

2019 Legislative Agenda

Legislative Goals

- **Advocate for the social, emotional, and educational well-being of children and families**
- **Strengthen the profession of School Social Work**
- **Educate about the impact of trauma and promote trauma informed schools**

KSSWA has been serving children for 45 years impacting thousands of individuals, families, and educational systems. The ever-increasing changes in our society continue to bring new and daunting issues for our educational systems requiring innovative approaches that truly impact the achievement of students. School Social Workers play a pivotal role in this movement by continuing to connect and increase collaboration between families, schools and community members. School Social Workers' assessment and interventions have shown to improve student attendance, reduce child abuse and neglect, increase graduation rates, identify mental health needs earlier, and advance academic achievement. Communities in Kansas are still in need of expanding their mental health services. The social, emotional and educational well-being of our students and families will only benefit from increasing School Social Workers across the state.

Qualifications of a School Social Worker

Kansas School Social Workers are educated at a Master level receiving an advanced degree in social work from an accredited university. All practicing School Social Workers must pass a licensing exam allowing each individual to practice in the state. Social work education and training give the knowledge and skills needed to provide advanced clinical mental health services beyond mental health case management. Uniquely most School Social Workers receive direct training in providing mental health services in a school setting. All Social Workers must complete a one year clinical practicum and supervision before being allowed to practice. During a School Social Worker practicum, Social Workers learn the best ways to address student mental health needs through biopsychosocial assessments, evidence based interventions, school wide positive behavioral supports, and evaluations of student and family needs.

Role of the School Social Worker

- School Social Workers address the social, emotional, physical and academic needs of **ALL STUDENTS** including students whose needs require special education support and services as well as students within the general education setting.
- *School Social Workers serve as mental health and behavioral experts who consult with administrators and teachers on how to best serve and educate students.*
- School Social Workers play a pivotal role in identifying students with exceptionalities through biopsychosocial assessments, adaptive functioning analyses, behavioral observations, & family collaboration.
- School Social Workers provide supports to vulnerable populations such as students in foster care, those transitioning between treatment programs, students involved in the juvenile justice system, those facing homelessness, migrant children, and those at risk for truancy/ dropping out.

2019 Legislative Priorities

1. **KSSWA supports and advocates for a school funding plan that sufficiently funds state aid for K-12 schools eliminating the longstanding shortfall**

The Kansas Supreme Court has given the legislature one more year to determine adequate funding for K-12 schools. Schools are the backbone of our society as they prepare students for future careers that will grow our economy. Sufficient funding allows students to have the resources needed to be properly educated in this changing world. This also promotes social emotional growth which is essential for students as they mature into independent functioning adults.

2. **KSSWA supports the expansion of Medicaid which provides essential health resources to numerous individuals which ultimately strengthens families**

School Social Workers work with impoverished families daily helping them meet their basic needs. We see first hand how children are impacted by parents not having the income to pay and manage their health concerns. Expanding KanCare will provide an estimated 150,000 people with insurance which will cover their basic health needs. Low income parents and individuals need to be able to take care of their health which strengthens the family unit and maintains stability for children. Currently 14.4% of Kansas children are living in impoverished conditions ranking 21st nationally. Adequate health care is one less burden working parents and individuals have to worry about if Medicaid expands.

3. **KSSWA supports the School Mental Health Intervention Program**

The new pilot program aims at increasing communication between schools and community mental health centers (CMHC's) in hopes that the highest needed students will get efficient support and improve their mental health symptoms. KSSWA believes further school mental health supports are needed to adequately address the social emotional problems among children. The Kansas Cares Survey indicated 17.92% of Kansas Youth contemplated suicide in 2018. This significant number recognizes the need Kansas youth have for more supports and resources in managing their mental health symptoms. It is yet to be seen if this pilot is the most appropriate measure, however, KSSWA wants to support any innovative practice aiming to improve mental health supports and will assist as necessary for it to be successful.

4. **KSSWA will establish communication with the Child Welfare System Task Force to explore how schools can play a role in assisting impoverished families in accessing services**

KSSWA encounters and works with many Kansas children who are in the child welfare system. Collaboration between schools and these systems can help reduce barriers and improve the resources available. KSSWA wants to provide assistance in easing access and promoting support for services of impoverished youth.