

# MINNESOTA SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATION LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2010-2011

## ***WHO ARE WE? :***

The Minnesota School Social Workers' Association (MSSWA) has been serving children in their schools, homes and communities for over 40 years. We are an association of school social workers throughout Minnesota who work with students and their families to provide mental health related services and support in the school system. Although our jobs differ between districts statewide, we are united in our common goal of working with the "whole child," MSSWA defines "whole child" as working with the child in his/her environment with consideration to family, community, values, culture and language. We help teachers teach by reducing the social and emotional barriers to learning by collaborating in the development of academic intervention plans to ensure student success. **Because of their unique understanding of both the mental health system and the educational system, school social workers play a vital role in our schools by helping students succeed.**

## ***HOW ARE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES COST EFFECTIVE? :***

- School social workers are qualified to provide: crisis prevention and intervention, therapeutic services, parent/guardian education and training, case management, advocacy, and collaboration and coordination of programs specific to student needs.
- School social workers address the social and emotional needs of ***all students*** in their school(s) which includes students whose needs may require special education support as well as students within the general education setting.
- Interventions provided through school social work services have shown improved student attendance, reduction of child abuse and neglect, improved graduation rates and early identification of a disability. These factors are directly related to increased student achievement.
- Minnesota school social workers are dual licensed by the Board of Social Work and the Department of Education to provide mental health services in schools.
- Our practice is guided by the Board of Social Work Code of Ethics, as well as School Social Work standards set forth by the National Association of Social Workers.

## ***WHY MSSWA ADVOCATES FOR SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:***

- Up to three quarters of U.S. children receiving professional care for a mental health problem obtained services through a school based program. Research and statistics prove that mental health needs of children affect a child's academic success.
- The Minnesota School Social Workers' Association supports the **adequate provision of school employed mental health services in schools provided by licensed social work professionals and practitioners.**
- We support **additional social work services** in Minnesota schools due to the increase in needs of the students who attend public schools.
- Licensed social workers are qualified to provide services that address the emotional and mental health needs of all students, to inform educators and families about children's mental health issues, and to collaborate with community resources to support children and their families.
- We support the ability for mental health professionals employed by schools **to seek third party reimbursement for mental health services provided.**

## ***MSSWA LEGISLATIVE FOCUS FOR 2011:***

### **A. STATE LEGISLATION:**

- **125A.02 Child with a Disability Defined Subdivision 1.** A mental health professional which may include a licensed physician, an advanced practice nurse, a licensed psychologist or a *licensed clinical social worker* is qualified to make a diagnosis and determination of attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder for purposes of identifying a child with a disability. The intention of this bill is to make sure that professionals already by statute, legally able to diagnose ADHD are able to have that diagnosis accepted by schools for the purposes of Special Education support to **include licensed clinical social workers. Status: Legislative Committee is meeting with stakeholders as well as Education Committee members regarding this bill with the intent that legislators will vote yes to change to the proposed a change in the 125A.02 Child with a Disability defined statute to align the definition of a Mental Health Professional as defined in 245.4871 with who is able to diagnose ADHD for the use in special education during the 2012 session.**
- **Safe Schools for ALL.** Current MN law requires school districts to have a policy that prohibits harassment based on race, sex, and religion. The Safe Schools for All Bill would expand the list of protected classes to

include disability, national origin, sexual orientation and other Minnesota Human Rights Act protected classes, bringing the law in line with the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The bill would also require protections based on physical characteristics. Unfortunately, Minnesota has lost several youth to suicide resulting from the devastating impact of bullying and harassment. **Action Requested:** Please vote yes to support the **Safe Schools for All Bill**, sponsored by Sen. Dibble.

- **Maintenance of Effort outlined in Minnesota Statute 126C.44 Safe Schools Levy** This statute states that a portion of the levied proceeds must be reserved and used for direct funding associated with resources to provide a safe learning environment such as “paying for the costs for licensed school psychologists, licensed school social workers, licensed school nurses, licensed school counselors and licensed alcohol and chemical dependency counselors to help provide early responses to problems” (Statute 126C,44 Safe Schools Levy Section a 6). **Action Requested:** Please vote no to any legislation that eliminates this safeguard.

## **B. NATIONAL LEGISLATION:**

- **Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, currently authorized as the No Child Left Behind Act):** All students should have appropriate quality specialized instructional support services, including school social work services, to enable them to be successful in school and beyond. **Action Requested:** Include all SSWAA recommendations in the reauthorized ESEA, including (a) changing the terms "pupil services" (ESEA) and "related services" (IDEA) to the uniform term "specialized instructional support personnel," and (b) establishing an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services in the U.S. Department of Education. Co-sponsor H.R.2597 and H.R. 3900. These bills include the establishment of the Office and the change in terminology noted above.
- **Increasing Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act, H.R. 1361/S. 538 (Sponsors: Rep. Edolphus Towns; Sen. Blanche Lincoln):** This legislation increases the number of school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists in areas served by low-income school districts through grants to graduate training institutions in partnership with low-income districts and provides other incentives to recruit and retain these professionals. **Action Requested:** Please support the Increasing Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act.

- **The Safe Schools Improvement Act** would amend the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act to include specific provisions to prevent bullying and harassment. It would require states and districts to include information regarding the prevalence of bullying and harassment in schools as part of the needs assessments they are already required to complete. Inclusion of this data will help ensure that schools and districts are properly equipped to handle bullying and harassment. In addition, the Safe Schools Improvement Act would require every school to include policies to address bullying and harassment in their codes of conduct. Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), and Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), introduced this legislation that would equip schools with the resources they need to prevent school bullying and harassment. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would promote a safe learning environment and reduce the nation's growing drop-out rate. **Action Requested:** Please vote yes to amend the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act to include specific provisions to prevent bullying.
  
- **Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) (Title V, Subpart 2, Sec. 5421, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001):** ESSCP is the only federal program providing support to school districts to expand and enhance critical school counseling programs, specifically the services of school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists. **Action Requested:** Maintain the ESSCP as a single grant program. For FY11, provide at a minimum, a funding level of \$61.5 million