



School Social Work Association of America  
Resolution Statement

**SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS HELPING STUDENTS SUCCEED:  
RECOMMENDED SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER TO STUDENT RATIOS**

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) recommends a maximum ratio of one Master of Social Work (MSW) level school social worker to 250 general education students or one school social worker per building serving 250 students or fewer. This recommendation is consistent with the roles and functions of the profession as delineated in the SSWAA School Social Work National Practice Model (2013). When students require more intensive services, such as student with disabilities and other specialized populations, the ratio of school social workers to students should be adjusted to ensure school social workers appropriate workloads to address students' needs. For example, in programs serving students with intensive behavioral challenges the ratio may need to be significantly lower to provide the level of services necessary to address those needs.

School social workers provide mental health services in schools and have specialized training to meet students' social-emotional needs. Schools often are one of the first places where mental health issues are recognized and initially addressed (Hennessy & Green-Hennessey, 2000; Hoagwood et al., 2005). School social workers serve as the primary mental health provider for students, and they may be the only counseling professional available to students and their families to both initially identify and provide interventions for those issues. (Early & Vonk, 2001; Hennessy & Green-Hennessey, 2000; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010). In a 2008 survey of school social workers, only 11 percent of respondents reported that all or most of the students on their caseloads receive counseling or therapeutic services outside of school (Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010).

Research indicates between 18-20- percent of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment to their major life functions (Dore, 2005), yet only one in five students receives the necessary services (Kaffenberger & Seligman, 2007). Furthermore, diverse students, including students with disabilities, students of color, and students from low income families, are at greater risk for mental health challenges, but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services (Vera, Buhin, & Shin, 2006). Students with untreated mental health issues may develop more significant problems which can greatly impact their educational experience and result in poor educational outcomes and possibly dropping out of school (Erford, Newsome, & Rock, 2007).

The role of the school social worker as outlined in the SSWAA School Social Work National Practice Model includes:

- Provision of evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services
- Promotion of a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence
- Maximization of access to school-based and community-based resources (SSWAA, 2013).

Staffing at a higher ratio than the maximum recommended by SSWAA compromises the quality of services provided to students and affects the potential for positive academic outcomes for *all* students.

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