

NASW Highlights the Growing Need for School Social Workers to Prevent School Violence

School social workers play a critical role in schools. They serve as the liaison between school, home, and the community. The underlying premise of school social work services is based in strengthening students' academic progress by removing barriers to learning including meeting their basic physical and emotional needs. Any form of school violence, including the mass shootings at schools around the country such as the recent incidents Florida and Maryland prohibit students' sense of safety and their learning. School social workers work to prevent mass killing in schools as well as guide schools in recovery after a crisis has occurred. **Today more than ever, there is a growing need for school social workers to help prevent school violence and to support students in moments of crisis.**

Unfortunately, school social work positions across the country have been eliminated or replaced by other professions. Due to extensive financial deficits and constraints, as well as competing priorities, local education agencies are often unable to hire enough school social workers to adequately meet the needs of the student population. In many instances, school social work services are eliminated all-together.

School social workers work in preventing school violence. They are trained to understand risk factors and warning signs of violent behaviors. They are knowledgeable in classroom management and behavior intervention and can assist teachers and school personnel in identifying concerning behaviors of students and developing supportive intervention plans. They are experts in research-based school discipline policy development that can increase school connectedness and decrease incidents of school violence.

School social workers work to provide support after a crisis. They are extensively trained to manage and deal with crisis and are equipped to assist school administrators and teachers. School social workers are experienced in delivering difficult and sensitive information and can assist in developing messages that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive. In addition, they can lead the development of strategic plans that prepare other school personnel to respond adequately during the times of chaos and crisis.

School social workers can link students and their families to community resources. They are well-informed regarding relevant resources in the community and online and can aid in connecting students and families to the appropriate resources during times of crisis.

The National Association of Social Workers advocates for ratios in its latest revision of the *NASW Standards for School Social Work Services* that reflect the need for an increase in social work positions across the nation in all schools:

School social work services should be provided at a ratio of one school social worker to each school building serving up to 250 general education students, or a ratio of 1:250 students. When a social worker is providing services to students with intensive needs, a lower ratio, such as 1:50, is suggested (NASW, 2012).

Violence in schools has increased dramatically over the past decades and is seen by many as a public health issue. School social workers aid in the prevention of school violence and provide much needed services and support after a crisis has occurred. NASW strongly urges the funding for an increase of school social workers in schools across the country to adequately meet the needs of students and decrease school violence.

The National Association of Social Workers is in partnerships with coalitions that are working to support school social work positions. We urge our members and the larger social work community to contact their elected officials to advocate for school social work positions in schools. For more information contact NASW Senior Practice Associate Sharon Dietsche, LCSW-C, LICSW at sdietsche.nasw@socialworkers.org.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy.