

School Social Workers: Vital Resources for Student Success

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Dear Superintendent _____,

According to a 2018 research study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals:

“the top ranked concern of Elementary Principals was the increased numbers of students with emotional problems (73.7% of responding principals) followed by students with mental health issues as well as students not performing to their level of potential.” p. 81. “In fact, respondents identified a number of student-related issues as being of moderate, high, and extreme concern. Among those issues identified were the management of student behavior, student mental health issues, absenteeism, lack of effective adult supervision at home, and student poverty. ”¹ p. viii.

If you want an expert to help the school district address the many serious and complex needs of students and families that impede academic success, then look no further than the hidden gem of School Social Workers. School social workers are an important part of our school communities. We are licensed mental health professionals who connect the home, the school, and the community in our quest to address the needs of the whole child so that he/she may succeed educationally. The profession of school social work has been in existence for more than 100 years. As professionals, we have been working on the academic front lines to eliminate barriers that would otherwise prevent students from obtaining the quality education all children inherently deserve.

As trained mental health professionals we know how to recognize, assess and address the most difficult situations including potential threats. With an increase in the number of crises occurring in our schools - including shootings, suicides, gang violence, bullying, as well as a plethora of social ills such as poverty and opioid addiction - the expertise of school social workers is needed now more than ever. We are among the first responders contacted during school crises, focusing on providing mental health and crisis response consultative services to administrators, students, their families, school faculty and the community.

As change agents, school social workers work to address the broader school culture and climate issues including services related to bullying, social emotional learning, positive behavioral supports, and trauma informed schools. School social workers also assess and help link families to community and school-based supports to mitigate barriers that students face that may impact attendance as well as educational success.

School social workers are an integral part of the Specialized Instructional Support Personnel team working collaboratively with school psychologists, school counselors and school nurses as well as serving on progress monitoring teams to help assess and assist students experiencing academic and/or behavioral concerns by providing needed Tier 2 and Tier 3 services. Research confirms that early intervention leads to a wide range of positive outcomes.

If a student is identified as needing special education services, school social workers serve as part of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team providing direct counseling/therapy, designing specific intervention programs as well as positive behavioral intervention support plans, and working closely with parents to support successful academic and behavioral outcomes for students which leads to improved district's overall graduation rate.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) recommend that school systems employ one school social worker per 250 students. We know that in most of our K-12 districts, however, the actual number of school social workers employed is far below this recommendation. According to American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) data, the actual number is more like one school social worker per 2,106 students² - substantially exceeding what is necessary to adequately address the social and emotional needs of students.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter to learn more about school social work and a few of the ways that we work to help get students over the graduation finish line. If you have any questions or would like to learn more about how your school district could benefit more from the services that we provide, please feel free to contact _____ at _____.

Professional Regards,

Name, Credentials, Title

References:

Fuller, E., Young, M., Richardson, M. S., Pendola, A. & Winn, K. (2018) The Pre-K-8 School Leader in 2018 A 10-Year Study [PDF file]. Retrieved from:
https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/NAESP%2010-YEAR%20REPORT_2018.pdf

Whitaker, A. (2019). OPINION: 1.7 million students attend schools with police but no counselor—ACLU Report. *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from:
<https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-7-million-attend-schools-with-police-but-no-counselor-aclu-report/>

School Social Workers are “trained mental health professionals who are prepared to recognize and respond to student mental health crises and needs as well as provide support to administration and staff when school crises occur,” (NASW, 2013)

For more information log into <https://www.socialworkers.org/>

“School Social Workers are licensed and/or certified mental health providers serving diverse groups of students, families, schools, and communities. School Social Workers provide evidence-based behavioral, social emotional, and mental health services. School Social Workers promote a safe and equitable school climate and culture supporting positive academic and behavioral outcomes. School Social Workers collaborate with school and community resources empowering students to reach their full potential” School Social Work Association of America, 2019

For more information log into <http://sswaa.org>