



SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA[®]



SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

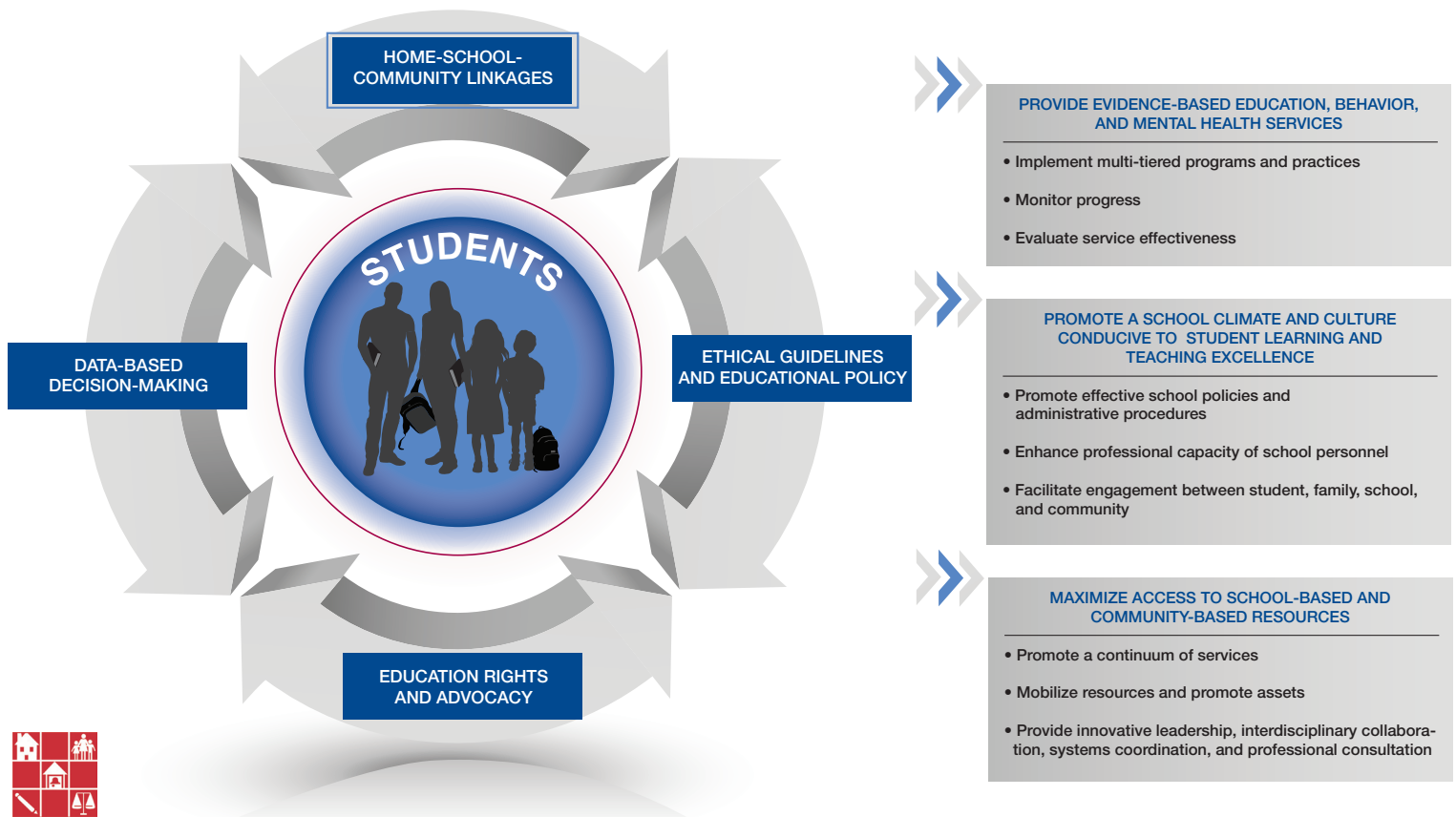
PRACTICE MODEL OVERVIEW

Improving academic and behavioral outcomes

THE PRACTICE MODEL

The roles and responsibilities of school social workers vary significantly across schools, districts, states, and countries. The purpose of the School Social Work Practice Model is (1) to articulate the skills and services that can be expected from school social workers, and (2) to promote consistency in undergraduate and graduate social work education, credentialing, and professional practice, with the goal of improving academic and behavioral outcomes.

There are a variety of factors that influence the percentage of time school social workers allocate to these different roles. The most obvious factor is the ratio of Full Time Equivalence to the number of students served. For all of the practices and key constructs in this model to be implemented effectively, a full-time social worker is required, which is approximately a 1-250 school social worker-student ratio. This estimate will vary depending on several factors, such as the percentage of high-risk students, the experience and expertise of the school social worker, and the availability of other services in the school and the community. Other factors that may affect the job description of school social workers are the priorities and expectations of the school/district.



PRACTICES

The Practice Model encourages school social workers to (1) provide evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services; (2) promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence; and (3) maximize access to school-based and community-based resources. School social workers are expected to possess advanced knowledge and technical skills to guide their practice in these three areas. The proportion of their time that school social workers engage in each practice varies widely depending on contextual factors, including the needs of the community, school, families, and students served.

1) Provide evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services

Providing evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services to support academic and behavior outcomes is the primary direct service component of school social work practice. School social workers have unique expertise in child and family work because they address school and community stressors that interfere with educational success. In addition, school social workers' consultative skills can assist other school staff in implementing interventions with fidelity. This practice is accomplished by:

- Implementing multi-tiered programs and practices
- Monitoring progress, and
- Evaluating service effectiveness

2) Promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence

School social workers promote a psycho-social environment that fosters academic engagement and achievement. Environments are conducive to learning and teaching when they have: (1) policies and procedures that produce safe and orderly environments; (2) capacity-building efforts to promote effective practices; and (3) supportive relationships within and between students, families, school staff, and community partners. This practice is implemented by:

- Promoting effective school policies and administrative procedures
- Enhancing the professional capacity of school personnel, and
- Facilitating engagement between student, family, school, and community

3) Maximize access to school-based and community-based resources

Maximizing school-based and community-based resources is the primary indirect or macro-practice component of school social work services. This may involve coordinating available services within the school or reaching out to community partners to secure services. School social workers know the services a school system provides, and they know the scope of services available within the community. Their skills in navigating these service delivery systems (e.g., health, mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice) are crucial in challenging barriers to school and community resources that enable academic and behavioral success. This practice is accomplished by:

- Promoting a continuum of services
- Mobilizing resources and promoting assets, and
- Providing innovative leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, systems coordination, and professional consultation



KEY CONSTRUCTS

Each school social work practice is supported by historical scholarship and research that delineates this specialized form of professional social work practice. The following key constructs are infused into each practice.

Home-school-community linkages

Academic achievement and behavior are profoundly impacted by the environment, including relationships and interactions across home, school, and community settings. Facilitating communication and promoting linkages across these systems is a central characteristic of school social work practice.

Ethical guidelines and educational policy

School social workers follow professional ethical guidelines and carry out federal and state educational policy to provide the highest level of school social work practice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics and School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) Ethical Guideline Series define expectations for ethical school social work practice. School social work literature further facilitates accountability by promoting the use of an ethical decision-making model when applying laws, policies, and codes to specific school dilemmas. The Code of Ethics emphasizes the need for continuous professional development to keep abreast of evidenced-based practices in the field, and reflection on evidence-based practices to ensure that they fit the context and culture of the school setting.

Education rights and advocacy

School social workers address the ways in which structural inequalities and school processes affect school quality and educational outcomes. School social work practitioners are expected to raise issues of diversity and social and economic justice that lead to school failure and educational disparities. School social workers should be able to balance their mandate as school employees to advocate for students and families with their mandate as social workers to help change policies and practices that undermine the dignity and worth of students.

Data-based decision-making

School social workers use the best current research to design and implement interventions. School social work services should be informed by the research literature, adapt empirically supported interventions to fit student needs, and routinely evaluate the effectiveness of policies, programs, and practices.

Authors' note

Andy J. Frey, Ph.D., Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville; Michelle E. Alvarez, EdD, Social Work Department, Minnesota State University, Mankato; David R. Dupper, Ph.D., College of Social Work, University of Tennessee –Knoxville; Christine Anlauf Sabatino, Ph.D., National Catholic School of Social Service, The Catholic University of America; Brenda Coble Lindsey, PhD, BSW Program Director, Clinical Associate Professor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; James C. Raines, Ph.D., Department of Health, Human Services & Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay; Frederick Streeck, MSW, Executive Director, School Social Work Association of America; Anne McInerney, MSW, Team Lead, St. Paul Public Schools; Molly A. Norris, MSW, Mankato Public Schools.

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Correspondence concerning the model should be addressed to: ContactUs@sswaa.org

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