**Minnesota School Social Workers Association**

**2022 Legislative Agenda**

***MSSWA LEGISLATIVE GOALS:***

***To promote the social, emotional and educational well-being of children and families.***

***To strengthen the profession of School Social Work.***

The Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA) has been serving children in their schools, homes and communities for over 50 years. We are an association of licensed school social workers throughout Minnesota who work with students and their families providing *“a focused reach to support* ***all*** *students specifically in areas of social-emotional learning and mental health needs, and are uniquely trained to integrate the school, community, and family context into interventions and resource referrals.”* (SSWAA, 2021). Although the roles and responsibilities of school social workers vary between districts statewide, we are united in our common goal of working with the “whole child”. MSSWA defines the “whole child” as working with the child in his/her/their environment with consideration to family, community, values, culture and language. Research shows that school social workers are instrumental in furthering the mission of the schools which is to provide a setting for teaching, learning, and for the attainment of competence and confidence through interventions that reduce barriers to learning enabling students to be physically, mentally, and emotionally present and ready to learn in the classrooms.

***QUALIFICATIONS OF THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER:***

MN School social workers are mental health practitioners and professionals, as defined by [Minnesota Statute 245.462 Subdivision 17 and 18](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/245.462), who meet Minnesota requirements to practice social work in the school setting. School social workers are uniquely positioned through our specialized training, knowledge and expertise to address the mental health needs of children within the school environment. School social workers operate under a scope of practice dependent upon their education, training, and level of licensure obtained by the Minnesota Board of Social Work. Minnesota school social workers are dual licensed by the **Minnesota Board of Social Work and the Professional Educators Licensing and Standards Board.** Nationally a Master's of Social Work (MSW) Degree is required to practice school social work and most school districts in MN require a MSW due to the advanced training in mental health.

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***THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER:***

* School social workers not only provide services to individuals, groups of students and families but also collaborate and coordinate with community agencies or other professionals (***such as school-linked mental health professionals***) to provide the necessary resources to meet student needs.
* School social workers address the social, emotional, physical and academic needs of ***ALL STUDENTS*** including students whose needs require special education support and services as well as students within the general education setting.
* School social workers often focus on providing support to vulnerable populations of students at high risk for truancy and dropping out of school, such as homelessness, students in foster placement, migrant children, students transitioning between school and treatment programs or the juvenile justice system, or students experiencing domestic violence. (SSWAA, 2020)
* School social workers serve as a resource to administrators and other educators providing consultation and training on identifying students with mental health needs and a referral process when services are sought.

***MSSWA 2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES***

1. **Elevating and diversifying the social work profession:**
   1. Ensure congruence in mental health laws so that social workers are recognized as mental health providers consistently in state statutes.
   2. Close loopholes that allow services to create new job titles with similar expectations as social workers, working around licensing laws.
   3. Pursue opportunities to make social work education more affordable and accessible.
2. **Medical Assistance Reimbursement for Mental Health Services provided by School Social Workers on IEP's.** *MSSWA supports including reimbursement for school social work services that are part of an Individual Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) which provides additional funding for school social work services to students with a disability.* 
   1. In order to maximize federal reimbursement, Minnesota requires school districts to seek medical assistance (MA) reimbursement for health-related services that are provided as part of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) IFSP Individualized Family Support Plan.
   2. Services including ***school social work services*** exist in statute 256B.0625 as reimbursable through Medicaid for eligible students.
   3. School social workers who are qualified mental health professionals and practitioners are currently providing Medicaid eligible behavioral health services but are not able to access federal Medicaid dollars under MN criteria.
   4. If Minnesota schools were able to access Federal Medicaid funding using the Special Education criteria, **like all other health related services**, schools would have more resources to support mental health providers such as school social workers in the school.
   5. Surrounding states including Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa do allow reimbursement for school social work services and have generated additional revenue. Wisconsin generates approximately $8 million annually in federal reimbursement and Illinois estimates that they receive between $15 to $20 million annually in additional revenue.
3. **Funding for Specialized Instructional Support Personnel** - MSSWA supports Governor Walz’s recommendation to invest in funding to address shortages of school support personnel services. This funding will benefit students’ social, emotional, academic, and physical health through additional support personnel positions within district and charter schools, as well as dedicated staff at the Department of Education.
4. **Mental Health Services and Early Childhood Social Workers -** MSSWA supports the Governor’s funding recommendation for social workers focused solely on early childhood systems, like early intervention school social workers, Head Start, and early Head Start. Early care and education can strengthen programs within these systems and improve outcomes for participating children and families
5. **School Based Mental Health Screening -** MSSWA supports the Governor’s recommendation to fund a statewide implementation of mental health screening and referral systems in schools by school-based mental health staff, including school administrators, to ensure the mental health and well-being of Minnesota students and staff. Funds will be provided to school districts, charter schools and tribal schools, through a per pupil allocation based on K-12 enrollment count, to obtain professional development on mental health screening of students and school staff well-being self-assessments, procure needed resources and supplies, pay for school staff and time conducting student mental health screening and school staff well-being self-assessments, and other expenses in implementing systems for mental health screening of students and school staff well-being self-assessments.
6. **MTSS Equity Centered Model of Service Delivery -** MSSWA leaders participated in a MDE work group in 2020-2021 dedicated to developing an equity centered approach to MTSS. A definition for a Culturally Responsive Equity Centered MTSS Model was offered to the legislature last year and did not pass. It will be proposed again this legislative session. This aligns with MSSWA’s commitment to our ethical responsibility as social workers.