Letter from the Chair

The organization-in-environment framework (Mulroy, 2004) points out that an organization is embedded within large, complex, macro systems with shifting resources and constraints that affect its mission, purpose, funding, and operations. This external environment is “characterized by economic, cultural, political, social, technological, and socio-demographic factors that actually or potentially affect the organization” (p. 87).

School social workers are well aware of the varied and multiple pressures that have been placed on them by external environmental factors. Franklin (2000) noted that educational policies and educational reforms “are bearing down hard on our practice” (p. 3). For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 (NCLB) brought attention to the needs of the most vulnerable children and at-risk students, while concurrently requiring empirically supported interventions, documented professional accountability, and evaluations of performance.

It is critical for organizations to identify, assess, and determine which similar organizations are affected by these issues in order to facilitate mutually beneficial interactions. In this spirit, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Fall 2014 that aims to unite their political and social capital to the advantage of both organizations.

The MOU includes features that are consistent with an organization-in-environment framework. It serves as a strong formal agreement between the two largest organizations serving the interests of school social workers. The MOU also incorporates horizontal and vertical structures, wherein the national organizations (vertical structure) agree to facilitate collaboration between state and local chapters of each organization (horizontal structures).

In addition, the MOU aims to strengthen and promote a National School Social Work Certification. NASW and SSWAA have embarked on an organizational journey together. The goal is to help school social workers succeed in a new, more challenging external environment.

In this newsletter, Dr. Brenda Lindsay provides historical background about the development of this inter-organizational MOU. In addition, Dr. Michelle Alvarez discusses the need for a national certification for school social workers that is comparable to teacher certification.

Christine Anlauf Sabatino, PhD, LICSW, C-SSWS, Chair

References

Resources
School violence also extends to college and of violence experienced.

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The National Association of School Social Workers (NASW) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2014 to signify a reinvigorated shared commitment to identifying areas for collaboration that advance school social work and the interests of school social workers (NASW, 2014). Dialogue between representatives of both associations began in 2013. There was immediate agreement on the wisdom of working together on issues of mutual interest. A series of discussions took place from July 2013 to April 2014 that culminated in development of the MOU. The document, a collaborative agreement between NASW and SSWAA, outlines the following expectations:

- Organizations will communicate, identify, and share information about areas of common interest;
- Organizations will collaborate on issues that are identified for action and joint activity;
- Each organization will update its membership regarding collaborative work activities;
- Organizations will annually review the MOU and identify potential joint endeavors for the calendar year; and
- SSWAA will endorse the NASW National Standards for School Social Work Services (2012).

Through the dedicated efforts of two powerful national associations, school social workers have the opportunity to capitalize on new synergies to enhance their profession. A work plan for 2014-2015 was later developed and approved by NASW and SSWAA (NASW, 2014). The work plan’s priorities included a requirement that the associations will notify their respective state chapter presidents and executives about the MOU, explore ways to facilitate better collaboration between state and local affiliates of each organization, and discuss ways to strengthen and promote National School Social Work Certification. This article is one way that NASW has worked to keep its membership informed about official...
collaborations on behalf of school social workers.

Sharon Issurdatt Dietsche, NASW senior practice associate, facilitated a conference call meeting between representatives of NASW and SSWAA (personal communication, June 18, 2014). Most of the discussion centered on the need to collaborate on issues related to national certification for school social workers and clinical hours for licensure.

There was consensus among the group about the need to explore ways to make requirements for national certification for school social workers congruent with national professional teaching standards. The ultimate goal of this endeavor is to boost salaries by making the same incentives available to school social workers that are currently offered to nationally certified teachers. At the same time, there is a need to advocate for more school social work positions through dissemination of clearly articulated learning experiences and demonstrated mastery of school social work standards and competencies.

With respect to clinical hours for licensure, school social workers in some states have reported difficulty in getting approval from their state licensing boards to accept for clinical licensure supervised school social work experiences; consequently, they are barred from taking the licensing examination. NASW and SSWAA will work collaboratively to address these issues.

The new MOU reaffirms a long-standing partnership between NASW and SSWAA that began in 1997 (SSWAA, 1997). Randy A. Fisher, then president of SSWAA, and James P. Clark, coordinator of the NASW School Social Work Practice Section, developed the first collaboration agreement. That document acknowledged that both groups share common goals and need to work together to promote school social work as a specialized area of practice. This is still true today. The 2014 MOU seeks to build on past efforts and further embed acknowledgment that school social workers are valuable resources to improve academic outcomes by reducing or eliminating barriers to learning.

REFERENCES


National certification is a high-profile topic that keeps surfacing for school social workers. In the 1990s, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) responded by developing an advanced practice specialty certification, the Certified School Social Work Specialist (C-SSWS). This certification was created prior to the availability of licenses, certifications, or endorsements in school social work by teacher certification agencies. The NASW national certification served the needs of the field for many years until more states began to offer certification and licensure for school social workers.

Around the same time, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was founded. Soon after its inception, this organization began offering advanced national certification for experienced teachers to demonstrate competency in their fields. States began to offer certification and licensure for school social workers.

School social work expert Gary Shaffer noted that “educational reform and concomitant changes in teacher preparation and licensure statutes will no doubt cause us to reexamine the regulations of school social work practitioners” (1996, p. 195). In keeping with this idea, I published an article on the need for an advanced national certification for school social work that was equivalent to NBPTS teacher certification (Alvarez & Harrington, 2004).

At that time, NBPTS was expanding to offer national certification to Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP), like school counselors. They were not, however, including school social workers. In my view, national certification equivalent to that offered by NBPTS “would validate the quality of [school social worker’s] professional practice” (Alvarez & Harrington, 2004, p. 20) in a way that is already accepted within professional education.

Today, states and school districts continue to offer incentives to NBPTS-certified school employees. For example, in North Carolina, nationally certified school employees receive a 12 percent increase in salary, Washington State offers a bonus of $5,000, and South Carolina offers supplemental salary of $5,000 per year of certification (NBPTS, 2015).

National certification has been addressed by NASW, not only through the development of the School Social Work Praxis II exam offered by the Educational Testing Services (ETS) and the C-SSWS certificate, but also through journal articles in *Children and Schools* (Sabatino, Alvarez, & Ketchmark, 2011). The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) has addressed it as well, approving a resolution statement that defines a highly qualified school social worker in terms of education, competence, and state certification and/or licensure (SSWAA, 2012).

Unfortunately, ETS has recently discontinued offering the Praxis II exam. Consequently, NASW and SSWAA are asked once again to make a concerted effort to tackle the issue of a national school social work examination—this time as organizational partners.

NBPTS has a written examination requirement as part of their national certification process. SSWAA’s resolution statement is an attempt to put forward the idea that state social work licensure examinations, overseen by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), could be used as the written examination for an NBPTS national school social work certificate. In addition, school social workers have developed documents to demonstrate how obtaining a clinical license in social work is equivalent in rigor to NBPTS certification (A. McInerney and K. Smith, 2015).
one of the challenges, however, is the inconsistency in eligibility requirements for the license examination across the states, making its inclusion in any national certification process very challenging (Alvarez & Harrington, 2004).

The school social work profession should consider pursuing a national certification through NBPTS, NASW, a new option, or a combination of these avenues (Alvarez & Harrington, 2004). Whichever choice is made, national certification must be viewed as rigorous and equivalent to national certification for teachers in this era of accountability, documentation, and performance evaluations. NASW and SSWAA can work together to accomplish this lofty goal. This work began with the signing of an updated Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations in which national certification was listed as a common goal. Now it is time for action. Let the joint project begin!

Michelle Alvarez, EdD, MSW, LCSW, is the associate dean of social sciences, College of Online and Continuing Education, Southern New Hampshire University.

REFERENCES


RESOURCES

NASW SPECIALTY PRACTICE SECTIONS ON-DEMAND WEBINAR

The Supportive School Discipline Initiative: Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline

CREDIT HOURS: 1.5 CEU(s)

PRESENTERS:
• Jaime Koppel, MPA
• LWendie Veloz, MSSW

MODERATOR(S):
• Nancy McFallJean, MSW

Presenters will provide an overview of the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI), an unprecedented cross-sector effort to support positive school climate and promote use of school discipline practices that foster safe, supportive, and productive learning environments. Attorney General Holder & Education Secretary Duncan announced this bold interagency collaboration in July, 2011. Through the SSDI, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Justice (DOJ), in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), other federal partners, philanthropy & experts from the field, are promoting awareness, and supporting development of policies and practices that keep students engaged in school while holding them appropriately accountable for their actions. Presenters will provide an overview of related resources and grant opportunities and share information about successful cross-sector collaborations.

For more details visit: SocialWorkers.org/sections
NASW invites current social work practitioners to submit brief articles for our specialty practice publications. Topics must be relevant to one or more of the following specialized areas:

- Administration/Supervision
- Aging
- Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs
- Child Welfare
- Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults
- Health
- Mental Health
- Private Practice
- School Social Work
- Social and Economic Justice & Peace
- Social Work and the Courts

For submission details and author guidelines, go to SocialWorkers.org/Sections. If you need more information, email sections@naswdc.org.

Did You Know?

Suicide continues to be the third leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24.

For more information, visit SocialWorkers.org/Sections