

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS IMPACT ON SCHOOL SAFETY IN GEORGIA

School Social Workers are the master's level certified education advocates who help students achieve academic success by linking the home, school, and community, providing holistic support for students. As the student services personnel integral to providing wrap-around services, School Social Workers work to remove barriers to student success through crisis support, mental health counseling, and behavioral assessments. School Social Workers also provide staff and community training related to cultural, social, economic, and mental health issues, facilitate school adjustment for students, resource coordination for families to access available services, address issues of non-attendance and truancy, child abuse and neglect, homelessness, and case-management for families requiring multiple resources.

Research indicates between 18-20% of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment to major life functions (Dore, 2005). **The state of Georgia's awareness that unmet mental health needs can be a significant obstacle to a student's academic, career, and social-emotional development that could impact school safety, underscores the need to provide for School Social Work services in every district.** School Social Workers' training includes specialized preparation in cultural diversity, systems theory, social justice, risk assessment and intervention, consultation and collaboration, and clinical intervention strategies to address the mental health needs of students.

With an adequate ratio of SSW:Students, School Social Workers are able to design and implement school-based programs to promote a positive school climate among all students and work with the entire student body to identify students in need of more intensive interventions and connect these students to additional services in the community. Improved ratios will allow School Social Workers to be used in the most effective way as part of a school-wide multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

Current SSW Data/Information

Ratio - 1SSW: 2475 students
School Social Work services are optional
Service delivery varies depending on district

Recommended SSW Data/Information

Ratio - 1SSW:1000 students
School Social Work services mandatory for every district
Comprehensive state funded study of SSW services by GADOE to ensure that students are served effectively across the state, leveraging SSW services to address barriers associated with mental health, social emotional issues, crisis intervention counseling and acknowledging the School Social Worker role as a key resource for facilitating wrap around services.

As Georgia moves forward in educating the whole child, making sure every student is educated in a safe and healthy environment is paramount. School-based mental health services, a broad spectrum of assessment, prevention, intervention, postvention, counseling, consultation, and referral activities and services help us realize that goal. These services are essential to a school's ability to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for all students; and School Social Workers are essential to these services.