



International Network for School Social Work

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UNICEF and School Social Work

UNICEF has joined together with the **Global Social Service Workforce Alliance** in a technical note on how social workers in schools help to protect children and their right to education. This 40-page document is intended for policy-makers, including government, the United Nations, donors and civil society. It describes the responsibility of the education system to integrate child protection into all schools as part of the obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is the first significant recognition that UNICEF has given to social work as a necessary part of the school system. This is what the report says.

The social service workforce should be integrated into schools and education systems

The key role of the social service workforce needs to be recognized by ministries of education, and they should work together with ministries of social welfare to ensure the integration of the workforce within education structures. In many instances, education staff underestimate or are unaware of the important role of the social service workforce. Education actors need to recognize the role of the social service workforce, and the fulfilment of their wider child protection responsibilities, as not only important in themselves but a means to help school systems meet educational outcomes. The underlying premise of child protection in schools is that it not only upholds children's rights to protection from abuse and violence but supports students' academic progress by removing or reducing barriers to learning, by ensuring that students' basic physical, mental health and psychosocial needs are met first.

The UNICEF website states that: *UNICEF's work is grounded in empirical data, rigorous research and thoughtful analysis.* This technical note **Social Service Workers in Schools** published in March 2022 <https://www.unicef.org/documents/social-service-workers-schools> provides data, research and analysis that you can share with your Ministry of Education to help establish and strengthen school social work in your schools.

UNICEF’s technical note on social services in schools comes at a time when schools are coping with the results of 2 years of stress, social isolation and educational disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving policy-makers eager to employ mental health professionals in schools. Students, families and school staff need support, however eager they are for students to be back at school. This opens the opportunity not only for more positions for school social workers, but also for social workers to help schools take new approaches in dealing with emotional, behavioral and learning problems. Social workers can guide schools toward avoiding labeling students as problems, instead helping to create a comprehensive system of support for the school community. Schools are using the creativity generated during the pandemic to rethink how and what to teach and how to build a better school community. This is a rare opportunity for social workers to innovate.

Rethinking education after Covid-19

During the pandemic, schools discovered that learning could take place anywhere: remotely, out-of-doors, socially distanced. It took creativity to maintain the social aspect of education when school was online. There was less emphasis on tests, more attention to emotional wellbeing and coping with social isolation. Teachers, social workers and other school staff had to accept frequent changes and became creative in how to keep the teaching and learning going. Teachers and students quickly improved skills with technology. Schools became more aware of the students’ mental wellbeing.

One example of an innovative program that blends academic with social and emotional learning is the partnership between the public schools and the Northwest Maritime Center in Washington State in the US <https://nwmartime.org/programs/youth-programs/youth-school/>. Students spend time rowing open wooden boats that are replicas of the longboats of Captain George Vancouver’s expedition that were used in explorations of Puget Sound in 1792. Students learn maritime skills and teamwork, develop self-confidence and learn about the marine environment while rowing strenuously in cold, wet conditions. Many teens learn better in this outdoor environment than in the classroom. The public school students learn maritime skills such as boatbuilding and navigation through this partnership of public school and non-profit organization. Academic, social and emotional learning are combined in ways that are motivating for students, including those who do not excel in traditional classrooms. Mental well-being goes along with this, through the combination of physical activity, social cohesion and experiencing success.



A new article about school social work worldwide.

You can find a global picture of school social work in 2021 in the **International Journal of School Social Work** at <https://newprairiepress.org/ijssw/vol7/iss1/2/>. The journal is seeking practice articles written by practitioners. Here is an opportunity to share your innovative programs with your colleagues around the world.