



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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Kathleen Greider
Superintendent of Schools
Farmington Public Schools
1 Monteith Drive
Farmington, CT 06032

Dear Superintendent Greider:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut chapter, representing nearly 2700 members we are writing you to express our concern with the replacement of school social workers with school psychologists as positions open up. An effective mental health approach for schools demands both school social workers and school psychologists, not one profession over the other.

Children today have more stress than ever before that place increasing numbers of children at risk. School social workers can help children learn ways of adapting to stressful situations before maladaptive coping skills are established. It has been shown that children with healthy adaptive coping skills to stress have higher attendance rates, decreased drop-out rates, higher test scores and higher self-esteem. School social workers are the **one discipline in a school system** that proactively addresses academic barriers within the child's home, school and community. School social workers serve as a catalyst to bring people together to create an environment conducive to learning.

According to the National Mental Health Association, less than 1 in 5 of the 12.5 million children in need of mental health services actually receive them. Many of these children will not achieve academic success due to social, emotional and behavioral problems affecting school performance. School social workers can help these students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. School social workers address issues of bullying, crisis intervention, drug use, counseling, conflict resolution, issues of self-esteem, child neglect and abuse, working to connect students with needed services, and the list goes on. These are services that benefit the student, the student's family, teachers, and administrators. However services once dismantled are not easily gained back and school systems that have reduced or eliminated school social workers quickly find that they need the social workers and ultimately have the expense of rehiring social work staff. **Four years ago Avon Public Schools replaced their social workers with school psychologists. Three years later (2017-18 school**

year) Avon Public Schools brought back school social workers as they realized that school psychologists complemented but did not fulfill the roles of a school social worker.

Focusing on students is a key aspect of school social work practice however it is just one of several important parts played by school social workers. Social workers are pro-actively involved in working with parents to enhance parent involvement, assuring families have information and access to community services, and collaborating with outside agencies such as the Department of Children and Families all are part of a school social workers typical day. Teachers and school administrators also benefit, in multiple ways, from having available school social workers as a resource, including helping to explain how family dynamics are affecting academic performance, coordinating services, and assisting in developing individual educational goals and the means to help the student attain those goals.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of trauma, fears of being bullied, and in this economy where so many families are struggling to get by those concerns press on the student's mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom. School social workers break through these barriers by providing students with the coping skills and support necessary to allow learning to take place.

At a time when school safety and security is on all of our minds please know that school social workers are part of the answer to secure schools. School social workers pro-actively identify children with mental health and social development needs and when school social workers are in the elementary schools such identification and referral to treatment can be made early on when intervention is most successful.

The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission and the Keep the Promise Coalition all have endorsed expansion of school social work services to address the mental health needs of school children. It would be most unfortunate if the Farmington Public Schools chooses to continue to move in reverse of these well founded recommendations.

In regards to the school psychologists, we recognize the value of school psychologists, however they do not function in the same capacity of school social workers. The two professions complement each other, but are not interchangeable parts. School psychologists are master level trained personnel, as are school social workers, however school psychologists (unlike a licensed clinical psychologist) cannot diagnose and treat, whereas licensed social workers can. A collaborative approach between the professions is what is needed and was recognized in Avon schools when the school psychologists reportedly did not support the decision to eliminate the school social work positions.

Often (as reported by students) when middle school and high school students are told they need to see the school psychologist there is resistance to seeing a psychologist.

Interestingly, students do not report the same about school social workers. Perceptions matter and can become a deterrent to the student seeking help when most needed. Having both school social workers and school psychologists in the school alleviates this problem.

I have enclosed copy from a National Association of Social Workers brochure on School Social Workers that further illustrates the diversified roles performed by school social workers.

As Superintendent of the Farmington Public Schools I know that you have a deep commitment to the children in your school district. Your district's school social workers share in that goal of educating and graduating students who are prepared for a successful future.

NASW/CT respectfully requests that the decision to hire school psychologists when a school social worker position comes available be reversed and that school social work positions be filled with certified school social workers. Thank you for consideration of this most important matter. If I may be of further resource to you please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Karp, LMSW
Executive Director