



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING


GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 26, 2023

**TO:** Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents  
Public School Academy Directors

**FROM:** Dr. Michele A. Harmala, Deputy Superintendent   
P-20 System and Student Transitions

**SUBJECT:** School Social Worker Approval Requirements and Available Waiver

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has received inquiries regarding school social worker approvals. The purpose of this memorandum is to explain the difference between a social work license and an approval as a school social worker, to clarify approval requirements for school social workers, and to remind intermediate school districts (ISDs) and local education agencies (LEAs), both traditional public school districts and public school academies (PSAs), of the availability of an administrative rule waiver to address the shortage of qualified personnel.

### **Social Work License and Approval as a School Social Worker**

It is important for ISDs, LEAs, and school social worker candidates to understand the difference between a social worker license and an approval as a school social worker. Michigan Compiled Laws, [MCL 333.18504](#), requires an individual to hold a social work license to practice social work in the state of Michigan. Therefore, all social workers working in schools must hold a social work license, issued by the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), as set forth in the [Michigan Public Health Code Act 368 of 1978](#).

To work in schools with students with disabilities, either implementing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or conducting special education evaluations, a licensed social worker must also hold an approval as a school social worker. Approvals for school social workers are issued by MDE, as required in the [Michigan Administrative Code R 340.1017](#).

### **Requirements for a MDE Approval as a School Social Worker**

MDE approval as a school social worker requires a master's level social worker license, completion of an approved graduate program for school social work, and a minimum of a 500-clock-hour supervised social work practicum. After completion of these requirements, a social worker is granted a temporary approval as a school social worker for the first year of employment while working under the direction of a

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fully approved school social worker. After successful completion of the first year, a school social worker may follow the pathway to full approval described in the [Michigan Administrative Code at R 340.1012](#).

Licensed master's level social workers who did not complete school social work coursework as part of their graduate degree program are still able to complete the required courses through an approved university program. Approved programs can be found on the [Approved Advanced Programs website](#).

A school social worker may conduct special education evaluations, deliver specially designed instruction, and provide services outlined in students' IEPs or IFSPs. A licensed social worker who does not hold an MDE approval as a school social worker may work in schools but is not qualified to provide special education services. When an ISD or LEA assigns a social worker, who does not have MDE approval as a school social worker, to provide specialized instruction and/or provide services as outlined in a student's IEP or IFSP, the assignment could result in a denial of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) as required by [34 CFR § 300.101](#) of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The potential denial of a FAPE would necessitate a review of each student on the social worker's caseload to determine the need for compensatory services. In addition, the school district may not report the social worker as special education personnel on special education cost reports because the individual does not hold the required qualifications; therefore, fiscal penalties would apply.

### **Addressing the Critical Shortage: School Social Worker Waiver**

Pursuant to [MCL 380.1281](#) and [Executive Order 1996-12](#), the state superintendent is making available a waiver for ISDs and LEAs to continue to meet the unique social work needs of students with disabilities and at the same time to address the critical personnel shortage. A waiver may be granted to allow the employment of a LARA-licensed master's level social worker to serve in the role of a school social worker before completing the requirements for an MDE approval as a school social worker if the following conditions are met:

1. The district is unable to find a social worker with an approval as a school social worker.
2. The candidate enrolls in an approved school social work program to complete the requirements to obtain a school social worker approval.
3. The candidate works under the direction of a fully approved school social worker.

The waiver application outlines the specific requirements for the waiver and can be found at: [Administrative Rule Waiver Application for School Social Worker \(SSW\) Requirement Under Rule 340.1799f](#)

Please direct questions to MDE's Office of Special Education at 1-888-320-8384 or Sungti Hsu at 517-241-4546 in MDE's Office of Educator Excellence.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance  
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Departments