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Texas School Social Workers: Job Barriers, Supports, Satisfaction and Preparation Programs

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Abstract

A study examined the job barriers, supports, satisfaction, and preparation programs of Texas school social workers (TSSW). The study used a convergent parallel mixed method design to compare and discuss quantitative and qualitative data obtained through a survey emailed to 476 Texas school social workers. Data was gathered from 250 social workers. The findings highlight the need to better understand the role of TSSWs and improve university social work preparation programs. The implications of this study's findings on TSSW work barriers and supports and preparation programs can create major improvements to the preparation, job definition, and work environment of TSSWs, and more importantly, the maximum success of all Texas students.

Keywords: Texas, school, social worker, responsibilities

School Social Workers in Texas: Job Barriers, Supports, Satisfaction and Preparation Programs

Almost no research has been conducted on Texas school social workers even though in May 2020 Texas employed the fourth highest number of school social workers among all states (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2021a). Because of the impact education has on American lives (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021b) and the services social workers can provide (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009), it is critical that the educational environment supports school social workers. Therefore, a study of Texas school social workers (TSSW) was completed in 2022 aimed at better understanding job barriers and supports Texas school social workers experience, their job satisfaction, and how social work preparations programs can improve to address the needs of TSSWs.

Introduction

The purpose of social work is to enhance the problem solving and coping capacities of people; to connect people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities; to promote the effective and humane operation of these systems; and to contribute to the development and improvement of social policy (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009). Social work focuses on meeting the needs and empowerment of people, especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. Although these needs of people in communal society have probably existed since the stone age, social work has existed in the United States for over two hundred years (Okpych & Yu, 2014).

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) defines a school social worker as:

> School Social Workers are trained mental health professionals with a degree in social work who provide services related to a person's social, emotional and life adjustment to school and/or society. School Social Workers are the link between the home, school and community in providing direct as well as indirect services to students, families and school personnel to promote and support students' academic and social success. (SSWAA, 2021a)

SSWA continues by defining school social workers' role in schools:

> School Social Workers are trained mental health professionals with a degree in social work who provide services related to a person's social, emotional and life adjustment to school and/or society. School Social Workers are the link between the home, school and community in providing direct as well as indirect services to students, families and

> school personnel to promote and support students' academic and social success. (SSWAA, 2021b)

In essence, a school social worker works in schools to provide social work services to a school community's members—students, families, and school staff—to promote and support schools' major goals of student academic and social success.

Phillippo and Stone (2011) present that school social work and the modern school began to develop contemporarily in the beginning of the 20th century. One of the oldest branches of social work (Sweifach & LaPorte, 2013), the practice of social work in schools began in the early 1900s when the role of the visiting teacher was created because of concern for disadvantaged students (Allen-Meares, 1988). The visiting teacher's primary focus was to facilitate communication and understanding between the school, families, and community and foster student welfare. The visiting teacher fulfilled a liaison role that drew greater importance with the passage of compulsory attendance laws (Allen-Meares, 1988). They focused on student attendance and behavior, informed families about academic requirements and community resources and educators about the circumstances and experiences of children coming to their classroom (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020; Corbin, 2005). School social workers served as advocates for students and their families (Allen-Meares, 1988). New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Connecticut were the first states to establish the practice of school social work (Allen-Meares, 1994). Eventually, the school social worker took on the role of home-school-community liaison aimed at sensitizing school staff about the effect children's out-of-school lives had on their learning and school experience. SSWAA identifies six general areas of school social work services in schools:

- Related Services,
- Services to Students,
- Services to Parents/Families,
- Services to School Personnel, School-Community Liaison, and Services to Districts.

School social work does not bring social work into a vacuous organization, but into a complex and possibly irrational organization—the school. In 1991, Dane and Simmon described the school social worker context as a host setting, or "arenas in which social workers practice that are defined or dominated by people who are not social workers" (p. 208). They identified challenges for school social workers due to host setting: role ambiguity, marginalization, value discrepancies, and the devaluation of women as social workers.

Alvarez et al. assert that "Very little published research exists" on the relationship between school social worker efforts and student educational outcomes and between school social worker efforts and school district goal attainment (2013, p. 235). Allen-Meares and Montgomery (2014) emphasize this

same condition exists globally. Alvarez et al. (2013) searched for research publications related to school social workers and school outcomes and found 384 related articles.

Forenza and Eckhardt (2020) continue to describe the current school social work research literature as "insufficient" with a "scarcity of empirical evidence concerning outcomes and service provision" (p. 101). They further note that outcomes of school social work are context-bound because of the high variance in job function and broad types of practices. Cuellar et al. (2018) noted that school social worker services can only be understood within each school community.

Teasley et al. (2012) present that research in school social work is needed to understand and improve the development of systemic methods for student problem solving. No research specifically focused on Texas school social workers (TSSWs) was found prior to 2020. The Steve Hicks School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin through the Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing created the Texas School Social Work Network (TSSWN) to provide "Texas-specific guidance" (University of Texas, 2021, para. 2), "tools and research" (TSSWN, 2020, p. 26) for school social workers. TSSWN (2020) conducted a survey of Texas school social workers connected to the 2020 Texas School Social Workers conference through a flyer, social media, and newsletters. TSSWN received 212 completed surveys. Through this survey, TSSWN gathered many demographic, educational, and work characteristics of TSSWs.

By collecting state school district personnel data, Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2022) maintains a list of Texas school social workers. Padilla et al. (2023) acquired the most current available list from TEA for the 2018-2019 school year, edited it for duplications. A report was formulated with the following information regarding Texas SSWs' demographics and job environment: Texas region center location, campus type, ethnicity, gender, years of experience, degree earned, salary, community type, number of worksite assignments, district charter status, campus student demographics, campus Title 1 status, campus staff average work experience, campus state academic grade, and state student academic test results (Padilla et al., 2023).

There is a great need to explore and expand the knowledge and understanding of current TSSW job barriers, facilitators, job satisfaction, and how to improve school social worker preparation program. Continued research on TSSWs may advocate for the adoption of a school social work service definition and other supports at the state level. Effective research and state support will ensure effective school social work that promotes student, staff, family, and community success now and in the future.

Methodology

A convergent parallel mixed-method design was conducted during the 2021-2022 school year. A survey, the *Wisconsin School Social Worker Survey,* was adapted with permission from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2021). The survey was developed with multiple-choice and open-ended questions and emailed to these TSSWs to obtain a more complete understanding of their job barriers, supports, job satisfaction, and improvement of social worker preparation programs (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021; Randall, 2015). Open-ended responses related to job supports and barriers were categorized. Then, the categories were organized under general themes related to job supports and barriers.

Participants

The researchers utilized the edited TEA 2018-2019 school social workers list to identify currently available TSSWs' emails and 436 were identified. Of those 436 identified, two hundred and fifty school social workers completed the questionnaire anonymously and served as the basis for this study's data analyses on TSSW job barriers, supports, satisfaction, and improvement of preparation program.

Research Questions of the Study

The research questions of the study were:

1. What are job barriers and supports experienced by Texas school social workers?
2. What is the overall job satisfaction level of Texas school social workers?
3. How can social worker preparation programs be improved to support future school social workers?

Results

After analyzing the survey data, the participants identified the top three barriers and supports for school social work in their schools. The data was coded into categories and then grouped into general themes related to job supports and barriers.

Job Barriers and Supports

One hundred TSSW respondents provided 126 different responses identifying the top three barriers for school social work in their schools.

Responses were reviewed and coded for themes, and 22 themes were generated and identified as barriers. The top three themes most identified as the #1 barrier were Lack of Understanding of the School Social Worker role (17.5%), Lack of Administrative Support (16.7%), and Insufficient Number of School Social Workers in the schools (10.3%), constituting over 44% of all identified responses (Table 1). The top three themes most identified as the #2 barrier were Lack of Support (29.3%), Lack of Understanding of SSW Role (18.7%), and Lack of Resources (12.2%), constituting over 60% of all identified responses (Table 2). The top three themes most identified as the #3 barrier were Lack of Support (18.4%), Lack of Resources (17.2%), Lack of Understanding of SSW Role (12.6%), and Poor School Culture (12.6%), constituting over 60% of all identified responses (Table 3). Collectively, among all #1, #2, and #3 barriers, the themes most identified as top barriers were: Lack of Support (64.4%), Lack of Understanding of School Social Worker Role in schools (48.8%), and Lack of Resources (35.7%). Evidently, almost two-thirds of TSSWs do not feel well supported in schools, almost one-half perceived a lack of understanding of the SSW role in schools, and over one-third believe they do not have the resources they need to conduct their job.

Table 1

Top Three Barriers for School Social Workers: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #1

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Lack of Understanding of SSW Role	17.5%		
Lack of Administrative Support	16.7%		
Insufficient Number of SSWs	10.3%		
Lack of Funding	8.7%		
Lack of Time	7.1%		
Lack of Parent Support	7.1%		
Lack of Resources	6.3%	Lack of Needed Resources	5.6%
		Transportation	0.8%
Assigned Non-SW Responsibilities	4.8%		
Lack of community resources	4.0%		
Number of Assigned Campuses	4.0%		
No SSW District Leader	3.2%		

Table 1

Top Three Barriers for School Social Workers: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #1

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Excessive Referrals	2.4%		
Conservative District	0.8%		
Language	0.8%		
Student Turnover	0.8%		
Communication	0.8%		
No Liaison Assigned	0.8%		
Lack of Teacher Support	0.8%		
Student Needs Not Met, Addressed, or Corrected	0.8%		
Lack of Community Support (Mistrust)	0.8%		
No Self Professional Development	0.8%		
Focus on Crisis and Not on Prevention	0.8%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	126		
Total Respondents:	100		

Table 2

Three Top Barriers for a School Social Worker: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #2

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Lack of Support	29.3%	Lack of Administrative Support	21.1%
		Lack of Parent Support (Mistrust)	8.1%
Lack of Understanding of SSW Role	18.7%	Lack of understanding of SSW Role	17.1%
		Students not Receptive to SW	0.8%
		Lack of Positive Image of SSW	0.8%
Lack of Resources	12.2%	Lack of Needed Resources	5.7%

Table 2

Three Top Barriers for a School Social Worker: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #2

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
		Access to community resources	4.1%
		Not Having a Clinical License SW	1.6%
		Lack in-house therapeutic counseling	0.8%
Non-SSW/LCSW Supervisor	7.3%		
High Caseload	4.9%		
Assigned Non-SSW Responsibilities	4.9%		
Lack of Time	4.1%		
Access to Students	2.4%		
Multiple Campus Assignments	2.4%		
Insufficient SSWs	2.4%		
Lack of Funding	1.6%		
Focus on Crisis, Not Prevention	1.6%		
Lack of Multidisciplinary Collaboration	0.8%		
Self-Emotional Burnout	0.8%		
Poor School Culture	0.8%		
Poor Classroom Management Skills	0.8%		
Focus on Testing	0.8%		
Evaluation Issues	0.8%		
Impoverished Community	0.8%		
Lack of Understanding SEL Trauma	0.8%		
Language	0.8%		
Poor Communication	0.8%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		

Table 2

Three Top Barriers for a School Social Worker: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #2

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Total Responses:	123		
Total Respondents:	95		

Table 3

Three Top Barriers for a School Social Worker: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #3

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Lack of Support	18.4%	Lack of Administrative Support	5.7%
		Lack of Parent Support	3.4%
		Unsupportive District Culture	2.3%
		Integration of Trauma Informed Support	2.3%
		Lack of Parental Engagement Program	2.3%
		Students not Receptive to SW	1.1%
		Lack of Community Support (Mistrust)	1.1%
Lack of Resources	17.2%	Lack of Needed Resources	6.9%
		Lack of Parental Engagement Program	5.7%
		Lack of community resources	4.6%
Lack of Understanding of SSW Role	12.6%		
Poor School Culture	12.6%		
Lack of Time	6.9%		
Academic Priority Over Mental Health	6.9%		
Assigned Non-SSW Responsibilities	4.6%		
High Caseload	4.6%		

Table 3
Three Top Barriers for a School Social Worker: Theme Most Identified as Top Barrier #3

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Lack of Funding	4.6%		
Impoverished Community	2.3%		
Access to Students	2.3%		
No SW/LCSW Supervisor	2.3%		
No School Resource Officer	1.1%		
Number of Campuses Assigned	1.1%		
Student Unaware of Self Issues	1.1%		
Confidentiality	1.1%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	56		
Total Respondents:	71		

TSSW respondents identified the top three supports for school social work in their schools (Tables 4, 5, 6). Responses were reviewed and organized into categories then into general support themes. The themes most identified as #1 support were School Staff (34.9%) and School Administration (30.3%). The themes most identified as top #2 support were School Staff (38.5%), School Administration (14.3%), School Social Work Director (9.9%), and District (9.9%). The themes most identified as top #3 support were School Staff (38.5%), Collegial Culture (13.3%), District (13.3%), and School Administration (10.0%). Collectively, among all #1, #2, and #3 supports, the most identified top supports were: School Staff (95.1%), School Administration (54.6%), and (District 30.5%). Thus, school administrators can serve a major barrier to TSSWs, but they can also provide serve as a support.

Table 4

Three Top Supports for a School Social Worker: Themes Most Identified as Top Support #1

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
School Staff	34.9%	School Counselors	19.3%
		School staff support	11.9%
		Teacher Support	1.8%
		Attendance Clerk	0.9%
		Support in general	0.9%
School Administration	30.3%		
Peer SSWs	8.3%		
District	7.3%		
Autonomy	4.6%		
Resources	2.8%		
Referral System	2.8%		
Community Partners	1.8%		
Multidisciplinary Team	1.8%		
Regional Center Support	0.9%		
Information	0.9%		
Student Receptiveness	0.9%		
Funding	0.9%		
Respect for SSW Role	0.9%		
One SSW/School	0.9%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	109		
Total Respondents:	95		

Table 5

Three Top Supports for a School Social Worker: Themes Most Identified as Top Support #2

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
School Staff	38.5%	School Staff	20.9%
		Counselors	3.3%
School Administration	14.3%		
School Social Work Director	9.9%		

Table 5
Three Top Supports for a School Social Worker: Themes Most Identified as Top Support #2

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
District	9.9%		
Resources	8.8%	Community Resources	4.4%
		Resources	4.4%
Recognition of SSW Position	7.7%		
Autonomy	6.6%		
Professional Development	5.5%		
Peer SSWs	4.4%		
School Culture	3.3%		
Increase in SSWs	1.1%		
Parent Support	1.1%		
Student Receptiveness	1.1%		
Multidisciplinary Team	1.1%		
Communication	1.1%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	91		
Total Respondents:	80		

Table 6
Three Top Supports for a School Social Worker: Themes Most Identified as Top Support #3

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
School Staff	21.7%	School Staff	11.7%
		School Counselors	10.0%
Collegial Culture	13.3%		
District	13.3%		
School Administration	10.0%		
Community Partners	6.7%		
Resources	5.0%		
Student Receptiveness	5.0%		
Peer SSWs Collaboration	5.0%		
School Staff	3.3%		

Table 6
Three Top Supports for a School Social Worker: Themes Most Identified as Top Support #3

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Funding	1.7%		
Professional Development	1.7%		
SW Leaders	1.7%		
Understanding of SSW Role	1.7%		
Region Center Support	1.7%		
Student Success	1.7%		
Autonomy	6.7%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	60		
Total Respondents:	55		

One hundred twenty-two TSSW respondents identified whom they sought advice related to their school social work. Responses were coded into categories and then themes (Table 7). The three top sources for advice sought by school social workers were Peer School Social Workers (35.6%), School Staff (24.7%), especially the school counselor, and Online Resources (15.6%).

Table 7
Source for Advice by School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Peer SSWs	35.6%		
School Staff	24.7%	School Counselor	18.0%
		Nurse/Health Specialist	6.8%
Online Resources	15.6%		
Personal Library	6.8%		
Supervisor	5.4%		
Psychologist	3.4%		
LCSW Supervisor	2.0%		
SW Supervisor	1.4%		
University Professors	1.0%		
Community	1.0%		
Social Work Mentor	0.7%		
Administration	0.7%		

Table 7
Source for Advice by School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Social Workers Outside Agency	0.7%		
LPC	0.7%		
National Association for Social Workers	0.3%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	295		
Total Respondents:	122		

Job Satisfaction

One hundred and twenty two TSSWs provided their level of job satisfaction (Table 8). Two-thirds of the TSSW respondents indicated they were either "Very Satisfied" (33.6%) or "Extremely Satisfied" (32.8%) with their jobs. Only 7.4 % of respondents indicated they were "Somewhat Dissatisfied" or "Extremely Dissatisfied" with their jobs. However, almost one-fifth of the respondents (19.7%) were "Somewhat Satisfied." Combining these lower three levels of satisfaction comprises more than one-fourth (28.1%) of the respondents as dissatisfied or not fully satisfied with their jobs. This should create great concern in schools.

Table 8
School Social Worker Job Satisfaction Level

Satisfaction Level	Count	Percent
Extremely Satisfied	40	32.8%
Very Satisfied	41	33.6%
Moderately Satisfied	8	6.6%
Somewhat Satisfied	24	19.7%
Very Dissatisfied	5	4.1%
Extremely Dissatisfied	4	3.3%
Total:	122	100.0%

One hundred and eleven TSSW respondents identified their biggest satisfaction with their job (Table 9). Responses were reviewed and organized into categories and them into general job satisfaction themes. The biggest job satisfaction identified was Helping Students with 75.9% of the responses,

followed by Helping Families with 9.0% and then School Teamwork with 6.6%. The two biggest subcategories in Help Students were experiencing Student Growth/Success (34.0%) and Work with Students (23.1%).

Table 9

Biggest Job Satisfaction for School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Help Students	75.9%	Student Growth/Success	34.0%
		Work With Students	23.1%
		Student Graduation	5.2%
		Gratitude From Student/Families	3.8%
		Student Happiness/Smile	2.4%
		Improvement In At-Risk Students	2.4%
		Building Relationships With Students	1.9%
		Helping Special Education Students	0.9%
		Student Mental Health Improvement	0.5%
		Mentoring Students	0.5%
		Student/Graduate Associate Degree	0.5%
		Student Trust	0.5%
		Successful Case Management	0.5%
Helping Families	9.0%		
School Teamwork	6.6%	Building Relationships/Students/Teachers	5.7%
		School Team	0.9%
Helping Others	4.7%	Impacting Lives	3.8%
		Helping And Giving People Hope	0.5%
		Overcoming Crisis	0.5%
Helping Families	1.4%		
Support from Administration	0.5%		
Advocating SW	0.5%		

Table 9
Biggest Job Satisfaction for School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Improving Schools	0.5%		
Networking	0.5%		
SSW Peer Support	0.5%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	212		
Total Respondents:	111		

One hundred and three respondents identified their biggest dissatisfaction with their job (Table 10). Responses were reviewed and organized into categories and then into general dissatisfaction themes. The three most common dissatisfactions identified were Lack of Support for School Social Workers (30.3%), Lack of Understanding of the Role of Social Workers (18.1%), and High Caseload (14.2%). Within the Lack of Support for School Social Worker theme, the two biggest subcategories in Lack of Support were Lack of Support for Social Work by School Administration and State Education (16.1%) and Social Work Services Not Valued or Respected (11.6%). Again, lack of support by school administration emerges as a strong area of discontent among TSSWs.

Table 10
Biggest Dissatisfaction Among School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Lack of Support for School Social Worker	30.3%	Lack of Support for Social Work by School Administration and State Education	16.1%
		Social Work Services Not Valued or Respected	11.6%
		Lack of Resources	1.3%
		Unsupportive System	1.3%
Lack of Understanding of Role of SSW	18.1%		

Table 10

Biggest Dissatisfaction Among School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
High Caseload	14.2%		
Lack of Understanding by Parents	5.8%		
Lack of Student Success	4.5%		
Administrative Duties	3.9%		
Compensation	3.9%		
Inability to Impact Systems	3.9%		
No SSW License	2.6%		
Lack of Understanding Student of Social Location in Schools	1.9%		
School Culture Issues	1.9%		
None/N/A	1.9%		
Paperwork	1.3%		
Lack of Documentation System	1.3%		
		Politics of the School/District	1.3%
School Culture Issues	2.6%	Unwillingness of Some Teachers to Change	0.6%
		Negative culture	0.6%
Lack of Professional Development	0.6%		
Lack of Understanding of Public Schools by School Social Workers	0.6%		
Lack of Support for Students	0.6%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		

Table 10
Biggest Dissatisfaction Among School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Total Responses:	155		
Total Respondents:	103		

School Social Worker Preparation Program

Ninety-nine TSSW respondents identified the program that prepared them to provide school social work services (Table 11). The highest response was the University (68.8%) with a master's program identified most frequently (25.8%). Notably, 13.3% of respondents indicated "On the Job" preparation, and 8.6% stated "None" or "N/A." Thus, over one-fifth of the respondents (21.9%) indicated that no program prepared them for their school social work job. More specifically, when responding to a question asking if their undergraduate/graduate program prepared them to provide school social work services (Table 12), 68.6% of 102 TSSW respondents answered affirmatively. Also, 16.7% answered "No" and 14.7% answered "Somewhat." Thus, almost one-third of respondents (31.4%) responded the undergraduate/graduate program only "Somewhat" or not at all prepared them to provide school social work services.

Table 11
Program Preparation for School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
		Master's Program	25.8%
		University	18.8%
University	68.8%	BSW Program	13.3%
		Internship	8.6%
		SSW Certificate	2.3%
On the Job	13.3%		
None/N/A	8.6%		
SSW Conferences	4.7%		
Self-Study	3.1%		
Networking	0.8%		
Director	0.8%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	128		
Total Respondents:	93		

Table 12
How Well Did Undergraduate/Graduate Program Prepare School Social Worker

	Count	Percent
Somewhat	15	14.7%
No	17	16.7%
Yes	70	68.6%
Total:	102	100.0%

TSSW respondents identified how the undergraduate/graduate program prepared them to provide school social work services (Table 13). The top three ways undergraduate/graduate programs prepared 79 respondents to provide school social work services were General Practice (30.3%), Internship (21.1%), and Strong Teaching on Multi System Practice (18.3%). Notably, 6.4% of respondents indicated the programs "Did Not" help them prepare to provide school social work services.

Table 13
University Social Work Program Preparation

Theme	Theme %
Generalist Practice	30.3%
Internship	21.1%
Strong teaching on Multi System Practice	18.3%
Did Not	6.4%
Informative Professors	6.4%
Graduate Mental Health Training	5.5%
Some Courses Helped	3.7%
Provided Resources	1.8%
Connected to Local Community Needs	1.8%
Well-Rounded Preparation	1.8%
Very Little	0.9%
Focus On and Working With Latinos	0.9%
Social Work Networking	0.9%
Total Percent:	100.0%
Total Responses:	109
Total Respondents:	90

Seventy-seven TSSW respondents provided recommendations on how higher education institutions can improve the preparation of school social workers (Table 14). With 81.1%, curriculum improvement was the top choice. The largest subcategories in Curriculum Improvement included School Social Work courses (16.8%) and Mental Health Preparation on School Social Work (16.1%). A distance away, continued connection after graduation between college instructors and students, such as mentoring, was the second highest recommendation with 6.3% of responses.

Table 14

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions to Improve Preparation of School Social Workers

Theme	Theme %	Category	Category %
Curriculum Improvement	81.1%	Courses & Prep Per Branch Of SW	6.3%
		School Social Work Courses	16.8%
		Mental Health Prep On School Social Work	16.1%
		More Hands-On	12.6%
		Service Learning Opportunities	7.7%
		School Environment	6.3%
		Documentation	4.9%
		Ethics	2.1%
		School Politics	1.4%
		Teaching on The Impact of Diversity	1.4%
		Special Education	1.4%
		Focus On Case Management	1.4%
		Include Substance Abuse In Curriculum	0.7%
		More Hands-On Experiences	0.7%
		Focus On Leadership	0.7%
		Update Student Issues	0.7%
Continue Connection Post-Graduation	6.3%	Mentorship With Social Workers	4.9%
		Follow Up Post-Graduation	1.4%
Instructor Improvement	4.2%	Faculty Should Return to the Field Occasionally	1.4%
		Bilingual Faculty	1.4%
		Learn From Practitioners	1.4%

Table 14

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions to Improve Preparation of School Social Workers

Specialized Speakers	2.1%	More Specialized Speakers	2.1%
SSW Advocacy	1.4%	Advocate For School Social Work	1.4%
SSW Certification	0.7%		
Paid Internship	0.7%		
Student-Centered Quality Instruction	0.7%		
SSW Certification	0.7%		
Continue Connection Post-Graduation	0.7%		
SW Department	0.7%		
None	0.7%		
Total Percent:	100.0%		
Total Responses:	143		
Total Respondents with Codable Input:	77		
Total Respondent(s) With Uncodable Input:	6		
Total Respondents:	83		

Limitations

The previous report reviewed the study's limitations that included a 57.3-percent participation rate. While TSSW demographics was not the focus of this study, the demographics gathered by this study's survey were statistically consistent with the prior state TSSW demographics report (Padilla et al., 2023).

Summary And Implications

About two-thirds of the TSSW respondents were "Very Satisfied" or "Extremely Satisfied" with their school social work job. Only 7.4% of respondents were dissatisfied to some degree. Respondents identified their biggest job satisfaction was Helping Students, followed by Helping Families, and then School Teamwork. No doubt, Texas school social workers receive great satisfaction in helping students succeed.

TSSW respondents identified their biggest job dissatisfaction. The top three job dissatisfactions were lack of support for SSWs, lack of understanding of the SSW role, and high caseload. Within the lack of support for the school social worker, the two biggest subcategories were lack of support for social work by school administration and state education and social work services not valued or respected. These findings are consistent with the previous literature on school social worker job satisfaction. Pamperin (1987) found higher role conflict and ambiguity led to lower job satisfaction. Furthermore, Staudt's (1997) research study revealed school social workers with supervisors who were social workers were more satisfied with supervision than those with supervisors from another discipline. Additionally, in 2006, Agresta stressed past research has found significant relationships between role discrepancy and job satisfaction in social workers in general (Kadushin & Kulys, 1995; Marriot et al., 1994) and among school social workers specifically (Pamperin, 1987; Staudt, 1997). This study's results on SSW job dissatisfaction reaffirm past research. It is critical that school leaders recognize the causes of SSW dissatisfaction so they may specifically address them effectively. Schools must support SSWs, ensure the school staff understand their role, and maintain a reasonable caseload that ensures success for students and staff. Job satisfaction is key to retaining well-trained and experienced SSWs.

TSSW respondents identified work barriers and supports to SSW practice. The top three barriers are lack of support, lack of understanding of SSW's role in schools, and lack of resources. School leaders must successfully eliminate these SSW work barriers especially by ensuring SSWs have a specialized mentor or advisor they can seek assistance from when needed. The top three supports of SSW practice identified are school staff support, collegial culture, and district and school administration support. School leaders must ensure these supports exist for all SSWs. Additionally, SSW respondents identified sources they sought for

advice. The three top sources are peer SSWs, school staff, especially the school counselor, and online resources. It is critical that university social work instructors remain accessible to TSSWs for advice.

TSSW respondents identified the program that prepared them to provide school social work services. The highest response was the University, with a master's program identified the most. Notably, 13.3% of respondents indicated On-the-job preparation. Respondents described how their undergraduate/graduate program had prepared them to provide school social work services. More than two-thirds of respondents agreed their undergraduate/graduate program had prepared them to provide school social work services. However, 14.7% of the participants responded that their university program had somewhat prepared them, while 14.7% also indicated their university program did not prepare them to provide school social work services. While most school social workers provided positive comments about their college preparation to conduct school social work, there was a small group that did not find their college preparation sufficient. It is critical social work programs prepare future school social workers sufficiently well, so all Texas school social workers find themselves well prepared. Respondents revealed how their undergraduate/graduate programs had prepared them to provide school social work services. The top three ways were General Practice, Internship, and Strong Teaching on Multi-System Practice. Notably, 6.4% of respondents indicated the programs "Did Not" help them prepare to provide school social work services. Respondents provided recommendations for higher education institutions to improve the preparation of future school social workers. The top improvement involved Curriculum Improvement that included School Social Work courses, Mental Health Preparation on School Social Work, and teaching about the school environment. This last suggestion is critical because respondents commented that the negative side of the school and district political environment interfered with their services.

Conclusion

Many TSSWs find support in their jobs and about two-thirds of TSSWs are satisfied with their job. However, many also experience job barriers that may limit their job efficiency and job satisfaction. Just under one-third of TSSWs indicated their college preparation program somewhat or did not prepare them for their jobs. TSSWs can provide great support to schools given the right job environment and preparation.

Further study may explore how school social workers navigate the complex public education system to ensure compliance with social work ethical standards. Follow-up study may focus on whether universities are developing program improvements that incorporate recommendations provided by TSSWs in

this study to better prepare future TSSWs and what school leaders are doing to ensure a better understanding of the role of SSWs in schools and promoting job support and satisfaction for SSWs.

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