

Bring Back School Social Workers!

Please vote YES on HB 2940

The Demonstrated Impacts

Social workers are needed in our schools now because **studies have shown that school social workers:**

- Reduce Absenteeism
- Increase Academic Achievement
- Identify Mental Illness
- Reduce student bullying and drug use
- Boost Student/Teacher Morale

Background

Our state is currently experiencing an education crisis. From chronic absenteeism to failing schools, we are tired of seeing Oregon ranked near the bottom in education. Although the troubles in education cannot all be attributed to any one factor, one area that stands out is our severe lack of school social workers. In past decades, when our state was able to contribute more to education, we had substantial numbers of school social workers. They provide much-needed mental health services in schools and have specialized training to meet students' social-emotional needs. Today, Oregon falls far below the recommended ratio of one Master of Social Work (MSW) level school social worker to 250 students.

Mental Health Attention Needed

Now more than ever, school social workers are needed. Research indicates between 18-20 percent of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment to major life functions, yet only one in five receives the necessary services. Schools often are one of the first places where mental health issues are recognized and addressed. Furthermore, certain 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. School social workers serve as the primary mental health providers for many students and may be the only counseling professionals available to students and their families to initially identify and provide interventions for those issues.

The Role

School social workers have unique training, knowledge, and expertise to address the mental health needs of children within the school environment, and they are the vital link between the school, home and community. Their training includes specialized preparation in cultural diversity, systems theory, risk assessment and intervention, consultation and collaboration, and clinical intervention strategies to address the mental health needs of students.

Social workers have extensive training in the following areas that are powerfully impactful in reducing absenteeism and improving students' school success:

Trauma-informed practices

- Social workers look at the “why” behind a child’s behavior (whole child perspective)
- Understand system barriers in and out of school that increase trauma response
- Trained in responding to all of the traumas listed in the Adverse Childhood Experiences Studies (i.e., homelessness, addiction, abuse, violence, neglect) that have been shown to increase suspension and double the chances of school failure
- Know how to train and support educational staff in trauma-informed responses

Cultural sensitivity and competency

- Understand the impact of historical trauma
- Have extensive training on anti-oppressive practices
- Understand and know how to prevent the School-to-Prison Pipeline
- Have awareness of the disproportionate rates of absenteeism of students of color, refugees and immigrants

Positive and inclusive school climate and culture

- Promote effective school policies and administrative procedures conducive to student learning and teaching excellence
- Enhance professional capacity of school personnel
- Facilitate engagement between student, family, school, and community

Systems perspective

- Recognize that a child is influenced by the systems in which they live and connect (church, school, home, community, etc.)
- Trained on how to engage and partner with families and community resources such as food banks, health care, shelter resources, and homelessness prevention

Mental health

- Provide evidence-based behavior and mental health services, including assessments and interventions of multiple mental health issues: PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders, autism, behavior disorders, etc.
- Suicide prevention

Oregon schools need social workers. Here is what would help:

- Increase students’ access to school social workers—please vote *YES on HB 2940* to provide much-needed grant money for these positions
- Support workforce development by funding programs that utilize school social workers to address issues like absenteeism, graduation rates, and mental health.
- Allow administrators to hire school social workers to social-emotional service positions as they feel appropriate to meet the needs of their students.