

School Social Work -

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SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK



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State of Iowa
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Paul F. Johnston, Superintendent
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

A SERVICE OF IOWA SCHOOLS

by
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State of Iowa
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FOREWORD

Education can never be static. The preparation essential for adjustment to the demand of today's society has changed and will continue to change. One of the best traditions of American education has been the continuous drive to embrace new knowledge, concepts and practices.

Based on the conviction that all children should be helped to experience success in school, programs and services have increased in variety and quality. The professional base which has been traditional in public education has thus continued to expand to include a wider range of non-instructional, professional personnel. Included in this development are the psychologist, nurse, speech therapist, physical therapist, guidance counselor, hearing clinician, child development specialist and more recently in Iowa the school social worker.

This publication explores the services of professional social work in the school setting. Basic in the development of a job description and delegation of responsibilities is the concern for early detection and prevention of social and emotional maladjustment. A high degree of parent involvement beginning at the pre-school program level is crucial to building and strengthening a positive relationship between home, community and the school.

PAUL F. JOHNSTON
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

INTRODUCTION

This publication has been prepared as a working guide to structure and provide direction for the development of social work services in the schools. This is a descriptive outline of social work services to aid the superintendent in his assignment of responsibilities and serves also as an orientation to the teacher, school psychologist, guidance counselor, nurse, and other professional school personnel, all of whom are important colleagues in the overall efforts directed on behalf of children hampered in their school programs by personal, social or environmental factors.

In addition this publication serves as an introduction of school social work services to social agencies in the community (both public and private), the courts, and other interested lay and professional groups.

Acknowledgment is given to the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction consultants who read the original copy and shared their constructive comments.

Recognition is given to Paul Johnston, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and his administration, specifically Drexel D. Lange, Associate Superintendent, and Richard E. Fischer, State Director, Division of Special Education, for their conviction in the contribution social work can make in the school setting. It is this conviction which led to the present emphasis in school social work.

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I. WHY SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

"Schools stand as the chief expression of American tradition of fair play for everyone, and a fresh start for each generation. . . It is no longer thought proper to restrict educational programs to the skills of the mind, even though these skills remain of fundamental importance. Schools also attempt. . . to do anything else which will help being a child up to the starting line of adult life as even with his contemporaries as native differences in ability permit."¹

The importance of education in society is being recognized more and more each day. We desire that each child shall have a successful school experience that will develop his individuality in a positive, enhancing manner. Yet school personnel daily are concerned that many children--seem unmotivated--seem withdrawn and to themselves--or are aggressive or belligerent. This list of disturbing behavior could go on and on. Not all children automatically are free to respond with vigor and enthusiasm to school. Performance is conditioned by many factors beyond the school walls, factors which limit creativeness and dull curiosity. Some of these conditions are environmental and some relate to shallow or frustrating experiences with meaningful persons. Evidence is abundant that many learning failures originate in disturbed parent-child relationships. More and more schools are recognizing the need of helping parents to promote their children's successful emotional growth through adequate identification, development of healthy self-esteem, and encourage free use of energies for learning and other work.

It is the school's function to take children with all their diversity of intelligence and background and to provide them with experiences which, over a period of years, will result in developing responsible citizens. In fulfilling this purpose, the school promotes, through its curriculum, the development of each individual's talents and abilities, not only for his own personal happiness and self-realization, but also for the improvement of society.

¹Quoted from Summary Statement of the Report to the President from the Committee for the White House Conference on Education of 1955.

The social worker's function is to help children cope with problems of personal adjustment resulting from negative environments that interfere substantially with their ability to make use of the services of the school. He brings to the school setting a service based on particular areas of knowledge. These areas deal with, (1) an understanding of human behavior and the forces that shape personality, (2) an awareness of underlying motivations of behavior and of the home and environmental pressures that distract a child from using the school experience effectively, and (3) an ability to assess the dynamic emotional and social factors that hinder learning.

The school social worker is specifically concerned about children whose school life is stormy--who cannot meet the demands of learning--who do not experience individual success--who are frustrated in their attempts to be creative--who rebel against rules, authority, and society.

Recognizing the manpower shortage existing in the social work profession, it was considered unrealistic to expect social workers to qualify twice for school social work positions by obtaining both a teaching certificate and the master of social work degree. Yet there remained the reality situation that a teaching certificate was required of all persons employed in school systems, and who worked directly with children.

It was on February 11, 1966, that the State Board of Public Instruction authorized a historic move in terms of certification in Iowa. A totally new category of professional, non-instructional personnel was established for persons being hired under an approved Title I, ESEA, project. The profession used as the example, and for whom the category was initiated was that of professional social work. The statement reads:

Professional Recognition

"The State Superintendent is authorized to issue a Statement of Professional Recognition to any non-instructional professional person employed under an approved Title I, ESEA, project who meets the standards recognized by the State Board of Public Instruction for the area of professional service involved.

Basis for the Professional Recognition of Social Workers

"The basis for the professional recognition of a social worker employed under an approved Title I, ESEA, project shall be the possession by such person of a Master's degree in social work granted by an institution of higher learning approved in a manner acceptable to the State Superintendent to offer the program of preparation and supervised practice leading to this degree."

The school social work program sets as its standard a master's degree in social casework from a professional school which has been accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. This usually covers a two-year graduate study period with a closely integrated program of class and field instruction.

In addition to a master's degree in social work, personnel interested in school social work should:

1. have a liking for people--children as well as adults

2. have a conviction concerning the importance of school experience for children
3. like working with educators and other professional persons in the school setting
4. have ability to work in a team relationship with others.

III. A MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL TEAM

In planning the effective development of a school social work program, immediately one is confronted with the importance of developing interprofessional relationships and effective team work with the professional personnel now functioning in the school setting. This definitely includes the school teacher, administrator, psychologist, guidance counselor, speech therapist, nurse, hearing clinician, and other specialists. The advantage of a team is that it enables each person to center his contribution on those areas in which he is particularly trained. Each person has training somewhat different from his teammates, and it is necessary that all members working with children have a common fundamental knowledge and understanding of them. They should have a common outlook in philosophy regarding the purpose of the school, its goals and objectives. The framework within which the team operates should be flexible and broad enough to encompass the various disciplines and permit the professional specialist to function in an integrated manner.

The use of the word "team" is not meant to imply that a group of persons must operate and function as one body and deal as a group with each child that is referred. Instead, there needs to be a close spirit of rapport and understanding of each other's services inasmuch as the one frequently complements the other. There indeed will be complex cases where the school will benefit from the total "team" discussing a child whom they have all seen. (Such a team meeting might include the classroom teachers, school psychologist, school social worker, nurse, guidance counselor, principal, speech therapist, hearing clinician, physical therapist and other specialists involved with the child.) The team concept may be limited in number or expanded depending on the number of persons available in a school system or county unit. There likewise will be many referrals made directly to the appropriate persons for their immediate service, e. g., school psychologist, school social worker, nurse.

Team work will not occur by itself. It is created by everyone in the school sharing a concern about the successful academic, social, and emotional adjustment of students. An important criterion in determining success or failure of a team is the communication within the group. To make real progress in developing teamwork, it is necessary to provide ample opportunities for interaction. In the beginning stages of organization and development of a school social work program there should be several meetings of the present

professional specialists employed in a school system or county or multi-county unit to consider responsibilities the various members carry, and to put this in writing. If handled properly, this discussion will sharpen thinking, provide more definite lines of action, and have lasting beneficial results.

The process of defining roles will increase the respect and understanding of each person for the special fields of other team members and will bring into sharper focus better ways of helping troubled children and their families.

The contribution of the social worker to the school team is that of suggesting skilled method of working with families and children to enable them to handle their problems in a more constructive and satisfying manner. In his diagnostic evaluation of home and community conditions and relationships, he assesses the effect of these factors upon the child's school attitude and performance. His method is social casework. It is through this helping process that the social worker strives to bring about those changes which will enable the pupil to apply his strength, gain insights, change attitudes, and develop self-discipline.

IV. FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

A. Preventive - Resource Function

The primary objective of the school social worker should be early identification and prevention of emotional problems. The child with behavioral problems is telling the school and community that he needs help. His symptoms, e. g., disruptive behavior, under-achievement, withdrawn behavior, are an indication that something is interfering with his adjustment. He is frustrated and needs to be understood and helped. If his need is not recognized early, he may encounter serious breakdowns resulting in school failure, inadequate personality development, poor social adjustment, delinquency, and significant loss of positive human creativeness and initiative. In a preventative role, the school social worker serves as a resource to school personnel who might wish to discuss concerns about specific children with him.

In contrast to referrals for diagnostic or direct casework service, which are determined through locally established referral procedures and are generally concerned with clear-cut, identified problems-- the school social worker is directly available also as a resource to the classroom teacher as he becomes concerned about individual children early in the school year. The intent is to identify beginning problems with which the teacher can deal effectively if he is able to confer with resource persons. Serving in a resource role allows the social worker to be concerned primarily with prevention and developing problems rather than to carry a complete caseload of chronic problem cases. Hopefully, children having difficulty can be identified in kindergarten through third grade, rather than later in the fifth or sixth grade by which time they probably have lost valuable academic skills.

B. Collaboration with School Personnel

The social worker offers a service which supplements the work of the teacher, who continues to carry responsibility for the student in the classroom. In this role he assists the teacher. Together they assess factors affecting problems and evaluate alternative procedures or solutions. The teacher may continue to work with the child, or formal referral may be made, leading to study of the home and environmental conditions, or psychological services.

Collaboration on assigned cases with school personnel, particularly the pupil's teacher, is an integral part of school social work service. On the elementary level, arrangements to discuss a child can be made through the principal. However, on the secondary level the guidance counselor has probably known the child and will be active in working with the school social worker.

Collaboration with teachers may include working toward facilitating the pupil's school adjustment. Inherent in this is:

1. Interpreting how the caseworker can supplement the services of the teacher through seeing the pupil for interviews, individually or as part of a group, working with parents or promoting referral to an appropriate agency.
2. Providing information about non-school factors involved in the pupil's behavior.

Early identification and referral is stressed in helping each child go as far in knowledge and education as his attitude permits. (See the illustration which appears on page 10.)

C. Child-Worker Relationship

"The school social worker's focus with the child is directed toward helping him to work, in a manner appropriate for his age and capacity, on those areas of his problem for which he can take major responsibility. The social worker develops a relationship with the child based on the fact that the child is having difficulty and that the purpose of their work together will be to strive toward some change. Through the use of social casework method, the worker helps the child to understand some of the nature of his problem and to find a new way to use his strength.

"The social worker, by the very nature of his position in the school, can provide for the child a relationship in which he does not have to compete with other children for his interest. In these interviews he may become secure enough to reveal some of his fears, conflicts, and feelings that may get in the way of his being what he would really like to be. Through this relationship and his new feeling of security, he is often able to move ahead in a new way in the relationship and to sustain this progress in the classroom. Children's comments such as, "I'm not the way I used to be" or, "Do you remember when I was always in trouble for fighting?" indicate their awareness of the purpose of their interviews with the school social worker and their recognition of their own change.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL



It is usually the teacher who first notices that a child needs special help. She is the primary referral source.



Many specialists cooperate in seeking the cause. In planning toward an answer the school social worker adds an understanding of family dynamics and environmental factors.



Since parents have a significant influence in the life of a child, involving them in plans for helping the child is of primary importance.



The improved behavior of the child creates a better learning situation, not only for himself...but for all other children.



Community agencies may become involved when specialized service is needed. The social worker has an intimate knowledge of the functions and resources of all available agencies.

"Certainly much of the content of the interviews is not carried on through intellectual discussion. Children have many ways of transmitting their thoughts and feelings--through facial expression, play, telling a story about someone else, etc. The child is often totally unaware of all that he contributes to the interview.

"Social casework with children requires understanding of the child's method of communication and the ability to respond to the child in such a way that he feels understood."¹

The social worker's direct service may be brief or continue over a period of several months, or in some cases several years. The relationship between the student and the social worker is established for the purpose of helping the child modify his behavior so he may best utilize his educational opportunities.

Assistance to the pupil usually involves direct service on a continued basis. However, when the degree of severity or nature of the problem is such that the service of a family agency, or a psychiatrist or some other specialist is more appropriate, the school social worker encourages enlistment of the appropriate kind of help. Such referral also may be on a cooperative basis with school personnel working with the child and his family while another agency works with other family members.

The social caseworker, working with the pupil:

1. Interprets the school referral problem to the child, enabling him to develop a better understanding of this, and secures his cooperation in solving the difficulty in reference to the classroom setting and his relationship with his classmates
2. Analyzes continuously the child in his school environment and home setting in relation to his school adjustment problem, determining how one relates to the other
3. Helps the child to use other specialized classes, programs, or services in the school or in the community, when this is needed

¹Florence Poole, Journal of the International Council for Exceptional Children, XXII, No. 1, (October, 1955)

4. Helps the child to recognize and modify his feelings about himself which may be interfering with his adjustment.
5. Helps with feelings toward siblings and parents
6. Helps with feelings toward teachers, friends, and school personnel.

He thus has:

1. Helped the student clarify his own problems
2. Provided support in his acceptance of them
3. Stimulated motivation and given guidance for solving or modifying problems
4. Helped the pupil receive increased self-understanding in areas which indirectly may relate to his problems.

E. Parent Participation

It is usually essential to work with parents early in the casework process since their attitudes and expectations have an important influence on the child's participation in the school experience. Interviews may be arranged by appointment at the school or in the home.

The social worker recognizes the parents' right to be informed about their child. The goal is to increase their understanding of the child's difficulty as the school sees it, and to obtain their constructive participation.

The parent-child relationship is of vital importance to the child no matter how impaired. Even though the intent is to help the child in school, parents are necessarily involved. Children do not live in an emotional vacuum. Often anxieties and fears can be understood only in the context of family attitudes and feelings. Although mothers are more accessible, experience in working with fathers and siblings has demonstrated the value of including them. Efforts are always directed toward finding and building on strengths of the parents and family.

Casework service with the child's family is an integral part of helping the pupil and this is provided in an effort to:

1. Increase parent understanding of the child and his problem in the school setting

2. Help parents to share responsibility for the pupil's adjustment in the school, and to work in a meaningful way toward solution of his problems
3. Assist with intra-family, personal or other problems interfering with the pupil's progress in school, provided the kind and depth of these difficulties are in keeping with school social work function
4. Help parents to understand and accept other special school programs and services, where available
5. Help parents to understand and accept community agency service when such specialized assistance is necessary, particularly in the area of psychiatric service, marital counseling, child placement, medical services, and financial assistance
6. Contribute to overall effectiveness of school-parent relationship by facilitating ways in which parents and school personnel can know one another better, by participating in Parent-Teacher Association meetings and parent-teacher workshops.

The parents mentioned are those who need to be included in a positive parent-child relationship with the school. They make verbal demands of their children and expect good school work on one hand; yet on the other hand many times they never participate in a supportive way or take an active interest in their child's daily school situation. When their child's motivation lags, he doesn't achieve and drops out of school. These parents seldom see how their actions of placing little significance on school by not attending parent-teacher meetings or being concerned about school issues, has influenced the child.

School may have become a negative force between parent and child. These parents want children to achieve but their distance (emotional and social) from school activities causes them to fall behind in participation and interest. With the many frustrations and daily disappointments of life, it is easy to get into a bind of requiring performance and then punishing for failure, not realizing the effect of support by praise and positive comments.

Some parents themselves may have failed at school. School for them perhaps was a disappointing and frustrating experience. They have never developed a relationship with school authorities in which they felt comfortable. Unconsciously they may feel that

the school has no real concern for them or their children. They fear and half expect their children to repeat their own pattern of school performance. These parents have very little with which to contact the school. However, they can be reached by the school extending itself to them.

F. Referral Service to State and Community Resources

Children with complex problems may need more help than the school can offer. When additional help is needed, the child and his family are referred to the appropriate resource.

The school social worker should be well informed on resources available to children and their families, and be familiar with processes involved in referral.

G. Pre-School Role

In the development of pre-school programs effort should be made to give parents a positive experience with the school. School enrichment experience alone is limited. Parent-inspired motivation is undoubtedly the most basic and long-lasting. A pre-school clinic for all parents has definite merit.

Since the school is a social institution through which all children must pass, its preventive function can be significant if a positive school-home partnership is established. It should not be a case of the school "taking over" from the parents. Innovation is needed in the area of encouraging parent participation early in the child's school experience. Active school programming is required so that this participation continues. A program where school and parents work together for development of the child has long been accepted as ideal, and to have the greatest potential for maximum child development.

V. AN OUTLINE OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

The following quotation is taken from the booklet Pupil Personnel Services, published by the Council of Chief State School Officers in 1960. This was a policy statement intended to serve as a guide for state education departments in development of services.

"One of the school social worker's most unique contributions is his skill in the use of the social casework method. Another is his extensive knowledge and use of the various social institutions and agencies. He contributes to the study and adjustment of pupil problems through facility and the use of school and community resources, through an understanding of human growth and behavior, and an ability to share his professional competency with others in the school.

"The functions of school social work services include:

1. Casework service with the individual pupil toward the correction of certain personal, social, or emotional maladjustments.
2. Casework service with parents as an integral part of the task of helping the pupil--to increase parents' understanding, their constructive participation, and their use of appropriate resources.
3. Case consultation and collaboration with other school personnel--to gather and get information on a case, and to establish and plan for respective roles in the modification of the pupil's behavior.
4. Cooperative action with the person in charge of pupil personnel services in referral of pupils, cooperation with parents, contact with community social agencies, coordination of school social work services with the work of these agencies, and cooperation with such agency in determining needs for and developing additional case work resources."

The services may be further spelled out and include the following:

1. Perform casework with parents, either individually or as part of a group, to improve parent-child relationships where this is felt to be a significant negative factor in the school adjustment and academic performance of a child

VII. CASELOAD

Caseload refers to the "cases" or pupils assigned to the worker for service. Although a tendency exists to assign a worker a large number of direct service cases, sufficient time should be allowed for him to function in a resource-preventive role with school personnel. Involvement of the social worker in pre-school projects and innovative parent projects will have a significant preventive value for the school district.

It is most effective and helpful to the school if the social worker's caseload is balanced. This means having cases which range in need for treatment from those with troubles just beginning, to others moderately severe, to those that are extremely severe. Generally more pupils whose troubles are mild can be helped in a given period of time than pupils whose problems are more severe. The number that can be served usually decreases in direct relationship to the severity of pupils' problems. Usually a balanced caseload is one where the majority of pupils desire help and have some chance of readjusting within the school year.

The securing of a balanced caseload can be encouraged by the school principal, other educational administrators, and the school social work staff. The goal of the program is effective service which often is measured in terms of the degree of change evident either in the pupil himself or his environment, so the school adjustment problem in turn can be assisted or resolved. In hard-core cases change usually is slow, and requires much consistent, follow-up assistance. The school principal's assistance also is important while service is being rendered, for at times the administrative authority invested in this position is needed to break through the resistance to service which impedes casework progress.

VIII. HOW AND WHEN TO REFER

The classroom teacher will generally be the first to recognize a troubled child and is the primary source of referral. He should discuss a child's problem soon after becoming aware that he needs help. However, concerns may be registered as well by the nurse, special educators, guidance counselors, and the child's parents.

Referral to the social worker is made through the principal, or the person he may designate. However, the principal always remains the administrator of his school and any administrative decisions concerning pupils need his approval.

The teacher, or referring person, should be able to state his concern and observations in writing. Appropriate forms should be developed for this purpose within each system.

The referral process must be developed within each school based on need. However, this should stress early identification and prompt service to children having difficulty.

IX. FINANCIAL BASIS

The salary of a school social worker may be reimbursed for 100 per cent from Title I funds available to a school district when this service has been added as an approved project under Title I. While large school systems will be hiring more than one school social worker, small school districts may wish to plan with other school districts for a joint or cooperative project in which they would share the expense and likewise the services of the social worker. On a county basis all or any number of school districts may plan cooperatively to obtain social worker services.

When a qualified person is employed who meets the state's standards i.e. holds a master's degree in social work (MSW) from a recognized training institution, reimbursement will be made on the basis of the state's reimbursement plan for special personnel. For details, see the publication, Special Education Approval Requirements and Reimbursement Plan, State of Iowa, Department of Public Instruction.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Books:

Beck, Robert H., Society and the Schools: Communication Challenge to Education and Social Work, National Association of Social Workers, New York, 1965.

Cutler, Richard, and Elton McNeil, Mental Health Consultation in Schools, Oak Park, Michigan, Public Schools.

Johnson, Arlien, School Social Work, Its Contribution to Professional Education, National Association of Social Workers, New York, 1962.

School Social Work, A Service of Schools, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1964.

Journals:

Children, Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D. C.

Exceptional Children, The Council for Exceptional Children, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036.

Social Casework, Family Service Association of America, 44 East 23rd Street, New York City 10010.

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Dear Colleague:

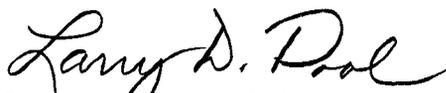
This manual has been prepared as an orientation to the role and function of the professional (MSW) social workers in the setting of the school.

Copies are initially being sent to city and county superintendents who already employ social workers, or who may be planning to do so in the near future. Fifteen (15) school social workers are presently employed in Iowa school districts, and I anticipate this number will reach twenty (20) by September, 1966.

Directors of Special Education and School Social Workers presently employed are being included in this initial mailing. Additional copies are available upon request for other persons in your system whom you feel could use a copy.

Sincerely,

Pupil Personnel Services
Division of Special Education



Larry D. Pool, ACSW
Consultant, School Social Work Services

LDP/css

Enclosure