

**SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

**STANDARDS FOR REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKERS  
IN  
SCHOOLS**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The employment of social workers by school systems in Saskatchewan is a relatively new practice. Because we are few in number, and somewhat scattered geographically, a statement of standards is important. A review of the Canadian situation has revealed that school social workers across the country have not, to date, developed a comprehensive package of standards.

Social work services in schools have been developing in the United States since the turn of the century. The American National Association of Social Workers have, therefore, developed a set of standards. They are compatible in almost all aspects with the practice of social work in Canada. With kind permission of N.A.S.W., the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (S.A.S.W.) has used their standards as a base for developing guidelines to be followed in this province.

The following standards are in essence an endorsement of the N.A.S.W. statement. Amendments, deletions, and substitutions have occurred in some of the U.S. Standards to more accurately portray the Saskatchewan and Canadian experience. They apply to school social workers whether employed or contracted. Guidelines for the Practice of School Social Work accompany this document with the intent of providing ongoing direction in the carrying out of services. Employers will need to reference these standards to ensure the quality of services to the public.

The goals, objectives, and tasks of a school social work program should be clearly and directly related to the mission of the local education authority, the educational process, and the use of educational opportunities by children. School social workers must anticipate and adapt to the constant changes and restructuring that are prevalent in education. They should take a proactive role in the local education authority's reform and restructuring initiatives.

School social work programs and activities must respond to emerging educational trends that stress prevention, early intervention, school readiness, parent education, and service integration for children from birth through secondary education.

For many school systems, these standards will reinforce current practices. For others, they will provide a challenge and a goal to be achieved. For school social workers, they both validate the uniqueness and diversity of school social work as a speciality practice area and affirm the value of school social work in enabling children to achieve maximum benefits from their education experiences.

It should be noted that the title **SOCIAL WORKER** is protected under the *Social Work Act* of Saskatchewan (1993). Hence, anyone holding the title SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER must be a member in good standing with the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers.

The *Standards of Ethical Practice for Professional Social Workers in Saskatchewan* were passed by the Council of The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers on April 21, 1994. These eleven standards were meant to assist social workers and the professional association in the regulation of social work practice.

School social workers are expected to comply with these standards which are restated as follows:

## STANDARD I

**Social workers shall have fully assimilated the values and principles which guide social work practice.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

**1. The school social worker will have demonstrated commitment to the following values and principles:**

- respect for the dignity of every individual;
- belief in the ability of every individual to evolve and develop;
- recognition of the necessity to perceive and understand the individual as an element of interdependent systems which may promote change;
- respect for the rights of individuals, groups, and communities;
- respect for the principles of individual autonomy and self-determination;
- recognition of the right of any endangered individual to receive assistance and protection if necessary; and
- belief in and defence of the concept of social justice.

## STANDARD II

**Social workers shall have a clear understanding of and have assimilated the philosophy, values, goals and functions of social work practice as defined in the *Code of Ethics*.<sup>1</sup>**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

**1. A school social worker shall demonstrate commitment to the values and ethics of the social work profession and shall use SASW's professional standards<sup>2</sup> and Code of Ethics as a guide to ethical decision making.**

This commitment is demonstrated through:

- 1.1 the recognition of basic human rights, including the right of all people to human services;
- 1.2 the willingness to accept some degree of personal and professional risk and to act upon professional judgement and convictions in controversies about social and professional issues; and
- 1.3 the recognition that change is constant and requires school social workers to remain current by continuously scrutinizing and improving theory, policy, and practice.

As integral members of the staffs of local education authorities, school social workers have a responsibility to know and comply with federal and provincial legislation, as well as local regulations and policies. They shall be knowledgeable and comply with the *Code of Ethics* of the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the SASW Standards of Ethical Practice.

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<sup>1</sup> *Code of Ethics* developed and adopted by the Canadian Association of Social Workers in 1994, and by the S.A.S.W. Council on January 14, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Standards of Ethical Practice for Professional Social Workers in Saskatchewan, April 1995.

In the event that conflict arises around an ethical issue related to local regulations and policies, school social workers shall be guided by the *Code of Ethics*, will negotiate the issue with the local education authority and will seek support and guidance from SASW.

- 2. As leaders or members of inter-disciplinary teams, school social workers shall work collaboratively to mobilize the resources of the local education authority and the community to meet the needs of children and families.**

School social workers bring their unique skills and systems perspective to the assessment and diagnosis of children's needs. As team leaders or members, school social workers initiate and support activities to overcome institutional barriers and gaps in services. School social workers must demonstrate trust, open communication, mutual respect, ongoing collaboration, and effective co-ordination that facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the interdisciplinary team.

## **STANDARD III**

**Social workers shall demonstrate knowledge basic to the social work profession.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

This knowledge is obtainable through formal professional social work education programs, experience, and continuing education experiences. Social workers recognize that there are levels of practitioner knowledge beginning at the basic level and progressing to specialized or advanced levels.

- 1. School social workers shall possess knowledge and understanding that are basic to the social work profession.**

Areas of required knowledge are as follows:

- A. Human behaviour and the social environment, including a variety of theoretical perspectives. Specifically, knowledge in this area involves an understanding of:
- 1.1 theories of human growth and development, including learning theory, systems theory, communications theory, social learning theory, and behavioural theory;
  - 1.2 cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity;
  - 1.3 the needs of at-risk children and children with disabilities;
  - 1.4 biological factors that affect children's ability to function effectively in school.
- B. The nature of systematic assessment and investigation and their essential functions in the professional practice of social work. Specifically, knowledge in this area includes an understanding of:
- 1.1 methods of gathering data and making inferences from data in order to conduct assessments and plan interventions;

- 1.2 performance objectives and measurable outcomes and the means to assess the effects of intervention;
  - 1.3 scientific investigation and the requirements of research designs;
  - 1.4 the use of the scholarly literature and research; and
  - 1.5 the concept of accountability in practice and research.
- C. Methods of social work intervention, including an understanding of:
- 1.1 the dynamic interaction of knowledge, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours between two or more people that is encompassed in the term "relationship," and the purposeful and professional aspects of social workers' use of relationship and
  - 1.2 the basic methods of social work intervention, including problem-solving, counselling, crisis intervention, casework, group work, community organization, consultation, case management, family therapy, and affective education strategies.
- D. Other skills required include the following:
- 1.1 interviewing and other forms of oral and written communication with all persons in the client system;
  - 1.2 using empathy to develop helping relationships with the diverse persons in the client system;
  - 1.3 selecting and applying the most effective intervention methods and techniques to enhance the child's educational experience;
  - 1.4 assessing the effectiveness of one's interventions;
  - 1.5 interpreting the effectiveness of social work services to administrators of the local education authority and other appropriate persons;
  - 1.6 conducting in-service training in areas of social work expertise.
- 2. School social workers shall begin to acquire knowledge and understanding of children in an educational setting within one year of appointment.**
- School social workers shall develop knowledge in the following areas:
- A. The organization and structure of the local education authority, particularly an understanding of:
- 2.1 systems theory and theories of organizational functioning;
  - 2.2 a historical perspective of the purposes of public school education, previous attempts to reform education, and the characteristics of children whom the local education authorities have been expected to serve;
  - 2.3 the nature and scope of the local education authority
  - 2.4 a broad view of educational policy issues and problems, including financing of the local education authority
  - 2.5 the politics of school-community relations in shaping educational policy and the effects of different types of school-community power structures;
  - 2.6 legislation affecting educational opportunity;
  - 2.7 child and staff subcultures in the local education authority;
  - 2.8 roles and areas of competence of various professionals in the local education authority, and
  - 2.9 the process of teamwork.

B. Understanding of the characteristics and reciprocal influences of the home, school and community. This requirement implies comprehension of:

2.1 family dynamics that have an impact on the child's adjustment in the school and community;

2.2 social welfare policies, programs, and resources in the community.

**3. School social workers shall develop skills for effective service to children, families, personnel of the local education authority, and the community within one year of appointment.**

Models of school social work practice should be developmental, not static and should use an ecological perspective. Skills required to implement such models include the following:

3.1 systematically observing and assessing the needs, characteristics, and interactions of children, families, personnel in the local education authority, and individuals and groups in the neighbourhood and community;

3.2 collecting appropriate information to document and assess aspects of the biological, medical, psychological, cultural, sociological, emotional, legal, and environmental factors that affect children's learning;

3.3 advocating for the needs of children and families;

3.4 demonstrating effective leadership of and participation in interdisciplinary teams;

3.5 providing consultation with families, personnel of the local education authority, and agency and community representatives to achieve common goals;

3.6 maintaining an effective liaison among families, the local education authority, and agency and community;

3.7 making effective referrals to resources in the local education authority and the community;

3.8 co-ordinating case-management services;

3.9 collaborating with community agencies in school-linked service projects or other programs to solve specific problem situations or to develop new resources for children and their families;

3.10 identifying and developing resources within and outside the local education authority;

3.11 co-ordinating the services of the local education authority and community agencies to implement effective intervention programs;

3.12 administering a workload, including the efficient determination of priorities and the allocation of time for various tasks;

3.13 conducting research for developing and evaluating programs;

3.14 participating in resource development;

3.15 analyzing and influencing policy at the local, provincial, regional, and national levels.

- 4. School social workers are encouraged to develop and provide training and educational programs that address the goals and mission of the educational institution, as determined by the employer or contractual terms.***

School social workers shall provide in-service training programs for teachers, other personnel of the local education authority, and the staff of community agencies. These programs may involve teamwork, and collaboration with other disciplines. The content should address the prevention, intervention and/or remediation of those factors that affect children's success in school.

- 5. School social workers are encouraged to provide consultation to personnel of the local education authority, members of school boards, and representatives of the community to promote understanding and the effective utilization of school social work services.***

School social workers provide consultation to facilitate the development of an understanding of factors in the home, local education authority, and community that affect the child's educational experience. They also act as consultants on policy matters, including such issues as discipline, suspension, expulsion, attendance, confidentiality, multicultural factors, and child abuse and neglect.

School social workers must be constantly aware of the overall goals, objectives, and tasks of their particular speciality and successfully interpret them to personnel of the local education authority, so that their primary professional activities and competencies are maintained and increased.

## **STANDARD IV**

**Social workers shall demonstrate skill in developing constructive and appropriate intervention with clients.**

## **STANDARD V**

**Social workers shall maintain confidentiality in an appropriate manner that promotes the well-being of the client.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

- 1. School social workers shall maintain adequate safeguards for the privacy and confidentiality of information.***

School social workers must be familiar and comply with the various legal mandates related to confidentiality. Professional judgement in the use of confidential information shall be based on legal and ethical considerations. Children, families, and other professionals should be informed of the limitations and requirements of confidentiality when services are initiated.

## **STANDARD VI**

**Social workers shall demonstrate skill in the problem-solving process.**

## STANDARD VII

**Social workers shall demonstrate skill and commitment in identifying the needs of client populations to the community, to agencies and to governments as appropriate.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

- 1. School social workers shall participate in the identification of individual children and target populations in need of services.**

Needs assessment is the foundation of effective program planning for children and families. It includes a study of biological as well as psychosocial factors that interfere with children's adjustment to and performance in school. More specifically it involves assessing the following:

- 1.1 the child's physical, cognitive, and emotional development and family history;
- 1.2 the child's behaviour and attitudes in different settings;
- 1.3 patterns of interpersonal relationships as observed in the family, local education authority, and community;
- 1.4 reports on the child's behaviour by teachers and other staff of the local education authority;
- 1.5 formal and informal policies of the local education authority and other institutional factors that may affect the child's behaviour;
- 1.6 patterns of achievement and adjustment at critical points in the child's growth and development;
- 1.7 the existence, accessibility, and utilization of community resources for children and families.

## STANDARD VIII

**Social workers shall maintain their records, public and private.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

- 1. School social workers shall comply with the C.A.S.W. Code of Ethics and school division policy.**

School social workers should be involved in developing written guidelines regarding social work files within their work place.

## STANDARD IX

**Social workers shall fulfil professional responsibilities in the course of social work practice.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

- 1. As part of their responsibility for their own continued professional development, school social workers have an obligation to remain current in their unique area of practice.**

Due to the changing nature of the fields of social work and education, school social workers have professional responsibility for the continued development of their knowledge and skills and for remaining current in these fields. They should also develop and use support systems that enhance their personal growth and professional identity.

Professional responsibilities include participation and leadership in SASW/CASW and other professional associations at the local, provincial, regional, and national levels; contribution to and participation in staff-development activities and professional conferences; and contributions to and the promotion of professional publications.

2. ***School social workers are encouraged to contribute to the development of the profession by educating and supervising social work practicum students.***

Field instruction may be provided through the supervision of social work interns in the schools and through the provision of other appropriate learning experiences in relation to social work practices in schools.

3. ***All school social work programs, new or long-standing, should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and contributions to the process of educating children.***

Through the ongoing evaluation of their program, members of the school social work staff demonstrate the program's accountability to the population served, the educational system, the public, and the standards and ethics of the social work profession.

The method used in program evaluation should be assessed periodically. When indicated, consultation should be sought to improve the setting of objectives related to children's problems, the identification of appropriate tasks to be performed to meet those objectives, and the measuring of the outcomes of the service.

Staff reporting forms and other ways of record-keeping should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are consonant with the tasks performed. The school social worker must establish a clear and rational basis for selecting a method of program evaluation.

## **STANDARD X**

**Social workers shall be responsible for maintaining and advocating for a safe working environment which promotes optimal effectiveness with clients.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

1. ***School social workers shall advocate for these conditions with their employing agencies.***

## **STANDARD XI**

**Social workers shall not undertake or continue a professional relationship when their competency or judgement is impaired because of a present or past personal relationship, i.e.: familial, social, sexual, emotional, financial, supervisory, political, administrative or legal. This concept is described as dual relationships/conflict of interest.**

***The following standards are specific to School Social Work practice:***

**STANDARD XII**

**School social workers shall maintain accurate data that are relevant to the planning, management, and evaluation of the school social work program.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

The utilization of records and statistics is one way for school social workers to demonstrate their accountability and value to the administration of the local education authority and to the community. Analyses of activity reports, program statistics, and outcome measures can support the utilization and expansion of school social work services to better meet the needs of children and families. Appropriate guidelines of confidentiality must be maintained.

**STANDARD XIII**

**School social workers shall know how to use assessment measures and shall integrate them into their evaluation and subsequent development of reports, when appropriate.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

School social workers should be skilled in the utilization of various objective measures that are appropriately administered by social workers including measures of adaptive behaviour, self-esteem, social skills, attitudes, emotional health, and interests. When they are incorporated into a comprehensive assessment, these measures can lend additional support to the school social worker's recommendations.

**STANDARD XIV**

**Following assessment, the school social worker shall work with team members to develop a plan of intervention which will enhance the child's ability to benefit from his/her educational experience.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

A plan is based on an assessment that is relevant to the concerns of the referral and includes goals, objectives, and interventions to achieve desired outcomes, methods of evaluation, and outcome criteria. The plan is designed to enhance children's positive educational experiences and involves the family, team members, school, and community resources as appropriate.

**STANDARD XV**

**School social workers shall identify areas of need within their school community and shall work with team members to advocate for appropriate services.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

The school social worker will identify appropriate activities to address deficiencies in resources and services of the local education authority or community that affect the ability of groups of children to benefit from the educational system. These activities may include documentation of the problems, presentation of the problems to the appropriate persons in the local education authority or community, and the promotion of action among educators, other professionals, and citizens. Advocacy for these changes should include work on and leadership of committees and advisory boards at the local, provincial, regional, and national levels.

## STANDARD XVI

**School social workers shall ensure that children and their families are provided school social work services within the context of multicultural understanding and sensitivities that enhance the families' support of the children's learning experiences.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

Increasing diversity in our nation's classrooms demands that school social workers increase their awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. School social workers must develop cultural competencies that include heightened self-awareness, knowledge, and practice skills. They must also recognize racial and ethnic barriers within the local education agency and develop strategies to lessen and overcome the negative effects of the barriers on children and the climate of the local education authority.

## STANDARD XVII

**School social work services shall be extended to the children and their families in ways which build on the client's strengths and which will offer them maximum opportunity to participate in the planning and direction of the learning experience.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

In developing a plan of action, school social workers must consider the characteristics of an individual child and the capacity of all children to communicate about themselves, to choose among options, and to be involved in directing their own learning.

## STANDARD XVIII

**School social workers shall facilitate the access of children and their families to appropriate community resources.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

Empowerment is based on the principle of using family strengths and structure to enable families to function as advocates for themselves and their children.

It is particularly appropriate for school social workers to identify and confer with individuals who function as formal or informal leaders in their communities in order to develop and enhance the natural helping networks that can complement the formal services of the local education authority and community agencies.

- 1. School social workers shall advocate for children and their families in a variety of situations.**

Effective advocacy can best be accomplished when school social workers keep informed about court decisions, legislation, rules and regulations, and policies and procedures that affect school social work practice. Of particular concern are issues such as suspension and expulsion, institutional racism, discrimination, homophobia, corporal punishment, violence of any kind, and sexism. In addition, advocacy should support the needs of immigrants and refugees, homeless people, persons with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), substance abusers, and other at-risk populations.

## STANDARD XIX

**School social workers shall be knowledgeable of the indicators of child abuse, school board policy and procedures regarding the handling of disclosures and the legislation regarding reporting of suspected cases of child abuse.**

*Guidelines for School Social Work Practice:*

Child abuse is a serious problem in our society. School social workers are often consulted by school staff members about possible cases of child abuse. It is important that school social workers be knowledgeable in this area in order to give accurate information and direction.

School social workers should ensure that reporting policy and procedures are in place within their place of employment. Where no policy exists, they should be involved in developing appropriate policies and procedures.

School social workers should promote awareness of the issue of child abuse within the local education authority by providing in-service training. They should promote the use of prevention education materials.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The local education authority should employ school social workers with the highest level of qualifications for entry-level practitioners.**

In accordance with S.A.S.W. requirements a recognized Certificate of Social Work (C.S.W.) or a Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) is the minimum credential necessary for this field of practice. In addition, the Association requires that members engage in a minimum of 40 hours per year of continuing education in social work. The enhancement of knowledge and skills is essential and requires ongoing pursuit by school social workers. Thus, the acquisition of post-graduate degrees (M.S.W./D.S.W.) should be recognized and encouraged.

- 2. The local education authority should provide opportunities for social work staff to engage in a program of social work in-service training and staff development.**

Local education agencies should provide opportunities for the school social worker to develop, implement, and participate in in-service training, staff development, and leadership activities. Staff development opportunities are particularly important for social workers in local education authorities whose work situations require a considerable degree of self-regulated practice. The opportunity for staff development both within and outside the local education authority can be offered in a variety of ways, including staff workshops with leaders from social work and related disciplines, a reasonable number of days off to attend or lead meetings that offer a means of extending skills and learning new ones, and leaves for continuing education.

**3. Social workers in schools should be designated "school social workers."**

"School social worker" is the position title that correctly identifies the person's educational background, profession, and function. Other titles, such as "attendance officer," "pupil personnel worker," "home and school visitor," "home/school co-ordinator," or "visiting teacher," project incomplete or misleading notions of the school social worker's qualifications and functions.

**4. The administrative structure of the local education authority should show clear lines of support and accountability for the school social work program.**

The administrative structure and organization of the local education authority should provide for optimum utilization of the school social work staff and resources. Realistic job descriptions, working conditions, and workload standards are essential. This administrative structure necessitates a mechanism for the regular review of the goals and objectives, their accomplishment, and the essential resources of the school social work program.

**5. The administrative structure established by the local education authority should provide for appropriate school social work supervision.**

The local education authority has the responsibility for administrative and technical supervision to ensure high-quality services. Supervisors of school social work programs should be credentialed and experienced M.S.W. school social workers. Special provisions for social work supervision are indicated for inexperienced school social workers in certain areas in which one or few such social workers serve an entire local education authority.

**6. The local education authority should provide a work setting that permits social workers to use their competencies effectively.**

School social workers need basic work resources to ensure privacy and confidentiality to children and families and to be most effective in their work. These basic resources include: an office with a telephone; clerical support; an adequate budget for professional materials, supplies, and activities; and adequate private facilities in each school site for meeting (individually and in small groups) with children, families, and personnel of the local education agency.

**7. Procedures used in setting salaries for school social workers should be fair and responsive to the particular level of education, experience, and responsibilities of the worker. This salary should be consistent with those of similarly qualified professionals in the educational authority.**

**8. Saskatchewan Education should be encouraged to employ a school social work consultant who is a credentialed and experienced M.S.W. school social worker.**

A school social work consultant would provide leadership and direction for school social workers in the province. This could include advocacy of school social work services, influencing legislative and regulatory efforts in education, certification development, collaboration with other service programs and representation of provincial and national activities related to school social work.

**9. The University of Regina, Faculty of Social Work, shall be encouraged to develop specialized programs in the area of school social work, including training in mediation and conflict resolution.**