



**Introduction to the Standards for the
Preparation and Practice of School
Social Workers**

Conceptual Framework for the Preparation of School Social Workers in Michigan

A school social worker preparation program is comprised of multiple interdependent components that prepare candidates for certification to demonstrate proficiencies defined in several aligned sets of standards. Although there are many standards that can be considered when establishing updated requirements for preparation programs, the following national standards and state administrative rules were considered as the basis for the current recommendations due to their utilization by preparation programs across Michigan.

- National standards:
 - [Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards](#) (Council on Social Work Education, 2015)
 - [NASW Standards for School Social Work Services](#) (National Association for Social Workers, 2012)
- Michigan administrative rules:
 - Michigan Department of Education School Social Worker Rules [340.1011-1018](#)
 - Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Social Work – General Rules [338.2921-2965](#)
 - Public Health Code [333.18501-18518](#)
 - [Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education](#) (MARSE)

Development of the Proposed Standards

In fall 2017, the Office of Educator Excellence (OEE) and the Office of Special Education (OSE) at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) began the conversation to plan for a transition process to move the responsibilities of overseeing the preparation program approval and credentialing processes for school social workers from OSE to OEE. This transition is aimed to:

- support Goals 1, 2, and 3 in MDE’s Top 10 in 10 strategic plan;
- provide students, families, and educators competent school social workers;
- reduce duplication of resources between OEE and OSE;
- create consistencies in the credentialing process; and
- recognize the expertise and training school social workers bring.

A stakeholder group consisting of representatives from P-12 schools, educator preparation institutions, and professional associations was assembled to engage in this process to review current preparation approval and credentialing systems at MDE, school social worker preparation practices, and on-the-job roles and responsibilities in the field. After examining current systems and practices, these stakeholders determined that competencies listed in MDE Rule 340.1011-1018 are no longer sufficient in identifying what school social workers should know and be able to do. Specifically, the current rules do not provide detailed guidance for:

- ethics and values for practice,
- the application and implication of assessment,
- the application, monitoring, and evaluation of intervention,
- the practice of data-driven decision making and practice evaluation,

- the pursuit of human rights and social and economic justice,
- the practice of interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration, and
- legal requirements and advocacy activities.

Moreover, the stakeholders determined that existing school social worker competencies (Rule 340.1011-1018) are task-oriented, do not provide sufficient guidance regarding the necessary preparation in knowledge and skills to engage in those tasks successfully, and do not allow school social workers to be prepared broadly for their possible duties.

Starting in August 2018, biweekly meetings were held to construct this new set of preparation and practice standards for school social workers, the intent of which is to consolidate school social worker competencies into a comprehensive preparation and credentialing system and to recognize their expertise in providing social services to students with disabilities.

These proposed standards were presented to the State Board of Education for review at its June 11, 2019 meeting. This presentation was followed by a period of public comment through September 15, 2019. A total of 70 individuals responded to the public comment survey, representing 22 counties and 39 different school districts and ISDs. Of the 62 individuals who identified their professional roles in the survey, there were 36 school social workers, 20 school administrators, four preparation program representatives, three parents/citizens, and one professional organization representative.

Participants were first asked to indicate their overall level of support for the proposed standards. Thirty-eight participants supported the proposed standards as written, 17 supported the proposed standards with minor revisions, 12 were neutral, and three indicated significant changes were needed. Of those three, only one provided actionable suggestions for improvement of the proposed standards.

A total of 18 comments were submitted, and they were organized into three categories: minor language clarification, revising of elements, and restructuring of portions of Standard 2 (Assessment). No comments were made on Standard 1 (Ethics and Values). The stakeholders who developed the proposed standards reviewed the public comment, and while they did not make major changes to the standards as presented to the Board in June, they did make minor adjustments to address recommendations offered in public comments.

Several minor language changes were made based on comments submitted. The stakeholders added "(MARSE)" to Standard 2 (Assessment) Element 6 to be consistent with other laws mentioned in the same element. They also added "within local context" to Standard 6 (Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration) Element 1 to emphasize the importance of understanding local context and climate when collaborating with others. The phrase "stays current" in the Element 5 of Standard 6 (Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration) in the previous version was replaced with "learns and applies...continuously..." to address a concern about the definition of the word "current."

One commenter recommended revising Standard 2 (Assessment) Element 2 to more precisely communicate that assessments are conducted to identify student strengths and resiliency factors in order to diminish risks. An Element 6 was added to Standard

3 (Intervention) to emphasize the mental health services school social workers provide. Standard 4 (Data-Driven Decision Making and Practice Evaluation) Element 1 was split into two elements to properly distinguish data-driven decisions made for students and for one's own professional practice. The stakeholder group also replaced the language "within the context of multicultural understanding" contained in Standard 5 (Human Rights and Social and Economic Justice) Elements 3 and 4 with "multicultural awareness" to be consistent with language used in the professional literature.

One additional amendment was made during State Board of Education consideration of approval of the standards at its October 8, 2019 meeting. The word "jargon" in Element 2 of Standard 5 (Human Rights and Social and Economic Justice) was replaced with "language." The amended element now reads "Communicate educational language in understandable terms to students and families."

Certification and Program Requirements

The stakeholder group strongly recommended development of a school social worker certificate, as opposed to the current practice of issuing approval letters for school social workers. To provide school social worker preparation in the State of Michigan and to recommend its program completers for school social worker certification from the MDE, providers must construct their programs to address Michigan Standards for the Preparation and Practice of School Social Workers and undergo the state program approval process for initial approval. Programs must provide evidence of program and candidate performance periodically to continue their approval with the department.

School social worker certification requirements are recommended to include:

- Master's degree in social work from a Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited program;
- Valid social worker license (LLMSW or LMSW) issued by Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs;
- Completion of an MDE-approved school social worker preparation program;
- 500 clock hours of direct social work practice with children and/or youth, supervised by a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), which may be earned via a field practicum or internship during the master's degree program, or as a post-master's degree practicum.

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Standards for the Preparation and Practice of School Social Workers

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Roles of School Social Workers

The roles of school social workers are complex and multifaceted within the ecology of schools, and are enumerated in Michigan Department of Education School Social Worker Rules [340.1011-1018](#). They may include but are not limited to the following:

- Provide individual and group counseling to students and their families in need of assistance utilizing an ecological framework addressing variations in development and learning, as well as reciprocal influences of home, school, and community.
- Provide consultation, collaboration, and advisement services to students, their family members and school staff regarding students' social, emotional, and behavioral status impacting learning, development, mental health, and school success. Encourage developmentally appropriate student self-determination and self-advocacy.
- Implement school social work services within a multi-tiered intervention model for programs and services.
- Provide instruction, modeling, and coaching to students, parents, and school staff in the implementation of effective behavior intervention strategies and techniques. Provide ongoing guidance and training services to parents and school staff on topics pertinent to the development, mental health, and learning needs of students.
- Provide liaison, coordination, and case management services with schools, families, community agencies, and other resources to influence positive school outcomes for students.
- Develop functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans to facilitate successful learning and socialization opportunities. Provide services and disseminate information to encourage school wide positive behavior supports.
- Identify and coordinate accommodations and modifications of school environment for a student to obtain access to general education curriculum and instruction.
- Provide support to facilitate successful transitions in areas that affect students' learning opportunities.
- Provide crisis prevention, planning, and intervention services, including assessments of the impact of trauma on development, learning, and school performance.
- Provide comprehensive written reports of assessments and evaluations to students that specifically address the reasons for referral. Utilize multiple methods of collecting data and provide appropriate measurable goals for intervention and anticipated outcomes from service.
- Provide and interpret assessments and evaluations to determine eligibility for special education and identify needs for programs and services including those that are stated in the Individualized Education plan (IEP)/Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- Utilize home and community settings, as appropriate, to collect assessment information, collaborate with parents, and provide interventions.

- Collaborate with parents, multidisciplinary evaluation team members, school administrators, and other community agencies to develop an accurate understanding of a student's disability, the impact of the disability on students' educational performance, and provide information regarding whether behaviors and school performance are attributable to manifestations of the disability.
- Conduct needs assessments and advocate for policies, programs, and services to meet educational and mental health needs of students, and to support safe school climates conducive to learning.
- Identify issues that may interfere with student development, learning, and school success.
- Identify and work to prevent bias, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression that interfere with individual rights in the educational process.
- Ensure that prevention, assessment, evaluation, and intervention services are sensitive to the diverse needs of the student's multi-cultural differences.
- Provide school social work services as determined by the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)/Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) team.

Standards

The standards outlined in this document provide the foundation for the practice of school social work. School social workers are trained mental health professionals who are active members of the school ecology. They are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team and in providing special education services. In addition, their participation and involvement in serving students with disabilities are specified in Administrative Rules. They operate from a systems perspective and strengths-based approach, providing leadership support and interventions to students, families, teachers, and the larger school community.

School social workers offer specialized knowledge and skills that support the functional skills and academic, behavioral, social, and emotional development of students. The standards encompass the following dimensions central to school social work: ethics and values, assessment, intervention, data-driven decision making and practice evaluation, human rights and social and economic justice, interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration, and legal aspects and advocacy. Each of these standards is described in detail below, including a description and knowledge and skill elements associated with each school social worker practice standard.

Standard 1 Ethics and Values

Ethics and values are inherent to the practice of school social work. School social workers must understand and follow the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, which is the guide for professional conduct for any social worker. School social workers must also know and adhere to the NASW School Social Worker Standards. Both the NASW Code of Ethics and the School Social Worker Standards create the foundation on which school social workers build upon the work that is done with students, families and communities. School social workers:

Standard 1	Ethics and Values: Adhere to the ethics and values of the social work profession while understanding the unique aspects of school social work practice and the needs of the students, families, teachers, and the larger school community they serve
Element 1	Understand the theoretical foundations of the school social work profession and service delivery
Element 2	Follow NASW Code of Ethics and NASW School Social Worker Standards

Standard 2 Assessment

School social workers have knowledge of varied models and methods of assessment and data collection to identify individual and systemic strengths and needs, develop effective services, supports, and programs, and measure progress and outcomes. School social workers individually, or as part of a multidisciplinary team, conduct comprehensive assessments to identify and evaluate a student’s developmental and educational needs, mental health concerns, eligibility for special education, and other educational services. School social workers use valid and reliable assessment techniques and standardized assessment tools to assess progress towards academic and behavioral goals. School social workers:

Standard 2	Assessment: Conduct ongoing individual, family, and system/organization assessments/evaluations with the goal of improving student social-emotional, behavioral, functional, and academic outcomes
Element 1	Understand how to use standardized assessment protocols
Element 2	Conduct comprehensive assessment and evaluation for students, families, and schools to identify student strengths and resiliency factors in order to diminish educational and developmental risks
Element 3	Conduct assessment of the impacts of trauma
Element 4	Conduct functional assessment of behavior
Element 5	Understand normative developmental expectations for infant, child, adolescent, and young adult functional skills, emotional, behavioral, social, cultural, communicative, cognitive, learning, and physical development
Element 6	Understand similarities and differences between clinically based definitions of psychiatric disorders and eligibility for educational support and services as indicated under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE)

Standard 3 Intervention

School social workers remain current with school-based intervention research and use evidence-informed practices. Interventions are designed to enhance positive educational experiences focusing on functional, academic, and social-emotional skills and involve the student, family, other interdisciplinary team members, school personnel, and community resources as appropriate. Interventions are applied within a multi-tiered framework and address the home, school, and community to promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning. School social workers:

Standard 3	Intervention: Use culturally responsive, evidence-informed interventions at individual, group, family, school personnel, and community levels
Element 1	Use crisis prevention, planning, and intervention practices
Element 2	Advance trauma informed practices
Element 3	Promote positive behavior support for prevention and intervention
Element 4	Develop behavior intervention plans
Element 5	Pursue interventions that promote social justice and access to education
Element 6	Apply proven tools and methodologies to provide mental health supports and interventions

Standard 4 Data-Driven Decision Making and Practice Evaluation

School social workers use a systematic approach to guide data-driven decision making. School and student data are used in the design, implementation, and evaluation of individual and systemic interventions to further students’ functional, academic, and social-emotional skills. School social workers collaborate with others to use data to develop educationally relevant, behaviorally specific goals and modify interventions based upon data-driven assessment. School social workers:

Standard 4	Data-Driven Decision Making and Practice Evaluation: Use data-driven information to evaluate practice outcomes for students and programs
Element 1	Use data to guide service delivery to students with disabilities
Element 2	Evaluate their own practice regularly to improve and expand services
Element 3	Evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services provided as indicated on IEP/IFSP
Element 4	Practice effective communication of the assessment and evaluation results for students with disabilities that include recommendation and goals

Standard 5 Human Rights and Social and Economic Justice

School social workers demonstrate knowledge of culturally responsive, multi-tiered practices that promote diversity, inclusion, and social justice throughout the school setting. This includes a focus on promoting positive outcomes for individuals and systems, noting the diverse and reciprocal influences of home, school, and community. Culture is defined broadly including the importance of multiple and intersecting identities. School social workers continuously develop, advocate for, and share specialized knowledge and skills that celebrate and affirm the people they serve, advocating for culturally responsive practices as an important context of this work. School social workers:

Standard 5	Human Rights and Social and Economic Justice: Continue to develop relevant knowledge and understanding to service the diverse client groups
Element 1	Recognize a broad range of experiences, personal characteristics, and background variables that influence student learning and development
Element 2	Communicate educational language in understandable terms to students and families
Element 3	Deliver service to students/families with multicultural awareness and competence
Element 4	Advocate that services are provided with multicultural awareness and competence within the school setting

Standard 6: Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration

School social workers demonstrate interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration skills to promote positive outcomes for students. School social workers have knowledge of their own roles, the roles of others, and are skilled at helping interdisciplinary teams work effectively. School social workers provide leadership in developing a positive school climate and work collaboratively with school personnel, families, and community members to increase accessibility and effectiveness of services. School social workers:

Standard 6	Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration: Engage internally with school personnel, family members, and externally with community professionals as appropriate to increase accessibility and effectiveness of services
Element 1	Understand the roles of other professionals to promote successful interdisciplinary collaboration within local contexts
Element 2	Participate in multidisciplinary teams, reviews of existing evaluation data, and IEP/IFSP team meetings
Element 3	Facilitate and coordinate student access to community resources
Element 4	Communicate educational jargon in understandable terms to parents, other school staff, and agencies, both written and oral
Element 5	Learn and apply evidence-informed practices continuously for interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration

Standard 7: Legal and Advocacy

School social workers demonstrate knowledge of professional and legal standards of practice, including state and federal educationally relevant laws and policies, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Equal Protection laws. School social workers provide consultation to school staff and families in understanding and adhering to legislation and regulations. School social workers monitor and advocate for policies and legislation that effectively support students, the practice of school social work, and public education. School social workers:

Standard 7	Legal and Advocacy: Advocate for policy and best practices at individual, school, district, community, and state levels to provide appropriate services to students and families and to assure equal access to educational opportunities
Element 1	Fulfill legal responsibilities and critical roles within the educational mission of the school or district
Element 2	Identify methods to analyze and influence school agencies at local, state, and federal levels to maximize student success
Element 3	Understand relevant local, state, and federal legislation, statutes, and policies that may impact students, families, school social workers, and other school personnel including requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE)