



## *2021 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 to provide mental health related services and support within the school system. 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 environment with consideration to family, community, values, culture and language. We help teachers teach by reducing social and emotional barriers to learning by collaborating in the development of academic intervention plans to promote and ensure academic success. School Social Workers incorporate a systems approach to address the mental health needs of children and youth.

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

Social workers receive two different sets of credentials: degrees and licenses. Social work degrees are earned from accredited academic institutions. The bachelor level social worker is prepared for practice in mental health case management. The master level social worker has the training and skills to provide services beyond mental health case management through advanced clinical mental health practice. (SSWAA, 2013) School social workers at the master level receiving clinical supervision or holding clinical licensure are prepared through their education, practicum, clinical supervision and licensure to provide clinical mental health services in a school setting. Licensed clinical school social workers use their skills to address the mental health needs of students through evidence-informed assessment, diagnosis, intervention and evaluation of individuals, small groups, families and school-wide. (SSWAA, 2013). Minnesota school social workers are dual licensed by the Minnesota Board of Social Work and the Professional Educators Licensing and Standards Board.

### **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.
- *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; thus, increasing academic achievement.*
- 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 with in the general education setting.
- School social workers often focus on providing supports 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, 2013)
- *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 2021 Legislative Priorities

- 1. Support Medical Assistance Reimbursement for Mental Health Services provided by School Social Workers on IEP's. 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).** Services – including speech-language pathology, occupational and physical therapy, mental and behavioral health services, school nurse services, vision and hearing screenings, diabetes and asthma management, and durable medical equipment – are reimbursable through Medicaid for eligible students. While school social work services are included under Minnesota statutes as health related services that can be billed to MA, our current practice in Minnesota *does not allow for districts to bill for these services*. Currently, \$4-5 billion flow to school districts every year, so they can make sure students with disabilities receive the supports they need to learn. A number of surrounding states including Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa do allow reimbursement for social work services. Wisconsin generates \$8 million annually in federal reimbursement and Illinois estimates that they receive between \$15 to \$20 million annually. *MSSWA supports including reimbursement for school social work services that are part of an Individual Education Program (IEP).*
- 2. Support HF4 Subdivision 3, of Article 1, Section 5** that outlines a financial investment “*of grants to fund trauma-informed and systematic professional development for all staff who work with students, including all principals and administrators, to support students with adverse childhood experiences, and to promote restorative practices and nonexclusionary discipline in schools*”. While this is one step to addressing the needs of the whole child, MSSWA supports this legislation but is also advocating for a shift from simply incorporating trauma-informed approach to a more holistic healing centered approach. *MSSWA supports a healing-centered approach which views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively and we would offer this as part of the systemic professional development required in this legislation.*
- 3. Support Mental Health Protections Act. This bill protects LGBTQ people from dangerous and discredited practices aimed at changing one's sexual orientation, including efforts to change gender identity or expression.** This bill prevents mental health care providers in Minnesota from practicing conversion therapy. This legislation will: (a) Protect Minnesotans from being coerced into treatments which are ineffective and which lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, self-harm and suicide and (b) help ensure that LGBTQ people receive mental health care that is ethical, affirming, and culturally competent. *MSSWA supports ending the harmful practice of “conversion/reparative therapy” in the state of Minnesota.*
- 4. Support bipartisan legislation to protect DREAMERS, preserve DACA and legislation to establish a path to citizenship.** DACA was first implemented in 2012 by the Department of Homeland Security after Obama's presidential executive order. DACA allows youth who were who were brought to the United States as children and who meet certain criteria, to request consideration for deferred action, or the DHS's decision to not pursue their removal from the United States for a period of two years, with the possibility for renewal. Specifically, the bill gives eligible young people who were brought to the U.S. as children the opportunity to resolve their immigration status and work towards citizenship. DACA recipients can live in the U.S. and go to school, and may be eligible for work authorization. DACA recipients are contributing every day to the strength of America. As of September 5, 2017, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is no longer accepting new applications for DACA. Anyone who had not applied or who became newly eligible can no longer apply. Anyone with current DACA status continues to be protected under the law. MSSWA stands up for DREAMERS and supports legislation that would establish a path to permanent legal residence for more than a million young people including those now protected by DACA. Please ensure these young men and women can remain in the only home they have ever known, and can continue their studies and give back to our nation.