

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS IN COORDINATED SERVICES

By Debra Schreiner-Brecht, Kathy Lowry, Anne McInerney, and Pat Juaire
Minnesota School Social Work Association

Cindy Shevlin-Woodcock
Minnesota Department of Education

The National Association of Social Workers (Standard #14) states: "social workers as systems change agents shall identify areas of need (and) work collaboratively to create services." It is the position of the Minnesota School Social Work Association that school social workers are uniquely qualified and positioned to mobilize the resources of local education and community agencies, working across systems to meet the needs of students and families.

History of Social Work

Social work history is rich with examples of coordinated services. In the early 19th century, social workers worked with immigrant families in large industrial cities to develop needed services. This was accomplished through collaboration and coordination with school and community leaders, politicians, clergy, and employers. Social work services at school began when "visiting teachers" made home visits to parents and their students. This communication resulted in better attendance and school success.

School social workers today continue this rich tradition, with a central focus on coordination of services. Training and standards of practice provide the framework that defines this role.

Social Work Training and Standards of Practice

Minnesota school social workers have a Bachelor's or Master's Degree in Social Work, and are licensed by both the Board of Teaching and the Board of Social Work. Professional preparation and experience in problem-solving, systems theory, empowerment perspective, and strengths-based approach give school social workers the training necessary to facilitate the coordination of services for students and their families.

Social workers follow standards of practice determined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Several standards, including #14 in the opening paragraph, speak to the role of social workers in collaboration and coordination of services. Standard #9 states, "social workers shall work collaboratively to mobilize the resources of local education and community agencies to meet the needs of students and families."

IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, states that school social work services include "mobilizing school and community resources to enable the child to learn as effectively as possible in his or her educational program" and that school social workers "work in partnership with parents and others on those problems in a child's living situation (home, school, and community) that affect the child's adjustment to school."

Finally, one of eight objectives in Minnesota Statute 125A.023 states that school social workers should "coordinate multi-disciplinary evaluation and assessment of children with disabilities."

How School Social Workers' Provide Coordination of Services

Given their training and standards, school social workers are uniquely positioned within the school community to provide coordination of services to students and their families. They are an integral part of the school team, and understand school, family, and social systems. School social workers focus on both internal and external factors that influence learning. They are skilled in bringing diverse individuals or groups together, fostering an environment that is safe and respectful.

The coordination of services begins when the school social worker learns of a student experiencing difficulties at school. The school social worker then provides leadership to:

- 1) Help determine the area(s) of concern affecting school progress. At this point the student may begin to receive individual or group counseling/therapy with the school social worker.
- 2) Identify school personnel, family members, and/or agencies who could be helpful as part of a collaborative team.
- 3) Bring the identified team together to facilitate communication and joint planning in identifying strengths and areas of concern, goals, strategies, including the active role of each team member in supporting the plan.
- 4) Work to create resources and/or services that are not yet available.
- 5) Monitor the action plan by communicating with team members.

6) Call a meeting of the team to share information, evaluate progress of plan, and make necessary changes.

Conclusion

School social workers are trained, qualified professionals who work with families and communities to coordinate services across systems. These services are necessary to help children and youth achieve success in the academic setting, secure future employment, and promote good citizenship.

School social workers are an integral part of the interagency service system in every community.

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