

March 7, 2019

Dear Committee members,

I am a Nationally Certified School Psychologist who has worked at five elementary schools in North Clackamas School District since 2014. I am presently at an elementary and middle school in the North Clackamas School District. I received my master's in School Psychology from the University of Oregon in 2014.

In all of my school settings, I have worked with populations with high and complicated needs. In some of the settings there have been school social workers and in some there have not. When there was a school social worker, more mental health needs were met and greater understanding of resources in the community and systems existed.

I was fortunate to have worked in a high needs elementary school (Lot Whitcomb Elementary) that did have a licensed school social worker as part of the team implementing the comprehensive counseling program. In high-needs elementary schools, practically all staff are expected to be social workers of a type- we feed hungry kids, arrange for therapy for students with mental health needs, figure out how to get insurance going for families who are confused by the complicated process, arrange for rides to doctors/dentists/etc., While at Whitcomb the school social worker lead the staff of the school on these tasks with an expert hand, and supported our students in such a multifaceted way. In addition to all of this, she filled the more traditional counseling roles of teaching classroom guidance lessons, running groups, supporting staff, running professional development, and lots of daily problem solving around student behavior and conflict.

My school social worker's understanding of systems (DHS, special education, insurance, mental health, medical, etc.) allows every meeting, staff development, and student or parent problem solving session to be imbued with knowledge and advocacy that brings us closer to a solution. I truly cannot imagine a more effective role at a school.

When I worked as an intern at a middle school in Springfield, OR with a similarly high needs population, I worked with two school counselors. They were wonderful, but far more limited in their capacity to fully address the needs of the students I worked with. Through the course of a high risk 8th grade girls group I ran, we had multiple pregnancy scares, multiple discussions around significant mental health needs, and multiple threats of self-harm. Although the counselors at the school supported me in addressing these needs, we stopped short of taking a community level approach to problem solving. If we had had a school social worker there would have been greater expertise to address these needs through a family and community systems approach as well as an understanding of the deeper mental health issues.

I would support any and all bills that would help to increase the number of school social workers in schools. Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Emily Barrett
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