

CHAPTER III
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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Peer Group Consultation

Chapter III: Professional Development

Objective: To provide guidance to school administrators when recruiting and providing supervision to school social workers and to make suggestions for professional development activities pertinent to school social work practices in the school environment.

Introduction

The purpose for this chapter is two-fold. It is intended to provide guidance to school administrators when recruiting and supervising school social workers. An example job description, interview questions and performance evaluation plan are included. These tools need to reflect the actual role and responsibilities required of the school social worker by the setting in which they practice. School social work positions differ depending on the needs of the student population being served, as well as the school's unique needs. Therefore, responsibilities would also differ and would need to be made clear upon hiring.

The second purpose is to offer suggested processes for professional development activities that are tied to social work practice within the school environment. Two such models are the development of a professional development plan and peer group consultation. 22

Sample School Social Worker Job Description

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:

- Bachelor's Degree in Social Work
- Minnesota Board of Social Work Licensure (LSW) Minnesota Board of Teaching Licensure

PREFERRED (ADDITIONAL) QUALIFICATIONS:

- Master's Degree in Social Work
- Minnesota Board of Social Work Licensure, Clinical Level (LICSW) Experience working with children and families, especially in a school setting

JOB GOAL:

- To maximize school success by addressing and impacting students'

RESPONSIBILITIES: (will vary across settings)*

1. Assess student functioning, both formally and informally, in home, school and community, identifying factors that may negatively impact a student's education while also assessing strengths.
2. Provide counseling to individuals and groups and their families, using appropriate therapeutic strategies.
3. Promote consistent school attendance.
4. Provide crisis intervention services for students, demonstrating skill in diagnosing and recommending appropriate treatment for mental health/behavioral needs.
5. Consult and collaborate effectively with community agencies and other mental health professionals to coordinate service.
6. Actively participate in multidisciplinary teams, and provide consultation to school personnel regarding home, neighborhood and community conditions that may affect student well-being.
7. Demonstrate knowledge of district, state and federal policies, including due process guidelines and child abuse/neglect reporting.
8. Maintain records and billing in a manner consistent with district practices.
9. Maintain functional office area with materials accessible and organized.
10. Prioritize school social work needs and manage time accordingly.
11. Uphold the ethical standards of the Social Work profession.

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Sample Interview Questions for School Social Worker Positions*

Applicant's Name _____

Date _____

(MAY RATE EACH QUESTION 1-5)

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

1. Describe your education and how it may have helped prepare you for this position.
2. Please tell us about your background in working with children who exhibit social/emotional problems in a school or other setting.
3. Have you had a practicum/internship or related experience in school social work? If so, describe your tasks and responsibilities and what you learned from this experience.
4. What do you think the role of the school social worker is in:
 - a. An IEP meeting
 - b. Developing a positive school climate
 - c. Reporting abuse/neglect

SKILLS

5. Describe how you would assess the needs of a child who is being referred by a classroom teacher or by a parent.
6. How might you use technology to help you be more efficiently?
7. How important is race, ethnicity, cultural and social factors when assessing a student for special education? Describe how you might relay this to the team.

SCENARIOS

8. You have been asked to facilitate a small group to teach social skills. How would you proceed?
9. A junior high girl told her teacher that a friend of hers told her she was going to kill herself. The teacher told you. What do you do?
10. A parent of one of the students you work with on an IEP is calling you and the teacher at least weekly, saying he is upset with his child's program, and is bad-mouthing the teacher to you. What steps might you take to resolve this conflict?
11. You hear from a teacher that "Jimmy" has increasingly aggressive behavior toward others. He is not on an IEP. The teacher has asked him to stop, but the situation is getting worse. How would you handle this?
12. There is chatter about certain students in the teachers' lounge that you feel is inappropriate. Tell what you know about the Data Privacy Act and how you might handle this kind of situation.

*Questions should be changed or added to fit your school's SSW position needs.

Sample Rating Instrument for School Social Workers

SCHOOL YEAR _____

DATE _____

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER _____

EVALUATOR _____

Instructions: Mark a “B” indicating Below Standard, an “M” for Meets Standard, and an “E” for Exceeds Standard. Evaluator may also indicate movement toward the next level, such as “M-E,” as well as add appropriate comments in the Notes section.

1. GENERAL SSW SERVICES

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers utilize social work skills that commensurate with professional social work standards as outlined by NASW guidelines.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Social work service is disorganized or poorly defined	Develops, manages and implements effective school social work services	Social work service is recognized as highly effective throughout the school and community	
Uses time ineffectively, not based on prioritized school social work needs	Accurately prioritizes school social work needs and manages time accordingly	Develops a written social work plan based on school social work needs	
Is primarily reactive with few measures of impact	Addresses student needs and measures the impact of interventions	Uses multiple sources of data to measure the effects of SSW services	
Social worker-student interactions include negative or demeaning responses	Builds positive relationships with students through friendly and mutually respectful interactions and home visits	Strengthens relationships with students through participation in community events	
Interactions may not account for the development level or culture of the student	Cares about each student and respects developmental, cultural and socioeconomic differences	Provides leadership in developing a caring and culturally sensitive school culture	
Office area is disorderly and/or not accommodating	Office area is functional and presents a warm and inviting atmosphere		
Materials for use with are not available	Materials for use with students are accessible and organized	All materials for use with students are organized and	
Demonstrates limited skills in resolving conflict	Effective in resolving conflict and teaching conflict resolution skills	Takes leadership in identifying points of conflict within the school	
Demonstrates limited crisis intervention skills	Displays skill in responding to crisis, ranging from individual to whole school intervention	Is a leader in responding to crisis in the schools	
Demonstrates limited diagnosis and treatment planning skills	Demonstrates skill in diagnosing and recommending appropriate treatment for	Conducts training in understanding and recommending appropriate treatment for	

	mental health/behavioral needs	mental health/behavioral needs	
Necessary school social work notes on students are not organized or accessible.	Student notes are appropriate and organized, indicating problem, intervention(s) and progress	Teaches others on student and programmatic data collection for school social workers	
Notes:			

2. WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers communicate effectively with all students, administrators, parents, staff and community members.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Reports are poorly written, and/or disorganized, lack individualization	Reports are clear, organized, accurate and individualized	Teaches other social workers to write clear, accurate and individualized reports	
Reports are not completed on time, or are rushed in at the last minute	Reports are completed in a timely manner	Reports are completed ahead of deadline in special circumstances	
Reports tend to be uniform, do not reflect individual differences	Reports reflect sensitivity to diverse student populations	Reports utilize additional resources to interpret data based on diversity	
Emails/letters are often grammatically incorrect or inappropriate	Emails/letters are clear and appropriate	Is a leader in helping others and creating policies regarding use of email communication	
Notes:			

3. PARENT/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND REFERRAL

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers help to ensure the overall success of students and school operations by collaborating with staff, parents, community agencies and community at large (knowledge of community services is necessary).

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Impedes the team process	Works effectively as a team member, including integrating assessment results	Takes a leadership role in team-building and in developing consensus and cooperation	
May be critical or rigid, ineffective in problem solving	Demonstrates effective problem-solving skills	Is proactive and highly valued as a resource to help solve problems	
Minimal response to requests for professional input	Provides ongoing professional input and expertise for others in the school community	Provides ongoing professional input and expertise to the broader community	
Provides minimal or no consultation with staff and parents	Provides appropriate consultation with staff and parents	Teaches others to provide appropriate consultation with staff and parents	

Demonstrates limited skill in interpreting student referral information	Demonstrates skill in understanding student referral concerns with respect to race, ethnic, cultural and social factors	Seeks additional information and resources to help team understand referral concerns	
Minimal or no review of prior interventions, historical records, or biopsychosocial data	Reviews relevant biopsychosocial data including health history, educational and family history and intervention records	Reviews, interprets and integrates relevant biopsychosocial data, seeking out additional information helpful to the assessment process	
Provides minimal assistance to staff and parents regarding pre-referral concerns	Provides consultation to staff which may include designing pre-referral interventions	Provides ongoing consultation to staff including designing and implementing pre-referral interventions	
Ignores or denies input from school staff or others who may be helpful in addressing special needs of students	Encourages and uses input from others in addressing needs of students	Initiates collaborative problems that address gaps in student services	
Facilitates minimal or no interaction with parents and community	Reaches out to families to get them involved in their child's education	Provides resource information and/or conducts parent groups to increase parenting skills, including effective involvement in their child's education	
Notes:			

4. ASSESSMENT/DUE PROCESS

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers develop and participate in appropriate assessments of student, family and systemic functioning.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Demonstrates limited ability to select, administer and/or interpret assessments	Demonstrates the ability to select, administer and interpret multiple assessments	Demonstrates knowledge of "cutting edge" assessment tools and practices	
Minimal knowledge or use of non-standardized assessment techniques	Collects assessment data using non-standardized assessment techniques, such as observation and interviews	Uses a wide variety of non-standardized assessment, such as observation and interviews	
Minimal ability to effectively convey assessment results	Interpret and synthesizes data and effectively conveys results to team	Demonstrates outstanding ability to synthesize and effectively convey assessment results	

Notes:

5. GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers meet with students individually or as appropriate, in a group setting, to address students' social/emotional needs.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
There is no system or an ineffective system for student referrals for groups	A system is in place for student referrals to groups	Uses a needs-assessment tool to develop a referral system for groups	
Groups do not exist, or are poorly run	Conducts groups which develop group identity and in which students are supporting each other	Group participation results in a demonstration of exceptional levels of empathy and support	
Groups are disorganized, not goal-oriented	Targeted skills are acquired through group process with the goal that skills are generalized to other settings	Trains others to conduct effective groups which lead to generalization	
There is no system or an ineffective system for student referrals for individual	A system is in place for student referrals for individual counseling	Uses a needs assessment to develop a referral system for individuals	
May use inappropriate therapeutic strategies	Uses appropriate therapeutic strategies in counseling students	Trains others in the use of appropriate counseling strategies	
No clear goals or measures of outcome of individual counseling	Collects data to show better student self-knowledge and interpersonal skills as a result of individual counseling	Trains others in methods to collect outcome data for individual counseling	
Notes:			

6. SCHOOL CLIMATE

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers assist in establishing a positive learning environment that fosters mutual respect and cooperation with staff and students.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Minimal participation in school committees	Actively participates in school committees and advocates for students	Is a leader in fostering effective, positive communication between students and staff	
Minimally involved in school improvement efforts	Involved in improving school programs and overall environment	Takes leadership in improving school programs and overall environment	
Ineffective communication with staff	Effectively communicates with and supports the staff and administration	Effectively communicates with staff and identifies resources for solving staff problems	
Is uninvolved with school programs and committees and does not often interact with	Actively promotes a positive school environment by participation in groups,	Takes leadership roles in promoting positive school environment, and provides	

staff	committees, or programs	leadership in crisis situations as needed.	
Notes:			

7. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers exhibit professionalism and ethical behavior, as well as growing professionally through a variety of sources, such as input from peers and other school staff/parents and participation in workshop activities.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Indiscriminately shares confidential information	Adheres to the Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act and FERPA regarding students and families	Teaches or helps develop school procedures regarding the Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act and FERPA	
Fails to demonstrate fairness, integrity and/or ethical behavior	Acts in accordance with social work code of ethics	Takes leadership in developing high levels of integrity within the school	
Participates in professional development if required or at a minimal level	Seeks out and participates in opportunities for professional development	Regularly participates in and takes leadership in providing professional development	
Seeks feedback only if required, and minimizes or ignores results	Actively seeks feedback from others, including the use of surveys and uses it to make professional decisions	A wide variety of feedback is sought and effectively used to make professional practice decisions	
Inconsistent adherence to due process guidelines and limited knowledge of policy	Demonstrates knowledge of district, state and federal policies and adheres to due process guidelines	Teaches other staff members about policies and due process guidelines	
Frequently absent or tardy	Adequate attendance	Excellent Attendance	
Attire may be inappropriate	Appropriate attire	Consistently professional attire	
May not get back to people in a reasonable amount of time	Responds to most messages in a timely manner, usually within 48 hours	Responds to most messages in a timely manner, usually within 24 hours	
Has little or no personal improvement plan	Sets professional goals designed to improve and/or expand SSW role and skill level	Assists or supervises others in setting professional goals	
Notes:			

Adapted from St. Paul Public Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, Owatonna Public Schools, and Minneapolis Public Schools.

**School social work positions differ depending on such variables as the needs of the student population being served, funding available and the school's unique needs. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that all of the evaluation questions would be relevant. In addition, common sense would dictate that a school social worker would not be expected to exceed standards in every area.*

Sample Professional Development Process for School Social Workers

Tenured school social workers are required to maintain and improve their professional skills. Continuing education includes post-graduate classes; professional workshops or conferences; and participation on district, state and/or national work related committees. School social workers need current data on research-based, successful interventions for students who are not succeeding at school. School district staff development that is designed for teachers does not always meet the unique needs of a school social worker.

One system used in schools is a professional development process (PDP) (Danielson Model). This process requires the school social worker to develop and implement an annual plan with measurable goals that will be reviewed on a regular basis with documentation of progress toward goal achievement. The plan must be in written form, submitted to the administrator and become a permanent part of the social worker's employment file. Administrators want the goals and activities of the social worker's plan to relate to the school or department improvement plan.

Professional development plans will vary in each individual district. Planning tools could include the district school social work job description and/or a district school social work performance evaluation (See page 24 for an example). Methods used to determine plan effectiveness may include peer coaching, development of a professional portfolio, formal and informal observations, participation in a study group, analyzing student data, reviewing student work, action research and journaling. This process can be used as an evaluation tool and would be more helpful than an administrator evaluating a school social worker with a rubric designed for teachers.

Peer Group Consultation and Supervision Groups

School social workers may use the Peer Consultation/Supervision Group Model to meet the state directives for supervision. Peer groups may also serve as a vehicle for training and in-servicing social workers around important practice issues. Peer groups are generally organized according to Elementary, K-8, Middle School, Secondary and Special Education involvement. Membership can also be determined by a group of social workers who identify a specific year-long project or activity or by a group of social workers who need supervision for licensure requirements.

A peer group model is used in Minneapolis Public Schools. Membership in the School Social Work Peer Group is required of all social workers, regardless of assignment. Peer groups accommodate new members when appropriate. It is preferred that Elementary School groups are comprised of members assigned to schools within a reasonable geographic area. Peer groups meet monthly for a minimum of nine times for at least one and one-half hours each meeting. Scheduling must be cleared with building administrators and should be scheduled to interfere as little as possible with building responsibilities. Social workers may accrue recertification credits from group participation according to attendance documentation on meeting summaries submitted to the Social Work Office.