

November 18, 2016

Dear Superintendent:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut chapter, representing nearly 2700 members we are writing to share with you valuable information as to the importance of having school social workers in your schools.

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, conflict resolution, issues of self-esteem, child neglect and abuse, and attendance. Working with families and connecting students/parents with needed community services is the role of a school social worker, and these are just some examples of the functions performed by school social workers. The work of school social workers benefits students, student's family, teachers, and administrators.

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 are all 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 issues 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 poor 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 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.

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.

The National Association of Social Workers has set the minimum recommended ratio of students to social worker at 250/1 and for special needs children 150/1. We encourage your district to work toward this national standard, by hiring and maintaining a sufficient workforce of school social workers.

I have enclosed copy *School Social Workers Enhancing School Success For All Students*, a NASW brochure that further illustrates the diversified roles performed by school social workers. If you have questions on the value of having school social workers in your schools please do not hesitate to contact me. Together we can best meet the mental health needs of today's school children, helping children to become productive and successful students.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Karp, LMSW  
Executive Director