

NASW Center for Workforce Studies
& Social Work Practice

Social Workers in Schools

(Kindergarten through 12th Grade)

occupational profile



Overview

School social workers play a critical role in schools and educational settings. Social workers working within school systems provide services to students to enhance their emotional well-being and improve their academic performance. School social workers are usually employed by the school district or an agency that is contracted with the school district to provide services. School social workers are often called on to help students, families, and teachers address problems such as truancy, social withdrawal, overaggressive behaviors, rebelliousness, and the effects of special physical, emotional, or economic problems (Barker, 2003). School social workers often also address issues such as substance abuse and sexuality issues in the higher grade levels.

Overview of Functions

School social workers have a wide range of job functions. Their title is typically “school social worker.” Qualifications for this position are often decided by the school district or employing agency and requirements can range from a bachelors degree to a clinical license from the state in which they practice. Below is a list of possible job functions within a school setting.

- Conducting bio-psychosocial assessments and social histories;
- Assessing students for substance use, support systems, physical and emotional functioning, barriers to academic performance, peer issues, suicidal/homicidal ideation, and similar issues;
- Developing and implementing treatment plans and discharge plans that support student self-determination;
- Providing direct therapeutic services such as individual, family or group therapy regarding specific issues;
- Providing crisis management services, including assessing for safety;
- Advocating for student services and students’ best interests;
- Providing case management services including, but not limited to, referrals to community resources, collaboration with other professionals;
- Providing trainings and workshops to teachers, school staff and parents;
- Conducting home visits;
- Identifying and resolving ethical issues;
- Managing and supervising staff; and
- Contributing to a multidisciplinary treatment team.

Benefits and Challenges of Working as a School Social Worker

School social workers play a vital role in addressing the various needs of students in an educational setting. Through the roles social workers assume, they have the opportunity to collaborate in the improvement of the lives of those they serve. Social workers who provide mental health services are required to be licensed by the state in which they practice. Their roles can vary from student to student, providing a variety of experiences on a daily basis. However, like many social workers, the caseloads of school social workers are often high. School social workers can be assigned to more than one school, requiring time to travel between locations. Often the school social worker performs in isolation and may not have access to consistent supervision. There also may be limited resources to support service delivery such as a lack of confidential and private space, supplies, and training.

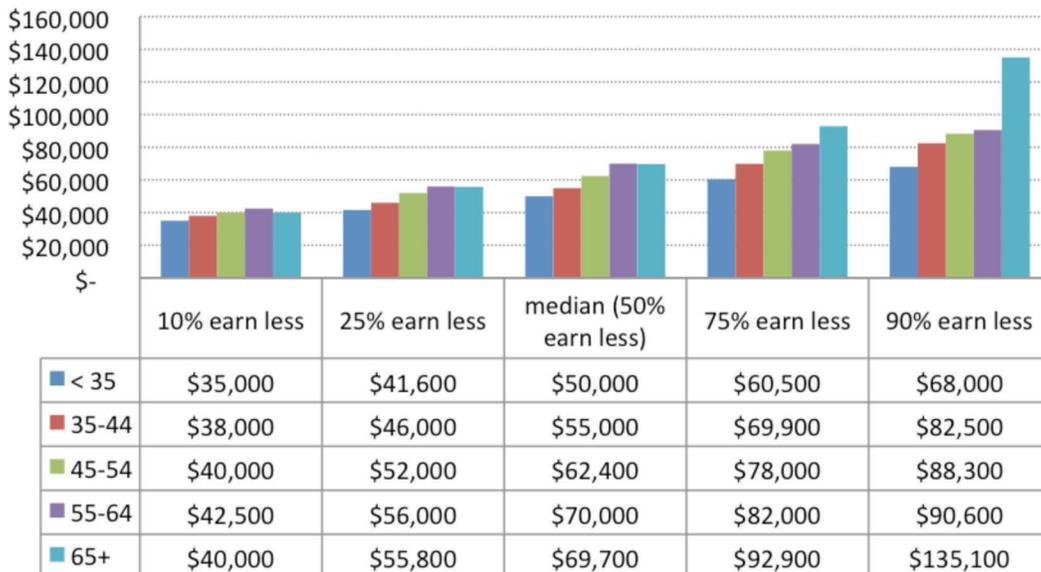
REFERENCES

Barker, R. (2003). *The Social Work Dictionary*. (5th Edition). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Data referenced in this profile are based upon results from the 2009 NASW Salary & Compensation Study (see Notes).

Salary Analysis of Social Workers in School Settings, K-12th Grade (n=1,358)

ANNUAL SALARY BY AGE¹



¹ Your age? (under 25; 25-29 30-34; 35-39; 40-44; 45-49; 50-54; 55-59; 60-64; 65 and older)

ANNUAL SALARY BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE²



ANNUAL SALARY BY DEGREE³



² In what year did you first begin working in the social work field?

³ Which of the following academic degrees do you hold (if any)?

ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION⁴



ANNUAL SALARY BY CERTIFICATION (CONTINUED)



⁴ In which of these areas (if any) do you hold current certifications? Please check all that apply.

ANNUAL SALARY BY SECTOR⁵



ANNUAL SALARY BY PRACTICE AREA⁶



⁵ On October 1, 2009, what was the sector of your primary social work position?

⁶ Which one option best matches the primary practice area of your primary position? (Please check the one best option.)

ANNUAL SALARY BY REGION⁷



ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION



⁷ On October 1, 2009, what was the city, state, and ZIP code of your primary work location?

ANNUAL SALARY BY CENSUS REGION (CONTINUED)



Survey Methodology

This survey was sponsored and developed by NASW. Data were collected and tabulated by Readex Research, an independent research company. To broaden representation of the profession, NASW partnered with a number of other social work membership organizations to create an expanded list of U.S. professional social workers for sampling purposes. These partner organizations were:

- Association for Oncology Social Work (AOSW)
- National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO)
- National Network for Social Worker Managers (NNSWM)
- The Rural Social Work Caucus
- Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care (SSWLHC)

The total number of unduplicated individuals among these five lists and the NASW domestic membership was 101,995. The overall sample size of 78,777 consisted of the 73,777 with a valid email address on file and a systematic sample of 5,000 (from the 28,218 who could not be reached via email).

Data collection utilized a mixed mode approach. For those with a valid email address, invitations were sent via email to access a Web-based survey. Those without an email address were sent invitations via regular mail, with the option to fill out a provided paper survey or to access the survey online via a provided Web site address.

Data were collected between October 1 and November 24, 2009. A total of 23,889 unduplicated usable responses were received, for a 30% response rate. Among these, 22,000 responses were randomly chosen for inclusion in the final tabulation. The data have been weighted to account for disproportional response between the email and regular mail samples. Percentages based on all 22,000 responses are subject to a margin of error of $\pm 0.6\%$.

RESPONDENT STATUS

The compensation analysis focuses on the subset of “valid answering practitioners”—that is, U.S.-based respondents confirming paid employment or self-employment on October 1, 2009 in a social work-related position (defined as any position that requires or makes use of one’s education, training, or experience in social work), and reporting regular salary or wages. Percentages based on these 17,851 “valid answering practitioners” are subject to a margin of error of $\pm 0.6\%$. *Results are not shown in this profile if there were fewer than 30 valid values in a category.*

Removed are those who did not answer at all, those who provided a report considered to be an outlier (top 1% and bottom 1% of all responses), and those who did not answer in a coherent manner. The tabulated base of the “answering practitioners” is 17,911.



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