

Tennessee School Social Workers

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

School social workers have demonstrated their ability to drive continued success in Tennessee schools by preparing students for postsecondary and career success and by ensuring more equitable opportunities for all students. However, forty-three (43) percent of school districts in Tennessee do not have school social worker coverage. We look forward to this concern being initially addressed through two actions required by a new law (Public Chapter 844) passed this year by the Tennessee General Assembly. Public Chapter 844 stipulates that the BEP Review Committee will analyze the addition of a component for school social workers to the BEP funding formula and will include this analysis in their 2018 annual report. The legislation also establishes an on-going student support collaborative led by the Tennessee Department of Education. This new collaborative will review and refine the roles and responsibilities for school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses. The collaborative will also identify available resources and areas that school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses can collaborate to provide high quality support to students.

Who are School Social Workers?

School Social Workers are professional school service personnel licensed by the Tennessee Department of Education that provide a critical link between school, home, and community. These professionals improve academic achievement by preparing students to be mentally, physically, and emotionally present in the classroom. School social workers have a baccalaureate or master's degree from an accredited social work program, and also have completed classroom instruction and internship training that orients them to the needs of students, the school environment and relevant state and federal laws.

How School Social Workers Improve Outcomes for Children and Youth

- Typically trained in violence prevention and the ability to use research to inform practice, school social workers have the tools to understand, develop, and implement school safety strategies that have minimal harmful effects on students and the school environment.^{1 2}
- A study on school social work services in the U.S., which included Metro-Nashville, Knox County, Memphis, and Shelby County Schools, showed that the number of school social workers in a school district positively influences the number of students that complete high school.³
- High school and middle school students receiving school social work services in two U.S. rural districts

had an average of 24% fewer absences and an average of 40% less behavioral referrals after beginning services.⁴

- “We were sending out hundreds of letters from our attendance office weekly, notifying parents of 5 day and 10 day absences. With the hiring of four social workers, who are speaking to and connecting families to resources, those attendance letters were decreased to only 12 letters.” – Kim Guinn, Anderson County Schools AWARE Director
- Youths receiving school social work services displayed significant increases in their satisfaction with school, their self-esteem, and their perceptions of both their academic performance and the supportiveness of their home environments.⁵
- School social workers implementing Tier 2 interventions with students considered to be at-risk found significantly improved self-esteem, self-control, classroom behavior, improved emotional awareness, coping skills, academic performance, and homework completion.⁶

Current Status of School Social Work

- During the 2016-17 school year, a total of 440 school social workers were employed in TN, the majority serving urban area schools⁷
- 43% of TN school districts do not have school social workers⁷
- 70.5% of TN counties do not employ 1 school social worker per 2,000 students^{7 8}

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Changing Needs of Tennessee Children and Youth

School Violence

- From 2014-16, a total of 26,828 offenses that included 19,145 victims were reported by Tennessee Law Enforcement agencies at a school location¹⁰
- As of February 28th, there have been 19 gun-related incidents on the grounds of a U.S. elementary, middle, or high school in 2018¹¹
- Witnessing violence can lead to toxic stress, trauma, and a negative impact on brain development in youth¹²

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- More than 1 in 6 Tennesseans report a score of four or more ACEs¹²
- The future economic development and prosperity of the state depends on what we do now to prevent these and wrap services around children and families¹²

Chronic Absenteeism

- 16% of Tennessee ninth-graders were chronically absent in 2015-16¹³
- Chronically absent students are less likely to read on grade level at the end of 3rd grade¹³
- More than 63,000 students in Tennessee missed school time in 2015 for disciplinary infractions¹³

Mental Health

- Approximately 1 in 6 school-aged youth experience impairments due to mental illness¹⁴
- The number of ADHD/ADD diagnoses in Tennessee have increased by 167 percent from 2004-05 to 2015-16¹⁵

Poverty

- In Tennessee, 1 in 4 students under the age of 18 are living in poverty¹⁶
- Economically disadvantaged students are 3x more likely to be chronically absent in elementary schools than their non-economically disadvantaged peers¹⁷

Addiction Epidemic

- Tennessee ranks 2nd in the U.S. for the rate of opioids sold¹⁸
- In 2012, Tennessee 10th and 12th graders stated the average age at which they first abused prescription opioids was 14¹⁸
- In 2013, an estimated 26,000 children ages 12-17 were dependent on or abusing illicit drugs or alcohol in Tennessee¹⁹

Suicide

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in young people (ages 10-19) in Tennessee²⁰
- With educators trained to recognize youth who exhibit signs of contemplating suicide, we have a good chance to identify and help youth at risk for suicide²¹

Bullying

- In the 2014-15 school year, there were 9,678 cases of bullying in Tennessee²²
- The percentage of cyberbullying cases rose from 6.5% in 2013-14 to 7.8% in 2014-15²²

Homelessness

- There was a 15% increase in the number of homeless children and youth from the 2014-15 school year to the 2015-16 school year²³
- Unaccompanied homeless youth have increased from 617 to 759 in those years²³
- With increasing population, links to housing and community resources are essential

Teen Pregnancy

- In 2016 there were more than 32 teen pregnancies per 1,000 females aged 15-19 in Tennessee²⁴
- Racial and ethnic disparities in teen pregnancy persist¹²

Gaps in Academic Achievement

- In 2015, 88 percent of African-Americans and 81 percent of Latinos were below proficient level in eighth grade²⁵
- The rates for African-American students who did not graduate from high school are more than twice as high as non-Hispanic white students²⁵
- Approximately 50,000 English Learners are enrolled in Tennessee schools¹³

¹Cuellar, M., Elswick, S., Theriot, M. (2017). School Social Workers Perceptions of School Safety and Security in Today's Schools. ²Strong, K. & Cornell, D. (2008). Student Threat Assessment in Memphis City Schools: A Descriptive Report ³Alvarez, M., Bye, L., Bryant, R. & Mumm, A.M. (2013). School Social Workers and Educational Outcomes. ⁴Heinrich, B. (2017). Evaluation of the Impact of Social Work Services in Rural School Districts. ⁵Newsome, W.S., Anderson-Butcher, D., Fink, J., Hall, L. & Huffer, J. (2008). The Impact of School Social Work Services on Student Absenteeism and Truancy. ⁶Allen-Mearns, P., Montgomery, K. & Kim, J. (2013). School-based Social Work Interventions: A Cross-National Systemic Review. ⁷Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Coordinated School Health (2017). Annual Report 2016-17 School Year. ⁸Tennessee Department of Education (2017). Annual Statistical Report for the 2016-17 School Year. ⁹Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (October 2017). Tennessee AWARE Annual Performance Report Grant Year 3 2016-17. ¹⁰Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (2017). School Crime 2014-2016. ¹¹Gun Violence Archives (February 28, 2018). Online Archive of Gun Violence Incidents. Retrieved from www.gunviolencearchive.org ¹²Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (July 2017). Kids Count: The State of the Child in Tennessee 2016. ¹³State Collaborative on Reforming Education (February 2017). 2016-17 State of Education in Tennessee. ¹⁴Perou R, Bitsko RH, Blumberg SJ, et al. (2013). Mental health surveillance among children—United States, 2005-2011. ¹⁵Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Coordinated School Health (2016). Annual Report 2015-16 School Year. ¹⁶U.S. Census Bureau (2014). American Community Survey. ¹⁷Tennessee Department of Education (February 2016). Chronic Absenteeism in Tennessee's Early Grades. Division of Data and Research. ¹⁸Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (2014). Prescription Drug Epidemic in Tennessee. Retrieved from www.tn.gov ¹⁹Child Welfare League of America (2015). Tennessee's Children 2015. ²⁰Tennessee Department of Health (2015). Tennessee Death Certificate Data 2013. Nashville, TN: TDOH Office of Health Statistics and Research. ²¹Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (2017). Suicide Prevention. Retrieved from www.tn.gov ²²Tennessee Department of Education (December 2015). Bullying and Harassment Compliance Report. ²³National Center for Homeless Education and U.S. Department of Education (2016). Tennessee: Number of Homeless Youth Enrolled in Public School by Year. ²⁴Tennessee Department of Health (2017). 2016 Resident Data: Number of Pregnancies with Rate per 1,000 Females aged 15-19, by Race. ²⁵Annie E. Casey Foundation (2017). 2017 Kids Count Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being.