



School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

School Reopening Priorities and Guidance during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Our nation is in the midst of navigating two public health crises related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the traumatic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubry and others, both of which are unresolved. The recent and repeated incidents of police brutality in this country is a major public health problem taking a tremendous toll on the psychological wellbeing of Black, Indigenous and People of Color. As school social workers, we are tasked with the responsibility of not only helping our students and families manage these crises, but also the staff with whom we work.

Given the urgency and fluid nature of these times, with the increasing and disparaging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as long standing unaddressed racial inequities have been felt across the United States, how we think and respond to the overarching economic, psychological and racial disparities is critical. The recent and repeated incidents of police brutality in this country is a major public health problem that joins COVID-19 in taking a disproportionately tremendous toll on the health and psychological well-being of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) everywhere. The precipitating factors that pushed our nation into these crises remain unaddressed and unresolved which will impact any [chosen re-opening plan](#):

- There is continued racial injustice toward our black and brown communities and unanswered calls for the necessary societal change to address long standing systemic racial inequities in our institutions.
- There is no vaccine, inadequate testing and contact tracing to mitigate the spread COVID-19, the demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) exceeds availability, and access to medical resources is scarce while health precautions become snarled in political polarization.
- There is disparity with access to health resources specifically in undocumented communities who may not have access to testing and once they are sick, can not afford medical bills, are turned away, or face a long wait for services.

As a result of these unresolved crises and a [lack of educational funding](#) to address them, pushing to move forward without attending to the underlying issues will be fraught with challenges. Therefore, it is critical that school social workers continue to acknowledge and voice how collectively our students, staff, leaders, schools, communities *and ourselves* are operating in a persistent state of crisis. The chronic nature of this crisis calls for school social workers to

maintain a laser focus on prioritizing physical, emotional, and social safety for students. This includes continual assessment and alignment of services and supports that promote the overall wellbeing and safety of students and the school community; optimizes opportunities to identify and cultivate the services, supports, and family engagement necessary for our students, families, schools and communities; and empowerment to promote the self-care necessary for the resilience to endure and emerge from these challenging times stronger.

The three main priorities in reopening: Safety, Services, and Self-Care

Safety

Schools have an integral role in the education of the whole child and the safety and wellbeing of communities. SSWAA urges school social workers to collaborate with school district administrators and local health officials to assess the readiness for reopening and to plan for when students do physically return to school. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020) has a [guiding document](#) that supports school staff in considering the policies and procedures, supplies, training, and communication needed in order to reopen schools in a way that supports the physical, emotional, and social health of school communities.

Whether starting the year off in-person, hybrid or remotely, school social workers will play a critical role because of their understanding of the interrelated importance of physical and psychological safety as well as the ways in which the racism endemic within institutions of education and health care create and exacerbate inequities.

It is imperative, now more than ever, that school social workers take the lead from students, families, and communities. School social workers can use their positionality within schools in order to elevate and amplify the voices and demands of students when it comes to both the school community's response to COVID-19 and their role and complicity in the racism of our educational system. School social workers can do their own education as well as educate their colleagues on the ways in which they uphold systems of oppression and white supremacy in schools.

With this in mind school social workers should:

- COVID-19
 - Stay up to date on [national, state, local, and tribal](#) health information;
 - Assert a teach first approach to COVID-19 health precautions by supporting purposeful efforts to help students understand the expectations of the changed school environment;
 - Ensure that [COVID-19](#) health precautions are integrated and taught from a social emotional learning mindset;
 - [Educate and reinforce](#) with students, their families and school personnel the importance of following [CDC guidelines](#) and those of their school district for safety in the school, on the bus, and in their community

- [Conduct home \(“porch”\) visits](#) following CDC and local school district guidelines to include social distancing and appropriate PPE .
- [Support families](#) that have children that test positive for COVID
- [Support teachers](#) to engage with students about the pandemic and to open the pathways for necessary communication and support regarding the impact COVID-19 has on our lived experiences.
- Assess and address racial inequities.
 - Conduct an [equity](#) context analysis at the school and district-level to identify policies and practices that uphold racism and negatively impact BIPOC students and staff.
 - [Seattle Public Schools Racial Equity Analysis Tool](#)
 - [Western States Racial Justice Assessment Tool](#)
 - Initiate strategic planning to address the outcomes of the equity context analysis that includes school social work at the table.

Services

As schools reopen, in-person or remotely, social-emotional learning (SEL) and the mental health of students, staff, and families within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) should be prioritized. School social workers can support schools in identifying and implementing appropriate SEL curriculum so that all students in the school community receive support during these challenging times.

Some students will benefit from additional support and intervention, and school social workers should prepare a plan for how to deliver these group and individual services both in-person and remotely. School social workers are poised to make the transition to match the designated educational delivery to prevent any gaps in services.

With this in mind school social workers should practice according to the [National School Social Work Model](#) whether supporting in-person, hybrid or remote learning:

- **Provide evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services**
 - Review the [NASW Technology in Social Work Practice standards](#)
 - Consider confidentiality and [ethics](#) in planning for remote services
 - Consider using a specific [consent form](#) to provide virtual services
 - Seek [additional training](#) on the [provision of virtual services](#)
 - Explore avenues and opportunities to provide SSW [assessments](#) virtually
 - [Progress Monitoring Social and Emotional Goals While Utilizing Technology](#)

- [Supporting Our Kids from a Distance: Tools & Strategies to Provide SEL & SpEd Services](#)
 - Help families navigate the [school decision-making process](#) and their [role supporting student's education](#)
 - Consider adopting tools for virtual engagement and support
 - [Closegap](#)
 - [Atlas for Schools](#)
 - [SuperBetter](#)
 - [Centervention](#)
 - [GoZen!](#)
 - [Mind Yeti](#)
 - Develop a plan for [student behavior supports](#) provided virtually
 - [Supporting and Responding to Behavior](#)
 - [Moving from the Physical Classroom to the Virtual Classroom: PBIS Foundations \(Settings, Expectations, Routines\)](#)
 - Establish a virtual school social worker office that students and families can access.
 - [Creating a Virtual Counseling Office](#)
 - [Creating a Bitmoji Classroom/Office](#)
- **Promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence.**
 - Provide [Social Emotional Learning](#) (SEL) services through an equity lens
 - [Guide for Racial Justice & Abolitionist Social and Emotional Learning](#)
 - [Social, Emotional, and Academic Development Through an Equity Lens](#)
 - Elevate and amplify [student voices](#)
 - [Elevating student voices in education](#) provides implementation markers and case studies
 - [Support school personnel](#) as they navigate their own stressors
 - Step up to be a [thought leader](#)
- **Maximize access to school-based and community-based resources to support students and families.**
 - Connection & collaboration with community resources will continue to be an emphasis due to the various reopening models and potential shifting between models in response to COVID-19 community trends.
 - [Supporting Clients in Under-Resourced Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

- Maintaining active engagement and connection with community providers to monitor changes to service delivery and appropriately match clients to the services and supports available.
 - [Community Resource Connects: Linking Families to Social Services During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)
- Advocate for vulnerable populations to ensure they have access to education and services that they may need including undocumented [students](#) and [family members](#), [LGBTQ](#) and [Indigenous](#) youth, and [Communities of Color](#).

Self-Care

While providing school social work services we need to stay safe and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we are also trying to navigate the many questions and concerns that this pandemic is raising for us, both professionally and personally, as we worry about our own health and the health of those we love. School districts have begun to share their plans for reopening with their communities and the following provides guidance to support your work.

So that school social workers can provide safety and services, they should:

- [Protect](#) themselves from COVID-19 exposure
- [Take care](#) of themselves
- [Stay in touch](#) with their own emotions
- Document your strengths and practice [gratitude](#)
- Stay aware of federal policy that impacts personal versus sick time. The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(FFCRA or Act\)](#) requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Additionally, individuals may receive an additional ten weeks of expanded family and medical leave under the [Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act \(EFMLEA\)](#), which requires that certain employers provide up to 10 weeks of paid, and 2 weeks unpaid, emergency family and medical leave to eligible employees if the employee is caring for his or her son or daughter whose school or place of care is closed or whose child care provider is unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19.
- Network with your peers through avenues provided by SSWAA
 - SSWAA's [Practitioners of Color](#) Ad Hoc Committee
 - [SSW 2 SSW Peer Assistance Network](#)

This statement is endorsed by the following State School Social Work Associations:



South Carolina Association of School Social Workers



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