
A Toolbox for New School Social Workers

Prepared for members of
the National Association of Social Workers, NC
the North Carolina School Social Workers Association
and MSW students in school social work practica



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Revised 11/1/07
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THIS GUIDE is intended for new school social workers but it also provides helpful information for BSW and MSW students entering school-based and school-linked practica. School social work was first introduced to North Carolina schools in the 1920s but did not develop widely until the 1970s. Guilford County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Wake County, Cumberland County, and Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools have large compliments of social work staff; however, the service remains relatively new in many



other districts. These large counties have about 250 school social workers, in contrast to 18 school districts in our state which still have no school social work staff. For many school administrators the role of the school social worker remains rather nebulous. As a new school social worker, you will face many challenges as you carry out your social work roles and responsibilities. You will need to learn about your school system and the children and families it serves. Some of you will need to learn about a new community and a new network of service providers as well. Even if you have worked in your community for many years, your new position within the school bureaucracy will require you to view families and systems from a different perspective.

You will need to assess the various needs of your assigned schools, assess your own strengths and deficiencies, and develop new practice skills to meet the demands of your job. If you are lucky, you will have an experienced MSW mentor for consultation and guidance from knowledgeable peers. If not, you will need to seek professional social work support while you chart new territory.

Getting Licensed—Nobody Knows the Troubles I’ve Seen...

One of the first challenges you will face may come from your local personnel department and the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Why is licensure important? In short, it helps assure the public and the children and families that you serve that you have the minimum skills and knowledge necessary to provide school social work services. Through the licensure process your salary will be established and you will be able to maintain your job. Licensure as a “school social worker” in North Carolina requires a BSW, an MSW, or PhD.

How can you get licensed? For information and a licensure kit see the DPI website at www.ncpublicschools.org or contact the Licensure Section, DPI, and 301 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh, NC 27601-2825. Look under “Student Services” then “Job Descriptions & Licensure Requirements.” DPI licensure information and forms, job opening listings, and salary information are available on line. Job postings are listed by individual school districts and additional listings may be found at the NASW-NC job bank, www.naswnc.org. You can also reach their Professional Licensure Assistance Line, a computerized response system, by calling (919) 807-3310 in Raleigh.

If you did not complete the school social work licensing requirements and apply for licensure while attending a MSW or BSW program, DPI will require you to affiliate with an IHE, “institution of higher education.” For persons seeking social work licensure, IHE’s

are DPI approved “Teacher Preparation Programs” (yep, that’s what they are called) that are also accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) at the MSW or BSW level. A list of *DPI approved* programs is available from the Department’s website at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/humanresources/TeacherEdProgramsDirectory.pdf>. There is a CSWE listing on the site, but it is out of date. A current list of CSWE accredited programs can be found in the *Directory of Colleges and Universities with Accredited Social Work Degree Programs* or you can view the content on their website at <http://www.cswe.org>.

If you hold an MSW, then you should contact me (Dr. Gary Shaffer) at UNC-CH, Gary_Shaffer@unc.edu; or Mary Lisa Pories, at East Carolina University, poriesm@ecu.edu. Persons holding BSWs can contact Mary Lisa Pories or Prof. Linda Williams at North Carolina State University, Linda_Williams@ncsu.edu. Professor Williams has been particularly helpful to BSWs whose own programs are not approved by DPI. NC A&T and UNC-G have DPI approved BSW programs but they only work with their own currently enrolled students in regard to licensure issues. Current MSW Joint Program students at NC A&T & UNC-G and BSWs at UNC-G should contact Dr. Susan Dennison, Susan_Dennison@uncg.edu.

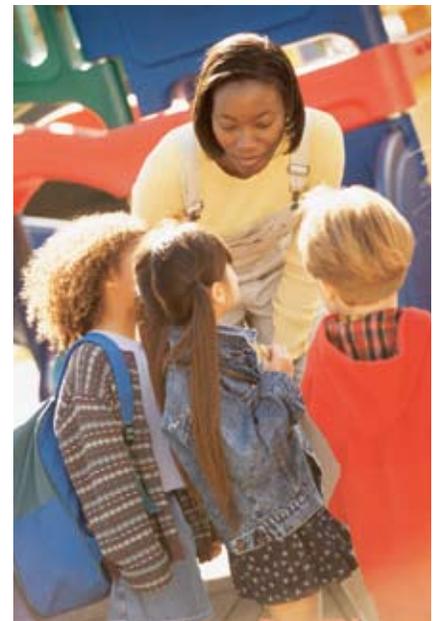
If you were permanently licensed as a school social worker in another state, contact DPI directly and follow their guidance or contact Dr. Shaffer. Your path to licensure may differ from the above.

While you are seeking initial licensure you may also find it valuable to seek “provisional licensure.” Your LEA’s (Local Education Agency; “educationalese” for “local school district”) personnel department should be able to assist you. Provisional licensure usually means that you are within a few credit hours of meeting the licensure requirements. If you have not already met the majority of the requirements for licensure this is not the appropriate route for you to take.

Even after filling out the forms and submitting them to an affiliated school and the DPI, the process can take a considerable amount of time if their office is “backed up.” DPI is taking great strides to be more accessible to applicants, but talking with a real person in the Licensure Division is still, for many, a monumental task. Computerized answering systems can be helpful—or “hell” if they aren’t programmed with the answers you need. Be patient, keep copies of any documents or letters that you send, and be persistent.

Understanding and Interpreting School Social Worker Knowledge, Skills and Values

Social work knowledge, skills, and values remain a mystery to many school personnel even including some of those who supervise school social workers and establish social work roles and responsibilities. National and regional studies indicate that less than a third of school social workers have a supervisor who is also a social worker. I have developed a PowerPoint presentation that is available to assist you in explaining school social work to educators and others in your community. Simply send an email request to Gary_Shaffer@unc.edu and I’ll send you a copy. It is important that you understand the potential of school social work and then



help your school personnel understand the contribution professional social workers can make to our schools.

Developing this understanding of the contribution of school social work is an ongoing task that will continue as long as you practice in schools. Fortunately you will not have to tread this path alone and there is much guidance available—both in the literature and from your colleagues across the state and nation. Some of the ways to get guidance are outlined in the following sections.

Professional Standards for School Social Workers

Contact the National Association of Social Workers for information about social work in general and school social work in particular. Join if you are not a member. Membership information can be obtained by writing NASW, 750 First Street, NE, Suite 700, Washington DC 20002-4241, calling at (202) 408-8600 or (800) 638-8799, or visiting their award winning website at <http://www.socialworkers.org>. The latest version of the *Standards for School Social Work Services* was approved in June of 2002. You can view the standards at the Association's website.

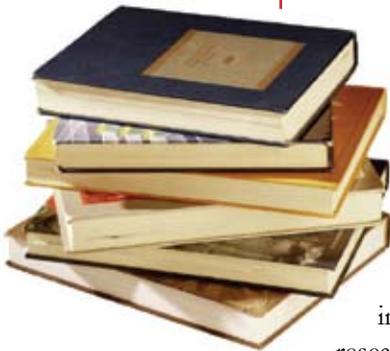
http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/credentials/school_social.asp.

Classes on School Social Work Policy and Practice

The DPI approved social work programs at the MSW and BSW levels offer school social work courses for their current students and most programs extend courses to BSWs and MSWs seeking “licensure only” as well. These will give you a good overview of current school social work policies and practice and an opportunity to share ideas with students, faculty, and professionals in the field. The UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work also offers a web based course to a limited number of MSWs living at great distances from UNC and ECU. You can view a syllabus of the UNC-Chapel Hill course, *School Social Work: Policy and Practice*, SoWo 850, at <http://ssw.unc.edu>. Look under “For Current Students.”

Helpful Books

School Social Work and Mental Health Workers Training and Resource Manual by Cynthia Franklin, Mary Beth Harris and Paula Allen-Meares (Eds) was published by the Oxford University Press in January 2006. This is a practical guide to strategies and resources related to working with children and youth.



For an introduction to important school social work policy and practice you will find the following texts helpful: R. Constable, C. Massat and S. McDonald (Eds.). *School Social Work: Practice, Policy and Research Perspectives*, 6th Ed. (Lyceum Books, 2006); L. Bye and M. Alvarez, *School Social Work: Theory to Practice*, (Tompson/Brooks/Cole, 2006); P. Allen-Meares, (Ed.). *Social Work Services in Schools*, 5th Ed. (Allyn and Bacon, 2006); and L. Openshaw, *Social Work in Schools: Principles and Practice* (Guilford Press, 2008).

Constable et al.'s most recent contribution to practice, policy, and research in the schools updates their 2002 publication and provides both a strong applied research perspective and an emphasis on the legal and organizational base of school social work practice. I think it is the best of the current texts on school social work.

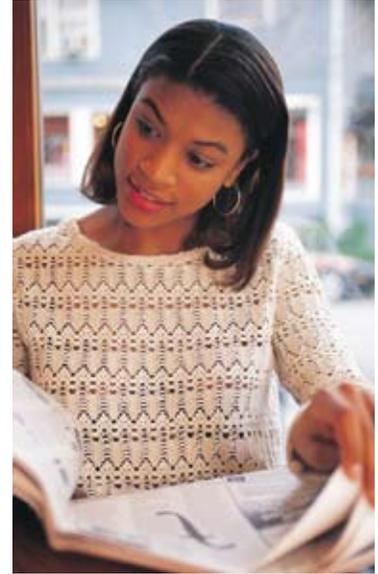
The chapters on planning and implementing social work services in schools in Allen-Meares' latest edition are very helpful and this information has been well received by social work students and practitioners in the past. A number of new contributors have been added to this new edition.

David Dupper's text, *School Social Work: Skills & Interventions for Effective Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 2003) identifies a series of "proven or promising interventions" on a range of psychological and behavioral issues of interest to school social work practitioners.

Marion Huxtable and Eric Blyth's new book, *School Social Work World Wide* (NASW Press, 2002) is excellent for those interested in comparative education and school social work practice in other nations. One reviewer said, "(It) opens the windows to school-linked and school based practice in nations across the globe, from established school social work programs in the U.S. and Great Britain to emerging programs in Korea and Eastern Europe."

For a collection of publications on good school social work practice see Freeman, E.M., Franklin, C.G., Fong, R., Shaffer, G.L. and Timberlake, E.M. (Eds.). *Multisystem Skills and Interventions In School Social Work Practice*. (NASW Press, 1998). This book highlights excellent school social work practice articles from NASW publications in the mid- to late-1990s and emphasizes a strengths based, ecological perspective.

Examples of school social work courses can be found in *Teaching School Social Work: Model Course Outlines and Resources* compiled by S. Torres Jr., and R. Patton published by the Council on Social Work Education (2000) in conjunction with the School Social Work Association of America. The UNC-Chapel Hill School Social Work course is in this compilation.



Suggested Journals

Only two journals are now being published on school social work: *Children & Schools*, published quarterly by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and the *School Social Work Journal*, published twice a year by the Illinois Association of School Social Workers. The *Journal of School Social Work* was discontinued in 2004.

A more general journal, *Social Work*, published bimonthly by the NASW, addresses policy and practice issues in all areas of social work and includes occasional articles on practice related to school social work and services to children, youth, and their families. All members of NASW receive this journal, and local practitioners or agencies with social work staff may be able to help you locate copies if they are not in your school district's resource library.

Professional Associations and Newsletters

The North Carolina Association of School Social Workers (NCSSWA) distributes a quarterly newsletter to members which you may find helpful. Membership information is available by contacting Amanda Rose, Membership Chair, at amanda_rose@abss.k12.nc.us or (336)513-5306. Approximately 200 school social workers are members. Their website also provides additional information: www.ncsswa.org.

The NC Chapter of NASW (NASW-NC) has a School Social Work Programmatic Unit for those interested in school social work issues. News about school social work is occasionally published in the Chapter's *Newsletter*, informational bulletins, e-mails and on their website at www.naswnc.org. National NASW's *Specialty Practice Section* also publishes a newsletter on School Social Work several times a year and provides special information on their website. Over 4,000 social workers are members. Membership in the Section is \$30 in addition to your regular NASW dues.

The School Social Work Association of America publishes position statements and a newsletter. SSWAA, formed in 1993, can be reached through e-mail at sswaa@aol.com or on the web at <http://www.sswaa.org>. It represents school social workers nationally, lobbies for national and state legislation, promotes best practice, and sponsors or co-sponsors national and regional conferences. SSWAA can also provide a list of state contacts regarding certification and licensure. There are about 2,000 members. Membership is open to all school social workers and students. Check their website for current membership rates and association information.

More Wonders of the Web



Current and helpful resources are only a key stroke away. Publications from advocacy groups, the US Department of Education, other governmental bodies, and professional associations are readily available online. For examples see the sites noted above as well as the US Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov>, the National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/index.asp>, the UCLA School Mental Health Project <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>, and *Education Week* on the web, <http://www.edweek.org>.

Additional Resources

Many books and articles on school social work practice have been published in the past decade. Effective practitioners need to be familiar with this literature and with related material in education, counseling, school psychology, child welfare, and family law.

Learn to Speak “Educationese”

Since it is important that you are able to talk with your teachers and administrators in “their language” you will find it helpful to keep up with educational issues by reading publications like *Phi Delta Kappan* (published monthly except for July and August, see <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm>) and *Education Week* (published 40 times/year). These are likely to be available in your principal's office or school resource library. Highlights of *Education Week* are on line as well, see the above address. General developments in education are addressed almost daily in your local paper and in nationally distributed publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report* spotlight highly visible trends.

Get to Know Those in the Know

Knowing yourself and your profession is critical but you will also need to spend weeks and months (perhaps years) establishing relationships with all of your school staff from the maintenance and kitchen staff to the district superintendent. Don't try to skip this important step. Get to know the secretaries, aides, bus drivers, and the children, from "whence your support cometh." Initiate and maintain regular contact with your principals, indeed, keep in touch with all of those who may be assigned to evaluate your performance and recommend your retention. You may find it helpful to send monthly summaries of your work and highlights of your future activities to all of your supervisors and principals.

Make Sure You Have a Mentor

As a beginning employee in the schools you should request an MSW mentor. In 1987–88 the DPI established an *Initial Certification Program* (ILP now) specifically for student support personnel. All newly licensed personnel were to complete this program prior to receiving "continuing licensure." Designed to assure a basic level of quality in performance, this program for new school social workers included: (1) the assignment of a support system (mentor and/or support team) for each initially licensed person; (2) individualized planning; (3) formal evaluation based on multiple indicators; (4) a professional development plan; and (5) a year-end summative conference. Upon successful completion of this program, the employing school system prepared a formal recommendation for issuing "continuing licensure."



Although no longer required as of 1998, the above program's guidelines and published materials continue to provide direction to LEAs employing initially licensed social work personnel. New social work staff can benefit from an experienced MSW school social work mentor and a number of LEAs are establishing their own mentoring programs. Essential for many personnel, this support can be particularly important when school social workers are recently graduated BSWs or MSWs. Even experienced practitioners can benefit, especially if there are few social work peers in an LEA. An experienced MSW mentor can help develop necessary social work skills and knowledge, provide professional support and assessment of performance, and help navigate the school bureaucracy.

When an experienced MSW is not employed by an LEA, alternatives exist. Cooperative agreements can be established with another LEA, a faculty member at a cooperating college or university, or an experienced MSW practitioner in the community. Starting a new job can be tough enough—don't start one without a qualified MSW mentor on your side!

Know the Law—Its Essential for Effective Advocacy

School social workers and social work practitioners who collaborate frequently with staff in the public schools need to be aware of a wide range of legislation, case law, and due process procedures in order to be effective advocates for children and families and in order to enhance children's ability to benefit from their educational experiences.

The DPI's "Job Description" for school social workers lists "advocacy" as one of the eight primary functions. It states, "The school social worker maintains an advocacy role to assure that the student's educational, social, emotional, and material needs are met in accordance with established laws, rules, and regulations."

The NASW *Standards for School Social Work Services* (2002) give further directives in this area. Standard 8 states, "School social workers shall advocate for children and their families in a variety of situations." This is explained as follows.

Issues of concern affecting students may include limited educational opportunities; discipline; punitive, arbitrary, and exclusionary policies and procedures in schools; institutional racism; discrimination against and among students based on protected classifications such as race, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, and religion; homophobia; and sexism. Advocacy should support the needs of students who are immigrants and refugees, students who are homeless, students living with HIV/AIDS, students with substance abuse problems, and other at-risk student populations. Effective advocacy can best be accomplished when school social workers are informed about court decisions, legislation, rules and regulations, and policies and procedures that affect school social work practice.

Advocacy efforts also relate to NASW's Standard 14, "School social workers, as systems change agents, shall identify areas of need that are not being addressed by the local education agency and community and shall work to create services that address these needs."

Many school social work students and practitioners use their legal knowledge and advocacy skills creatively in their schools. Their work has led to increased funding for homeless children and their families, timely enrollment of Latino students, expanded funding for



encouraging attendance, the development of summer recreational and feeding programs for children of low income families, and the establishment and funding of family resource centers in schools and in public housing. Knowledge of "Title IX" has helped pregnant students remain in school longer and probably reduced multiple pregnancies while the teens were enrolled in school. Parental participation in Individual Education Programs has increased and their involvement has become more informed because of the advocacy and support provided by school social workers under I.D.E.A. (revised 2004).

What should a reasonably well-informed school practitioner know?

Practitioners would have differing opinions; but, an experienced school social worker should be familiar with many of the areas outlined below and, depending on their job duties and responsibilities, they should be experts on a select few.

As a beginning school social worker you should at least be knowledgeable about the areas formatted in brown text in the following:

Critical Federal Legislation

- ❑ No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the latest revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965 as revised) can be found on the web at <http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>.

An excellent resource is the No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference (September 2002), <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbreference/index.html>.

There are many areas in this act that support school social work practice. Note:

Federal legislative information on the US Congress can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas2.html>.

Children with Disabilities

❑ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and IDEA

For a quick over view of 504 & IDEA see the following. NC SDPI can be substituted for the Texas Education Agency references at <http://www.adda-sr.org/504.htm> and Section 504 & Idea: Basic Similarities and Differences, Rosenfeld, Edlaw, Inc. <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6086> 1997 IDEA but many are similar. For a quick overview of the new IDEA (2004) see the Guide to Frequently Asked Questions prepared by the House Comm. On Education & the Workforce at <http://republicans.edlabor.house.gov/archive/issues/109th/education/idea/ideafaq.pdf>

See the full text of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). The DOE believes this act “aligns IDEA closely to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), helping to ensure equity, accountability and excellence in education for children with disabilities.” <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>. Scroll down and click the “statute” button on the left.

(See “What makes a good IEP for your child” www.pacer.org/parent/iep.asp and “Functional behavioral assessment” <http://cecp.air.org/fba>)

Check with your school for a copy of the NC DPI, Exceptional Children Div. Publication “Procedures Governing Programs And Services For Children With Disabilities,” 2004. A copy can be found on the web at

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/policy/policies/procedures>
Handbook on Parents’ Rights, July 2004, NC DPI,
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/policy/resources/>



Equality, Access, Protection and Services to Low-Income, High-Risk Families

- ❑ Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
- ❑ Child Abuse and Prevention Act; PL 93-247
- ❑ McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, <http://www.nationalhomeless.org>
- ❑ Welfare Reform, PL 104-193, Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (For an overall analysis and summaries: http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=1996_Personal_Responsibility_and_Work_Opportunity_Reconciliation_Act.)

Specific NC Legislation, Regulations and Court Orders

Note: Current NC legislation and General Assembly information can be accessed through the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government Website. The publications and training materials for the Principal’s Executive Program in Chapel Hill are also excellent resources. The DPI website can also prove helpful, see



<http://www.ncpublicschools.org>. Your principal's office and local professional resource library may also provide information on the following. Direct review of the relevant NC statutes is also recommended. For the NC General Statutes online see <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/homePage.pl>.

- Abstinence Until Marriage (NC General Statutes; Chapter 115C, Article 81, Part e1) also
<http://www.nchealthyschools.org/abstinence>
- Compulsory Education (NC General Statutes; Chapter 115C, Article 26, Part 1).
- NC Crime Legislation relating to juveniles
- Basic Education Program (NC General Statutes; Chapter 115C and DPI website.)
- School Improvement and Accountability Act of 1989 (Senate Bill 2)
- The New ABCs (See DPI website.)
- Selected statutes from NC Juvenile Code Provisions on Child Abuse & Neglect (See Janet Mason's *Reporting child abuse and neglect in NC*, 2nd Ed. (2003) published by the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government. Available on line at <http://sog.unc.edu/pubs/electronicversions/rca/rca.htm>. Also NC General Statutes, Chapter 115C-400 (School Code) and Chapter 7B Article 3 for the CAN statute <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/statutes/Statutes.asp>
- Law and practice related to pregnant and parenting teens (See Anne Dellinger's monographs at the School of Government. Go to electronic publications <http://www.adolescentpregnancy.unc.edu> then see: *Public Schools and Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents and Health Care for Pregnant Adolescents: A Legal Guide*.)
- School law impacting on the delivery of social work services
- Dropout Prevention and Students at Risk (See DPI website also www.dropoutprevention.org)
- NC Welfare Reform
- NC School Social Work Licensure (See the DPI website and the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work <http://ssw.unc.edu>)

Pupil Rights, Issues of Control, and Practice Considerations

- Due Process Rights (Case Law)
- Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) 1994, as amended (PL 93-380)
- Corporal punishment—Discipline (See NC General Statutes, Chapter 115C-391; Article 27)
- Suspension and expulsion (See NC General Statutes, Chapter 115C-391; Article 27)
- Parents' and Students' Rights (See NC Youth Advocacy & Involvement Office publication, *Youth rights and responsibilities: A handbook for NC Youth*, (Fall 2000) online at <http://www.doa.state.nc.us/yaio/publications.htm>
<http://www.doa.state.nc.us/yaio>
- Confidentiality and informed consent (See the NASW Commission on Education, *Position Statement on The School Social Worker and Confidentiality* www.socialworkers.org/practice/school/confidentiality.pdf and, the *NASW Code of Ethics* at <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/codenew/code.asp>

and the *Code of Ethics for NC Educators*—confidential information at http://www.ncpublicschools.org/teacher_education/conductcode.htm

❑ Social Worker Liability

(For related topics see confidentiality, privileged communication, CA/N reporting, record keeping, transporting, counseling and advising)

How can you begin to get a handle on this information? Certainly daily practice in the public schools will increase your familiarity with some of these areas, for example, attendance, suspension and expulsion, FERPA, child abuse and neglect reporting, and Title I programs. Relying on “practice” in your school or district may not, however, adequately inform you about all of your many roles and responsibilities. Examples are not difficult to identify. “Practice” in some districts is simply illegal—failing to report child abuse and neglect, “investigating” alleged children abuse before reporting it to the DSS, prohibiting students from enrolling because they lack a social security number, failing to test students in a language they can understand or failing to notify parents and involve them in IEP activities. Some practice is legally questionable, for example, not notifying parents of Section 504 options or failing to initiate adequate dropout prevention safeguards (pushing out children). Some practice, acts of omission or commission, may raise ethical questions if not legal “red flags.”

Keeping up with legislation, case law, and regulations is difficult. Share this responsibility with your teachers and other student support staff when possible. Perhaps you can make it a focus of one of your “teacher work days” or build it into a staff retreat or workshop. NASW’s newsletter, the *Section Connection*, provided to NASW’s School Social Work Section members, highlights legislative developments of concern to school practitioners. NC-NASW’s Legislative Hotline (919) 828-9650 and their Director of Governmental Relations, Jack Register, MSW, can help keep you current on NC Developments. Staff at various DPI offices may be of assistance on state related issues. The *NC Education Directory*, now on the DPI website, can provide you with names and numbers; it is likely there is a copy in your principal’s office. Finally, of course, there is the World Wide Web for those of you with nimble fingers, a computer, and a modem. I’ve already provided you with many web resources above.



Develop a Work Plan

If you want to do more than chase after truants and transport kids— you better negotiate an effective work plan. It has been argued in numerous forums that school social workers’ potential contribution to effective schools remains untapped because their job descriptions are narrowly defined. Driving kids to hell and back because no one else can leave the school is not a social work task helping to develop alternative transportation resources is. Counting absences and taking parents to court is often an exercise in futility. But, helping to develop a comprehensive dropout prevention plan which involves the school, home, and community may encourage kids to finish one more year or maybe eventually graduate.

Those who hire and supervise us too often lack an understanding of school social work practice. The tasks they define may literally leave us spinning our wheels. Unless our

administrators' vision is expanded, we end up doing clean up duty—working with kids and families after everything else has been tried, receiving referrals only in a crisis, and responding to individual pupil needs when really what is needed is system change.

When school social workers are asked for examples of their work plans, often they provide the DPI's list of social work functions or worse, nothing at all. But the Department's list of job functions does not a work plan make (it's not even a useful "job description.") Developing goals and setting priorities for service with supervisors is too



often a task ignored. Too bad, because this joint planning venture can present you with a wonderful opportunity to help your supervisors understand the scope of school social work services and helps you determine priorities and how your work will be evaluated.

So... your initial homework assignment is to negotiate a work plan (if this has not been done). First, dig out an old copy of *NASW Standards for School Social Work Services* (1991). Pay special attention to student social worker ratios and what can realistically be expected when you are serving 1,500 to 2,000 children. (You can't be everywhere at once.) Note the new *No Child Left Behind* legislation supports a ratio for MSW school social workers of 1:800. Then, together with your supervisor(s) determine the following. What are your responsibilities? Are they compatible with your

professional preparation and do they meet the needs of your LEA and the unique demands of the individual schools you serve? Where and with whom will you focus your talents and energies? (You can't be everywhere at once.) Will you just "spin your wheels" or can you engage in needs assessment and prevention activities? How much time per week or month will you devote to working with various individuals, tasks, and programs? Will you have time to collaborate and consult with other school and community personnel serving the same or similar target populations? When conflicting demands arise, and they will, how will you establish your service and time priorities? (As you know, you can't be everywhere at once.) Who will evaluate your work and what methods will they use to evaluate it? What records and statistics do you need to keep in order to demonstrate not only input but, more importantly, outcomes of your efforts? Will the records you maintain provide evidence of your responsible professional practice? How will you obtain professional consultation if your supervisors lack social work education and training? How will you be encouraged to maintain and expand your professional knowledge and skills? What financial and other support will the system provide to help you maintain and develop competencies? When will your work plan be reviewed? How can it be modified?

When these areas have been discussed thoroughly, put your plans into writing. This is not a monumental task—just a necessary one. Necessary to ensure you can best serve your kids and their schools. Necessary to ensure you can best support their parents and your community. And, necessary to ensure your survival—so that you can return to "do battle" once again next year.

Personal Safety

Effective school social work practice often requires staff to work in their schools as well as in homes and agencies throughout their target communities. An escalation in school-based and community violence requires school social work personnel to be ever vigilant about safety. School staff should be provided with “tools” to help them avoid potentially dangerous situations, de-escalate violent confrontations, and plan for a safe work environment within and outside of the school. Your local Department of Social Services, mental health agencies, and police or sheriff offices should be able to help provide training in this area for school personnel. Regional and local dispute settlement and conflict resolution programs may also provide excellent training for staff and students.

The School Social Work Association of America provides a helpful pamphlet on assessing danger, working with agitated individuals, walking and driving tips, and what to do if you are victimized. You may freely reproduce this material as long as you give credit to SSWAA. To receive a copy write or e-mail the SSWAA addresses above. Griffin’s article on “Social Worker and Agency Safety” published in the 19th Edition of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (pp. 2293–2305) will also help you review key personal and organizational safety programs and issues.

Protect Your Gluteus Maximus

If you are going to be effective you need to insure that you have a job and the support of your schools. Keep your administrators and supervisors informed about your work and aware of your presence. Provide them with a monthly summary sheet of your activities and accomplishments. Send them pictures of social work related activities and summaries of workshops and programs that you attend in order to strengthen your knowledge and skills (keep them brief so they will be read). Seek ways to multiply your impact. Organize school volunteers, establish peer helping programs, supervise social work interns, and work on school-wide and community prevention programs. Keep social work visible in your schools: put up bulletin boards, get in the yearbook, provide a booth at career day and college night, sponsor a club (related or unrelated to your job), write a column for your school news bulletins and letters to the editor for your local paper, and volunteer to do in-service training and workshops in your community. Collaborate with other student support personnel and keep abreast of changes in your local and state human service network. Oh yes, and do your job well! For additional ideas consult James McCullagh’s article on “Survival Strategies for School Social Workers” published in 1982 in *Social Work in Education*, 4, pp. 415–425. This is an “old” article but it is still relevant for today’s practitioners. A power point on School Social Work in North Carolina can be requested from Dr. Shaffer that can be modified for your use.



Action Agenda

North Carolina social workers have made major strides in the past decade, but much remains to be accomplished. School social workers need to work collaboratively with

school psychologists, counselors and other student support staff to address the ever-changing needs of our schools, students, parents and communities. This integrative approach needs to take place at both the state and national level as well as at the local school site. School social workers need to help school personnel better understand the scope of social work practice within and outside of the traditional school settings and the ways it can benefit students, schools, and communities. School social workers need to better document their interventions and activities so that they can demonstrate their practice effectiveness. Qualified school social workers need to be recruited and hired by school districts and effective mentoring programs need to be established. Salaries for MSW level practitioners should equal those of their school psychology peers. The student-social worker ratio in most settings needs to be re-examined. The ratio of 1:2,500 established by the *Basic Education Program* in the mid-1980s fails to recognize the challenges of special populations, depressed communities, and low performing schools. Flexible ratios for special needs populations must be considered. A ratio of 1:800 is more realistic in today's school environment and several organizations support this ratio. The School Social Work Association of America recommends a ratio of 1:400. It is interesting to note that the 1930 White House Conference on Children recommended a ratio of 1:500.

End Note

A lot of territory has been covered within these pages and obviously there is more you need to know. For example, personal and professional liability and insurance were not addressed. Record keeping and documentation need attention too as few school districts and school social workers are adequately documenting their services. This guide is a “working document” and I hope you find it useful. Websites and phone numbers are accurate as of the cover date. Let me know your suggestions for additions or notify me of errors. I can be reached at: Gary L. Shaffer, Ph.D., UNC at Chapel Hill, School of Social Work, 325 Pittsboro Street, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550, Phone (919) 962-6436; Fax (919) 843-8715 or e-mail Gary_Shaffer@unc.edu.



