use to support your mission as a state association or to strengthen your macro-level practice as an individual practitioner.

Resources:

[Clinical School Social Work: Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Students](#)

[Definition of Highly Qualified School Social Workers](#)

[Overview of School Social Work Services \(Minnesota School Social Workers Association\)](#)

[An Example of Comprehensive Student Support Services](#)

[School Social Worker Referral Process](#)

[School Social Work National Practice Model](#)

[A Sampling of School Social Work Services identified in the Literature](#)



Module 6 Identifying the "Power Players"

- I. Partners for Advocacy Efforts
- II. Designate one board member to be the main point of contact for collaborating/networking with other organizations, local legislators, and other potential partners.
 - A. Start small or cast a wide net
 - B. The more voices for your cause, the easier the task for everyone
- III. Think about who needs to be educated on the role of school social workers and who is best positioned to help you raise the visibility of the profession at the State level.
 - A. A great place to start is with the legislators representing your district.
 - B. Since you are a constituent, they are more likely to meet with you and provide suggestions about key players in the State legislature.
- IV. Other Key Players:
 - A. Legislators who sit on the Education Committees for both chambers of your State legislature.
 - B. The State chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).
 - C. Other State organizations representing specialized instructional support personnel, such as:
 1. School counselors.
 2. School psychologists.
 3. School nurses.
 - D. State parent-teacher organizations, including groups representing parents of children with disabilities.
 - E. State special education interest groups.
 - F. Social work faculty/professors from universities with MSW programs and the necessary coursework for school social work (if your State requires specific coursework).
 1. Offer to speak to a class about school social work.
 2. Host an information table at student events/job fairs.
 - G. Provide membership materials for your State association and SSWAA – for both faculty and students!
 - H. The State department of education/professional educator standards board.
 - I. The State principals associations (elementary and secondary) and State special education directors.
 - J. The State school boards association.



- K. Other school related organizations focusing on areas such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL).
 - L. Your State education association (affiliates of the National Education Association and/or the American Federation of Teachers – the "unions").
 - M. Lobbyists for various organizations – it's helpful to establish relationships with these folks. You may not need them now, but better to get to know them before you need them!
- V. After you have decided which organizations/people to target, the following ideas may be helpful in planning your next steps.
- A. Contact via email/phone for introductions (who you are, what school social work is, why you would like to talk with them).
 - B. Ask for a follow up meeting in person to discuss school social work (ask for a 15-30 minute meeting).
 - C. Bring current data on school social work services in your State (how is school social work defined in your State; what services are provided -- general education, special education, crisis, prevention, intervention, etc.; number of school social workers employed in your State; number of graduate programs in the State and how many students are in MSW programs; districts employing the most school social workers (can find this out through a public records request); current threats to the profession; and, any other relevant data).
 - D. Link school social work services to increased graduation rates, increased academic achievement, decrease in discipline rates, decrease in chronic absenteeism, and other positive student outcomes.
 - E. What is your "ask?" What would you like them to do with this information?
 - F. It could be helpful to have an outline of the conversation with key taking points (on note cards or in notebooks).
 - G. Bring printed materials – any promotional materials (brochures, flyers), business cards, news articles, SSWAA materials, and a one-pager with some of your key statistics and data.
 - H. Follow up after the meeting and every three to four months afterwards. You can also follow up as specific pieces of legislation are introduced or as new developments occur in your State.



Module 7

How to use social media to create action alerts

Using social media does not have to be intimidating, overwhelming, or take a technology expert to figure out. Social media outlets can include: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.

Legislative updates and action alerts often are time sensitive. During the legislative session, both House of Representative Bills and Senate Bills can move quickly through committees. The request to testify in person in support of certain Bills or to submit written or oral support (letters, emails, and phone calls) to your legislators can happen within a day or two of a deadline or vote. The ability to use social media can increase your ability to quickly reach your audience, which often includes more than just your membership.

Due to the fast-paced nature of the legislative session, in Washington state, several Board members have access to the organization's social media accounts. Whenever a request to testify or provide written support is requested, any board member can post the information.

The information is often a short phrase or sentence with a link to additional information such as: how to identify who your elected Senator or House of Representative is, how to contact your specific legislator, how to learn more about a piece of legislation, how to learn more about the history of a specific piece of legislation, who are the key supporters, who are the legislators or groups that are opposing this Bill, or what to say in your letter, phone call, or testimony. In Washington state, the Board will also provide links to the organization's website which will have templates that members or other interested persons can download and use.

The idea is to keep the social media posts simple, with a clear request (or the post could just be informational), and allow people to access additional information. During the legislative session, social media is an important avenue to reaching members and others quickly, in order to provide information or make a request.



Module 8
Day at Your State Capitol

- I. Pick a date and plan to spend 3 hours in the morning on some of the following activities from State association Days at the Capitol. Then devote the second half of the day to visiting legislators. Below are some planning ideas to get started:
 - A. Choose a "keynote speaker" to kick off the day. Suggestions might include an ethics training focused on social justice or a presentation by a legislator on how to effectively get your message heard.
 - B. Plan a training session on "Talking to your Legislators 101." Include some interactive time, including role-playing, to help members feel empowered for their visits.
 - C. Review your Legislative Agenda and specific talking points related to the legislation or mission for that day. Have your lobbyist (if you have one), a SSWAA board member (if someone is in your State or can travel there), or the NASW or State teachers union lobbyist present an update on the status of legislative initiatives impacting SSW, children, mental health and education.
 - D. Offer CEUs for Professional Development.
- II. Create Folders for Legislators that include pertinent information about the following:
 - A. Legislative Agenda; the role of school social workers, including their expertise and education; a one-pager on the National Model of SSW; SSWAA Position Statements on SSW and Violence Prevention; facts about children's mental health; an explanation of the overlapping and unique roles of school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists.
 - B. Don't forget to include your contact information!
- III. Making Visits – Day on the Hill:
 - A. Set appointments for members to meet with their Representative or Senator during the afternoon or focus on Education Committee Members. If you have a Legislative Committee, ask them to be responsible for setting up the appointments or assist members to do so.
 - B. Review talking points before the visits.
 - C. If possible, go in at least pairs (or more) for the legislative visits.
 - D. Discuss strategy beforehand with your team, and assign roles such as opener, recorder, commenter and closer.
 - E. Be prepared and review TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY HANDOUT: MAKING A VISIT TO YOUR LEGISLATOR'S OFFICE.
 - F. Be positive, friendly and concise. You may not have a lot of time!
 - G. Send a Thank You note.
- IV. Next Steps:



- A. Invite legislators to your school. This gives them the chance to see programs in action and for you to talk about the number of kids being served and the number still needing assistance!
- B. Stay in contact by following his/her website and social media.
- C. After the legislative session ends, schedule a time to meet in the district office.
- D. Volunteer your time for the Senator or Representative, especially he/she is running for re-election. **IMPORTANT NOTE: You cannot do representing your school social work association, only as an individual voter/constituent!**
- E. Take a few moments to personalize action alerts from your State association.
- F. Build relationships! This is what it is all about!
- I. Examples of how to promote your State association's Day at the State Capitol:

The Washington State association creates a summary of its Day on the Hill to share with members in the newsletter, on Facebook, and through other social media. Here's an example:

Lobby Day January 18, 2016
JANUARY 18, 2016:
WASSW LOBBY DAY!

We had an exciting day in Olympia for our 3rd annual Lobby Day on Monday, January 18th, MLK Day. We partnered with the National Association of Social Worker's WA Chapter this year and coincidentally shared our Lobby Day with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). We spent the morning with over 90 people hearing from legislators including Representatives Orwell and Pettigrew, as well as Nancy Amidei on the nuts and bolts of lobbying. We also heard presentations on four bills that are prioritized this session: [HB 1900 Defining School Social Workers](#), [HB 1701 Fair Chance Act aka Ban the Box](#), [HB 1713 Ricky's law](#), and [HB1390 Legal Financial Obligation Reform](#).

In the afternoon, we saw Governor Inslee speak to an impassioned Black Lives Matter group inside the dome in the Capitol Building. We also met with six different Legislators and Senators representing our districts. We walked away feeling empowered and energized about the movement in our profession through our lobbying efforts and are eager to see how this legislative session unfolds.

UPDATE 2/19/16:

[HB1900 Defining the role of School Social Workers](#), Counselors and Psychologists passed the House 64-33! [SHB2381 Establishing a legislative task force](#) on school counselors, psychologists and social workers passed the House 58-39. Both bills will now move on to the Senate! Stay tuned!



Module 9 How to Develop Talking Points

Once you have developed your message, the next step is to develop talking points. Talking points are the key "bullets" you will use to guide conversations with legislators, staff, other advocates, or anyone who needs to hear your message. Concise talking points are important to ensure all your members are delivering the same message, while allowing the flexibility to insert personal stories and add local and state specifics. Here are some "how-tos":

- I. Think Brief.
 - A. You really only need 3-4 key points. Beyond that, we all start to read the talking points and get nervous if we don't cover them all. A few critical points provide a good conversation starter.
 - B. You may only have 5 or 10 minutes of the legislator's or staff member's time. Make those minutes count!
- II. What's the point?
 - A. Each of your talking points should add to the arguments that support your goal.
 - B. That goal might be just to educate the listener about the role of the school social worker.
 - C. On the other hand, your goal may be to get the legislator's vote or support for a specific bill.
- III. "In my experience...."
 - A. In addition to the formal talking points, you should add an open-ended bullet. That's where the school social worker adds his/her personal experiences.
 - B. Personal experiences should be directly related to the message and the goal.
- IV. Name that bill
 - A. If you are speaking about a specific bill, include on your talking points the exact title of the legislation and the number of the bill.
 - B. There are often a number of bills addressing the same issue, so you want the legislator/staff member to know exactly which one you mean.
- V. "Why should I care about that?"
 - A. This is where you can make the case why the legislator should be concerned about the issue.
 - B. Research any vote he/she may have taken on similar bills.
 - C. Look to see if the legislator serves on the education committee or other relevant committees.
 - D. Most important, find out if there is a situation in the legislator's district/state that makes this issue a priority for constituents.
- VI. "Show me the numbers!"
 - A. Even though you're just going to have a few talking points, you should always try to bring more information with you.



- B. Any data from the schools or school district and state where you work can be very helpful in backing up your talking points.
- C. Develop a one-page information sheet to leave behind that will remind the legislator/staff member about the need to address this issue.

Example of talking points on a specific bill from a past SSWAA Summer Legislative Institute:

GOAL: Getting the legislator to co-sponsor the *School Social Workers Improving Student Success Act*, H.R. 1138; sponsor: Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI).

1. "We are asking the representative/senator (legislator) to co-sponsor this important bill."
2. This bill would improve school mental health services by giving grants to high-need school districts to hire more school social workers and keep those already working there.
3. School social workers hired under these grants would
 - a) Identify and target services to the highest-need students in each school where they work.
 - b) Address social, emotional, and mental health needs to ensure better school outcomes, provide assistance to teachers in designing behavioral interventions, connect students and families to community services, among many other services.
4. ADD personal story.
5. ADD any statistics from your district or state to support why there is a critical need for more school social workers.

And don't forget to repeat the "ASK": "Will you agree to co-sponsor this bill that is so important to your district/state?"



Module 10 How to Get Your Message Heard by Policymakers

Policymakers/legislators are just regular folks! It doesn't matter if it's a school board member, a local or state legislator, or a member of Congress. How you deal with them is pretty much the same. Your goal with any or all of them is to establish an ongoing "personal" relationship that gives you access and hopefully allows you to influence their positions on specific issues related to school social work.

Here are a few basic tips for talking with policymakers:

- I. Do your homework. Before you begin your quest for that important relationship, do the following:
 - C. Focus on the policymakers who represent you. As a constituent, you will more likely have their ear, so make sure you're targeting the right folks.
 - D. Research where the policymaker stands on education issues. You can do that on their websites, by asking key education groups (for example, NEA/AFT affiliates), reading local press, or keeping up with them through their own newsletters.
 - E. Find out on which committees they sit. Local, state, and federal legislative bodies have education and other committees that will be relevant to school social workers.
 - F. Learn why the policymaker's constituents might be supportive of your issues and determine how best to convey that support to the legislator.
 - G. Determine if there are other advocates who might help pave the way for you.
 - H. Research any personal information that might point to a sympathetic legislator. For example, do you know folks who know the legislator or are related? Do your kids swim on the same team? Does he or she have a child with a disability or other "special interest" issues? Is a friend or relative of the legislator in the mental health and/or education field?
- II. Once you've done your homework, you're ready to make the initial step toward forming that relationship. That means requesting a meeting.
 - A. Before any meeting, strategize. It's always best to have at least two people making a visit to a legislative office. And you will most certainly want to have your talking points, including what specifically you might be asking the legislator to do. However, at an initial meeting, you may just want to educate the legislator about school social work and start to lay the foundation before asking for anything specific.
 - B. Don't use jargon or assume the legislator knows anything about



- school social work. It's better to be pleasantly surprised than to assume too much!
- C. You will want to take a passionate, rather than combative, approach, no matter what your research turned up. If you alienate the person or make assumptions based on past votes, you may be missing out on a potential ally.
 - D. Know your issue well, including having data to back up your position.
 - E. Stay on message. Legislators sometimes will try to shift the conversation and ask about totally unrelated issues. Feel free to repeat, "I came here to discuss..." and then move the discussion back to school social work issues!
 - F. Be prepared for the opposing arguments and decide how you might address those.
 - G. Be as good a listener as you are a talker! Also, practice reading body language: Have you hit a sore point? Are you getting your message across? Is it time to wind up the meeting?
 - H. Never be disrespectful or issue ultimatums. Not everyone is going to agree with you.
- III. There are some "procedural" issues you might want to think about.
- A. If the legislator says the party leadership is supporting or opposing the position you're discussing, that legislator most likely is expected to follow the party line. Think in advance of some incremental steps that might be taken to get to your final goal. For example, if you were arguing for a program to hire school social workers, ask for a pilot program in three school districts that would allow data to be gathered on the effectiveness of those SSW services. Those data might lead to a larger program.
 - B. If you are talking about a specific bill, know the bill number and maybe even have a short summary you can pass to the legislator. Be specific about what you want – support, amendments, opposition.
 - C. Feel free to check back, especially if the legislator has given a commitment.
 - D. Always follow up with a thank you note.
- IV. Most important, you want the legislator to see you as a resource.
- A. Nurture that role through regular contacts – new information, reports, data, especially if it is linked to the legislator's constituency. A brief monthly email is a good way to do this.
 - B. Be available, if possible, to testify at hearings or town hall meetings.
 - C. Get to know the legislator's staff. In fact, you may more often meet or talk to staff than to the legislator. That's OK, as long as your



message is getting through. Staff members provide a lot of information and can also exert influence over the legislators.

- D. Remember, lots of "special interests" are trying to reach legislators. You have to convince legislators that YOUR issue is "extra special" and that THEY are critical to making things better for their constituents!



Module 11 How a Bill Becomes a Law

The process of turning a bill into a law is basically the same in state legislatures and in Congress. All but one state legislature (Nebraska) have bicameral legislatures, just like in Congress. Bicameral legislatures have an upper chamber, usually known as the Senate, and a lower chamber (House of Representatives, House of Delegates, or other names). Bills have to wend their way through both chambers before becoming laws.

It's important to understand that hundreds of bills may be introduced during a legislative session. However, only a few will receive any real action. Most are just referred to committees of jurisdiction (see #5) and die when the session ends. Those same bills may be introduced in numerous legislative sessions before ever being acted on, and some will never move beyond the simple introduction.

Here are the basic steps a bill must go through before it is enacted into law:

- I. An issue is raised – by a policymaker, a constituent, or a "special interest."
- II. The legislator decides to introduce a bill.
 - A. The legislator's staff does research on the issue, including talking to advocates like you.
 - B. Hearings may be held in the legislature or in the field to get more information.
- III. Staff members draft the bill.
 - A. Before it is formally introduced, staff members may again solicit information from advocates or other experts on the draft.
 - B. Staff will then tweak the draft based on that input.
- IV. The policymaker introduces the bill.
 - A. Most bills can originate in either chamber of the legislature.
 - B. A similar or exact bill may be introduced at the same time in the other chamber, but not necessarily.
 - C. The sponsor(s) of the bill may give a statement on the floor of the chamber to introduce the bill.
- V. Once the bill is introduced, it is assigned a bill number and is referred to the committee of jurisdiction.
 - A. For example, if it is an education bill, all state legislatures and Congress have an education committee which has jurisdiction over bills pertaining to that topic.
 - B. In some instances, more than one committee may have jurisdiction, so the bill is assigned to all committees with jurisdiction over that issue.
- VI. After the bill is formally introduced, more hearings may be held.
- VII. Next the bill may be "marked up" in the committee(s) of jurisdiction.
 - A. Committee chairmen determine what bills will be placed on the schedule in their committees.



- B. If the chairman decides to call up a bill, the bill gets "marked up" – considered, amended, "reported out" on a positive vote (moving on to the next step), or killed in the committee.
- VIII. A committee report is written if the bill is reported out favorable, with majority and minority explanations of the committee's intent in passing the bill.
- IX. Once the bill clears the committee, it is placed on the calendar for consideration on the floor of the chamber.
 - A. The bill may be considered as a freestanding bill or as an amendment to another bill.
- X. If the bill passes, it is sent to the other chamber for consideration.
- XI. The next step may be a conference committee.
 - A. There may be two different bills on the same topic moving through the two chambers, or the bill may be amended in one or both chambers.
 - B. That results in two similar but not identical bills, which requires a process to reconcile the two versions of the bill called a "conference committee."
 - C. Negotiators from each chamber are assigned to work out the differences and develop a final bill.
- XII. The chambers vote on the final conferenced bill.
- XIII. If the bill passes in both chambers, it is sent to the president who can sign it into law or veto it.
- XIV. If the bill is vetoed, the legislature may attempt to override the president's veto.
- XV. FINALLY, the BILL BECOMES A LAW!