

Codifying School Social Work Services

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Background

Many Texas school children face significant obstacles to learning, such as mental health needs, bullying, child abuse, community violence, and other personal crises. These challenges can go unnoticed without early identification and worsen without timely intervention from professionally trained staff. School social workers are uniquely trained to provide social work services that identify and address these complex problems to meet the needs of students and their families, and the surrounding community. However, the Texas Education Code does not include a definition for school social work services. **Defining school social work services can provide school districts with guidance in understanding the wide range of services these professionals can offer—allowing teachers and administrators to focus on their work yet still providing valuable assistance and support to students.** This is especially needed as more schools bring social workers to their campuses to support students' mental health needs and prevent school violence.

Quick Facts

- Texas ranks 41 out of 50 states for overall youth mental health.¹
- The recommended ratio for school social workers to students is 1:250.
- In the 2019-2020 academic year there were approximately 5,309 Texas students for every one school social worker employed in our state.²

What are School Social Work Services?

Social workers have special expertise in understanding family and community systems and linking students and their families with local resources that enable student success. **Their work is centered on removing barriers to learning by engaging parents and caregivers at every opportunity to support student's needs—whether its truancy prevention, teaching coping skills, managing behavior from ongoing stress and anxiety, or access to food assistance.** What's more, school social workers collaborate with counselors and campus staff to identify evidence-based practices for maintaining an effective and safe learning environment.

Codifying a Definition Would:

- Define the scope of school social work services.
- Enable school social workers to dedicate their time to the above defined duties.
- Ensure school districts retain the option to voluntarily hire social workers and have no fiscal impact to the state.

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¹ "Mental Health America Youth Ranking Data 2022," Mental Health America. <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/2022/mental-health-america-youth-data>

² Tex. Education Agency, Open Records Request Number of State Employed School Social Workers (received 2020) (on file with author).