

School Social Workers: Essential to North Carolina Schools

What do school social workers do?

- School social workers help students deal with a wide range of challenges such as **failing grades, bullying, violence, thoughts of suicide and other mental health issues, chronic absenteeism and difficult home situations.**
- School social workers are trained and licensed professionals who provide a link between the home, school and community through support services that **positively impact the development of the whole child.**
- School social workers, with their crisis management expertise, clinical proficiency and leadership skills, are **uniquely positioned to assist all members of the educational community when a crisis occurs.**
- School social workers are experts in research-based school discipline policy development that can **increase school connectedness and decrease incidents of school violence.**

The Need for School Social Workers:

- Between **18-20% of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment** to major life functions, only 1 in 5 receive the necessary services.
- Students with disabilities, students of color, and students from low-income families, are at greater risk for mental health challenges, but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services.
- Students with untreated mental health issues may develop more significant problems which can greatly impact their educational experience and result in poor educational outcomes including the possibility of dropping out of school.

School social workers address all these needs.

National Standards for School Social Work Services

According to the National Association of Social Workers, school social work services should be provided at a ratio of **one school social worker per 250 students.** When a social worker is providing **services to students with intensive needs, a lower ratio, such as 1:50,** is suggested.

In 2021, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) reported the ratio in North Carolina to be one school social worker to 1,289 students. Ratio of school social workers varies wildly across the state.

North Carolina Details

DPI issues licenses for practicing school social workers. The following schools are *some* of the approved programs to recommend graduates for the license: East Carolina University, North Carolina A&T State University, NC State University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Greensboro, and Western Carolina University.

School Social Workers may hold a bachelors (BSW) or masters (MSW) degree in social work. Some school

districts may hire Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW). Despite the master's level education and clinical mental health expertise, most social workers are paid on the bachelor's level for teachers.

As of 2021, DPI reported that **20 counties in North Carolina reported only having one school social worker for the entire county**. In areas that do have school social workers, many are split between schools. In 2021, there were 1,216 full time equivalent school social work positions in the state.

In 2017, the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force endorsed efforts to appropriate \$100,000 in recurring funds for a full time School Social Worker Consultant to be housed in DPI Student Support Services to provide coordination, training, support, and data collection for school social. Despite not receiving this state funding, DPI internally adjusted their budget and in December of 2019, **hired the first School Social Work Consultant in a decade**.

A few roles school social workers provide to their communities while working directly with students and their families:

- Crisis interventions
- Partner with community agencies like LME/MCOs
- Clinical behavioral health services (if a licensed clinician)
- Consult in areas of mental health
- Conduct home visits
- Case management services including, but not limited to, referrals to community resources, collaboration with other professionals
- Consults regarding home/community factors impinging upon a student's education such as homelessness and child abuse and neglect
- IEP services for special education
- Initiate and facilitate Child and Family Team meetings
- Provide crisis management services, including assessing for safety
- Therapeutic interventions such as individual, family or group therapy regarding specific issues

These Services Result in:

- Better academic achievement
- Lower dropout rates
- Increased school attendance
- Decreased school violence
- Decreased discipline problems

References and Additional Resources

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, [School Mental Health Support Personnel Staffing, 2021](#)

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