Chapter 3

Professional Development

This chapter looks at:

- Introduction
- Job description
- Interview questions
- Performance evaluation
- Professional development plan
- Peer group consultation

Chapter 3: Professional Development

Objectives
The objectives for this chapter are twofold. 1) To provide guidance to school administrators and Social Work Supervisors when recruiting and providing supervision to school social workers. 2) To make suggestions for professional development activities pertinent to school social work practices in the school environment.

Introduction
The purpose for this chapter is twofold. First, it is intended to provide guidance to school administrators when recruiting and supervising school social workers. An example job description, interview questions, and performance evaluation plan are included. These tools reflect current roles and responsibilities required of the school social workers by settings in which they practice. School social work positions differ depending on the needs of the student population being served, as well as the school's unique needs. Therefore, responsibilities differ and need to be clear upon hiring.

The second purpose is to offer suggested processes for professional development activities tied to social work practice within school environments. Two such models are the development of a professional development plan and peer group consultation.

Sample School Social Worker Job Description
Below, a sample school social worker description summarizes minimum qualifications, preferred (additional) qualifications, job goals, responsibilities,

Minimum Qualifications
- Bachelor's Degree in Social Work
- Minnesota Board of Social Work Licensure (LSW)
- Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing Standards Board (PELSB) Tier 3 or Tier 4 license

Preferred (Additional) Qualifications
- Master's Degree in Social Work
- Minnesota Board of Social Work Licensure, Clinical Level (LICSW) Experience working with children and families, especially in a school setting

Job Goals
- To maximize school success by addressing and impacting students' personal, social, and emotional needs in home, school and community.

Responsibilities (will vary across settings)*
1. Assess student functioning, both formally and informally, in home, school and community, identifying factors that may negatively impact a student's education while also assessing strengths.
2. Provide counseling to individuals and groups and their families, using appropriate therapeutic strategies.
3. Promote consistent school attendance.

4. Provide crisis intervention services for students, demonstrating skill in diagnosing and recommending appropriate treatment for mental health/behavioral needs.
5. Consult and collaborate effectively with community agencies and other mental health professionals to coordinate service.
6. Actively participate in multidisciplinary teams, and provide consultation to school personnel regarding home, neighborhood and community conditions that may affect student well-being.
7. Demonstrate knowledge of district, state and federal policies, including due process guidelines and child abuse/neglect reporting.
8. Maintain records and billing in a manner consistent with district practices.
9. Maintain a functional office area with materials accessible and organized.
10. Prioritize school social work needs and manage time accordingly.
11. Uphold the ethical standards of the Social Work profession.
12. Cultural competency to support students and families.

MSSWA - 2020
School social work positions differ depending on the needs of the student population being served, as well as the school's unique needs. Therefore, responsibilities would also differ and would need to be made clear upon hiring.

Applicant's Name _____   Date _____

(May rate each question 1-5)

Contextual to COVID-19
● In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, what are some specific actions you've taken to build your skills and abilities to practice and support students/families in a remote/distance learning environment? ● COVID-19 health precautions will have an impact on school reopening plans. What strategies will you use to establish yourself with students, parents, and staff in a distance learning model? A hybrid model? A fully open model?
Who are you?
● Tell us a little bit about yourself and why you are interested in a school social work position? ● Briefly describe your professional background, training, and experience that relates to this position. ● What are the strengths you will bring to this position and our school community? What is an area of growth you have targeted for improvement? ● What are you passionate about and how would you bring your passions to the work you do on a daily basis? ● How has your background and experience prepared you to be effective in an environment that is committed to inclusion and where we see awareness of and respect for diversity as an important value?
What have you done?
● Explain your tasks and job responsibilities (in your practicum, in your past positions). May we contact your supervisor/principals? ● Do you have any experience responding to a traumatic event? Describe. ● What experiences do you have with parenting programs? ● This position works with a team of people, such as counselors, psychologists, mental health

therapists, school nurses, and administrators. There are some similarities to some of the roles and some specific differences of each role. Please share your understanding of a typical school operation and what specific role a school social worker plays that other positions would not.

- Tell us about your experience working collaboratively with other professionals?
- What experience do you have working with diverse populations?
- How have you promoted equity, sensitivity and inclusion in your work?
- How have your experiences and training prepared you to work as a school social worker?
- Please tell us about your background in working with children who exhibit social/emotional problems in the school setting, or in other settings.
- Tell us about your experiences working with problem-solving teams/multidisciplinary teams.
- What experience do you have in conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs)?
- What is your experience with 504 accommodation plans?
- Tell us about a case that you felt successful in handling.
- Tell us about a case that was not successful and what would you do differently.
- What is the most creative and innovative counseling technique you have used?
- Please describe a large-scale project you have coordinated in the past (food drive, school-wide event, etc.).

What is your role?

- What do you see as the main role of a school social worker: (In an IEP meeting? Developing a positive school climate? Reporting abuse/neglect? Talking to a disgruntled parent? Providing prevention, assessment, intervention, and referral services to the school community at the school-wide, targeted and intensive levels?).
- What do you see as the role of the school social worker in relation to other pupil service staff in the school, such as the school psychologist and co-located mental health therapist?
- What experiences have you had working with parents?
- Unfortunately, there are times when the school has to respond to the sudden death of a student/teacher. What do you see as the role of the school social worker?
- What role do you think the school social worker can play in preventing violence?
- How do you utilize consultation with staff to support students and build the capacity of educators to accommodate and intervene for students' social/emotional/behavioral needs?

- Share specific strategies and examples of you building a relationship with a student and their family in the role of school social worker.
- What data do you routinely utilize to drive your interventions? What are some examples of intervention strategies you have used for students with behavioral needs and how do you evaluate their effectiveness?
- Supporting successful Tier 1 practices so teaching & learning can thrive is essential for all students to learn. How do you utilize consultation with staff to support students and build the capacity of educators to accommodate and intervene for students' social/emotional/behavioral needs?

What do you know?

- Are you familiar with FERPA? How might FERPA impact the role of a school social worker?
- Briefly describe what a Behavior Intervention Plan is. Have you written one? Explain.
- What kinds of social skills do you see as essential for all youth to learn? How will you support the learning of these skills in an elementary school setting?
- How important is race, ethnicity, cultural and social factors when assessing the needs of the whole child? Describe how you would integrate this into practice and how you might relay this to the team?
- What data do you routinely utilize to drive your interventions? What are some examples of intervention strategies you have used for students with behavioral needs and how do you evaluate their effectiveness?
- What systems and structures do you feel need to be in place school-wide to meet the SEL and basic needs of our students and families?

How would you handle…?

- The principal asks you to assist with an angry student who is sitting in the fetal position under his desk.
- The teacher is concerned that a student is always sleeping in class. What information would you want to find out in order to assist this student?
- A student tells you he/she is being abused.

- Students report to you that there may be a fight.
- You have been asked to facilitate a small group to teach social skills. How would you proceed?
- Parents of a student with an IEP with whom you work are calling you and the teacher at least weekly, saying they are upset with their child's program and is bad-mouthing the teacher to you. What steps might you take to resolve this conflict?
- You receive an email from an administrator or counselor saying they have some credible information that a student is homeless and their family is living with relatives. Walk us through, to the best of your knowledge, all of the steps you would use regarding this situation and in the role of school homelessness liaison.
- We establish a need for a 6th grade family change group. Please describe the steps you would take to implement this group?
- You are at one of your buildings beginning a busy day and the other school calls to inform you of a crisis situation. What would you do?
- Since your role would be split between two buildings, communication with the full-time staff at each building is imperative to make sure that student's needs are met if you are not available. What type of communication system would you use to relay information about students to other staff.
- What steps would you take to support a student who is refusing to access their education because they won't enter the building or classroom?

What would you do?

- You hear from a teacher that "Jimmy" has increasingly aggressive behavior toward others. He is not on an IEP. The teacher has asked him to stop, but the situation is getting worse. How would you handle this?

- What strategies would you use if you were assigned to a school with a large faculty so they know who you are and what services you provide?
- We are often confronted with multiple situations at once? How would you prioritize handling an upset parent, a crying student, and 2 peers ready to get into a fight who are wishing to see you?
- What types of intervention strategies would you use in the school setting for students with: (emotional problems, behavior problems, school phobia, eating disorders, attention deficit disorder, divorce, etc.).
- Explain some ways you might provide service to classroom teachers.
- How would you use technology in your job to help you be more efficient?
- Talk to us about how you have handled a time when you were in conflict with another staff person. (How would you deal with a staff member that you do not get along with, agree with or are intimidated by?).
- Tell us about a time you were in disagreement about programming/support for a student. What were the challenges? How did you navigate the situation?

Would you be a good fit?

- What attracts you to working with students at ____grade level?
- What do you see as the role of parents in the education of their children and the degree of their involvement in the school setting?
- What resources have you or would you utilize that could make a difference in our school community?
- Self-care is critical. How do you balance your professional, personal and passions in life?

Closing

- Do you have any questions for us or anything that you would like to share that you haven't had the chance in other questions?
- Do you have any questions for our team or anything else you would like to add?

*Questions should be changed or added to fit your school's SSW position needs.

Performance Evaluation

School Social Work Performance Example
Sample Rating Instrument for School Social Workers

School Year:	Date:	
School Social Worker:	Evaluator:	

Instructions: Mark a "B" indicating Below Standard, an "M" for Meets Standard, and an "E" for Exceeds Standard. Evaluator may also indicate movement toward the next level, such as "M-E," as well as add appropriate comments in the Notes section.

1. General School Social Work (SSW) Services

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers utilize social work skills that commensurate with professional social work standards as outlined by NASW guidelines.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Social work service is disorganized or poorly defined	Develops, manages and implements effective school social work services	Social work service is recognized as highly effective throughout the school and community	
Uses time ineffectively, not based on prioritized school social work needs	Accurately prioritizes school social work needs and manages time accordingly	Develops a written social work plan based on school social work needs	
Is primarily reactive with few measures of impact	Addresses student needs and measures the impact of interventions	Uses multiple sources of data to measure the effects of SSW services	
Social worker-student interactions include negative or demeaning responses	Builds positive relationships with students through friendly and mutually respectful interactions and home visits	Strengthens relationships with students through participation in community events	
Interactions may not account for the development level or culture of the student	Cares about each student and respects developmental, cultural and socioeconomic differences	Provides leadership in developing a caring and culturally sensitive school culture	
Office area is disorderly and/or not accommodating	Office area is functional and presents a warm and inviting atmosphere		

Materials for use with are not available	Materials for use with students are accessible and organized	All materials for use with students are organized and professionally displayed	
Demonstrates limited skills in resolving conflict	Effective in resolving conflict and teaching conflict resolution skills	Takes leadership in identifying points of conflict within the school	
Demonstrates limited crisis intervention skills	Displays skill in responding to crisis, ranging from individual to whole school intervention	Is a leader in responding to crisis in the schools	
Demonstrates limited diagnosis and treatment planning skills	Demonstrates skill in diagnosing and recommending appropriate treatment for mental health/behavioral needs.	Conducts training in understanding and recommending appropriate treatment for mental health/behavioral needs.	
Necessary school social work notes on students are not organized or accessible.	Student notes are appropriate and organized, indicating problem, intervention(s) and progress	Teaches others on student and programmatic data collection for school social workers	
Notes:			

2. Written Communication

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers communicate effectively with all students, administrators, parents, staff and community members.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Reports are poorly written, and/or disorganized, lack individualization	Reports are clear, organized, accurate and individualized	Teaches other social workers to write clear, accurate and individualized reports	
Reports are not completed on time, or are rushed in at the last minute	Reports are completed in a timely manner	Reports are completed ahead of deadline in special circumstances	
Reports tend to be uniform, do not reflect individual differences	Reports reflect sensitivity to diverse student populations	Reports utilize additional resources to interpret data based on diversity	
Emails/letters are often grammatically incorrect or inappropriate	Emails/letters are clear and appropriate	Is a leader in helping others and creating policies regarding use of email communication	

Notes:

3. Parent/Community Collaboration and Referral

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers help to ensure the overall success of students and school operations by collaborating with staff, parents, community agencies and the community at large (knowledge of community services is necessary).

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Impedes the team process	Works effectively as a team member, including integrating assessment results	Takes a leadership role in team-building and in developing consensus and cooperation	
May be critical or rigid, ineffective in problem solving	Demonstrates effective problem-solving skills	Is proactive and highly valued as a resource to help solve problems	
Minimal response to requests for professional input	Provides ongoing professional input and expertise for others in the school community	Provides ongoing professional input and expertise to the broader community	
Provides minimal or no consultation with staff and parents	Provides appropriate consultation with staff and parents	Teaches others to provide appropriate consultation with staff and parents	
Demonstrates limited skill in interpreting student referral information	Demonstrates skill in understanding student referral concerns with respect to race, ethnic, cultural and social factors	Seeks additional information and resources to help team understand referral concerns	
Minimal or no review of prior interventions, historical records, or biopsychosocial data	Reviews relevant biopsychosocial data including health history, educational and family history and intervention records	Reviews, interprets and integrates relevant biopsychosocial data, seeking out additional information helpful to the assessment process	
Provides minimal assistance to staff and parents regarding pre-referral concerns	Provides consultation to staff which may include designing pre-referral interventions	Provides ongoing consultation to staff including designing and implementing pre- referral interventions	

Ignores or denies input from school staff or others who may be helpful in addressing special needs of students	Encourages and uses input from others in addressing needs of students	Initiates collaborative problems that address gaps in student services	
Facilitates minimal or no interaction with parents and community	Reaches out to families to get them involved in their child's education	Provides resource information and/or conducts parent groups to increase parenting skills, including effective involvement in their child's education	
Notes:			

4. Assessment/Due Process

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers develop and participate in appropriate assessments of student, family and systemic functioning.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Demonstrates limited ability to select, administer and/or interpret assessments	Demonstrates the ability to select, administer and interpret multiple assessments	Demonstrates knowledge of "cutting edge" assessment tools and practices	
Minimal knowledge or use of non-standardized assessment techniques	Collects assessment data using non-standardized assessment techniques, such as observation and interviews	Uses a wide variety of non-standardized assessment, such as observation and interviews	
Minimal ability to effectively convey assessment results	Interpret and synthesizes data and effectively conveys results to team	Demonstrates outstanding ability to synthesize and effectively convey assessment results	
Notes:			

5. Group and Individual Counseling

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers meet with students individually or as appropriate, in a group setting, to address students' social/emotional needs.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
There is no system or an ineffective system for student referrals for groups	A system is in place for student referrals to groups	Uses a needs-assessment tool to develop a referral system for groups	
Groups do not exist, or are poorly run	Conducts groups which develop group identity and in which students are supporting each other	Group participation results in a demonstration of exceptional levels of empathy and support	
Groups are disorganized, not goal-oriented	Targeted skills are acquired through group process with the goal that skills are generalized to other settings	Trains others to conduct effective groups which lead to generalization	
There is no system or an ineffective system for student referrals for individual counseling	A system is in place for student referrals for individual counseling	Uses a needs assessment to develop a referral system for individuals	
May use inappropriate therapeutic strategies	Uses appropriate therapeutic strategies in counseling students	Trains others in the use of appropriate counseling strategies	
No clear goals or measures of outcome of individual counseling	Collects data to show better student self-knowledge and interpersonal skills as a result of individual counseling	Trains others in methods to collect outcome data for individual counseling	

Notes:

6. School Climate

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers assist in establishing a positive learning environment that fosters mutual respect and cooperation with staff and students.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Minimal participation in school committees	Actively participates in school committees and advocates for students	Is a leader in fostering effective, positive communication between students and staff	
Minimally involved in school improvement efforts	Involved in improving school programs and overall environment	Takes leadership in improving school programs and overall environment	
Ineffective communication with staff	Effectively communicates with and supports the staff and administration	Effectively communicates with staff and identifies resources for solving staff problems	
Is uninvolved with school programs and committees and does not often interact with	Actively promotes a positive school environment by participation in groups, staff, committees, or programs.	Takes leadership roles in promoting positive school environment, and provides appropriate assistance to school leadership in crisis situations as needed.	
Notes:			

7. Professional Responsibility

It is an expectation that Minnesota School Social Workers exhibit professionalism and ethical behavior, as well as growing professionally through a variety of sources, such as input from peers and other school staff/parents and participation in workshop activities.

Below Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	B/M/E
Indiscriminately shares confidential information	Adheres to the Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act and FERPA regarding students and families	Teaches or helps develop school procedures regarding the Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act and FERPA	
Fails to demonstrate fairness, integrity and/or ethical behavior	Acts in accordance with social work code of ethics	Takes leadership in developing high levels of integrity within the school	
Participates in professional development if required or at a minimal level	Seeks out and participates in opportunities for professional development	Regularly participates in and takes leadership in providing professional development	

Seeks feedback only if required, and minimizes or ignores results	Actively seeks feedback from others, including the use of surveys and uses it to make professional decisions	A wide variety of feedback is sought and effectively used to make professional practice decisions	
Inconsistent adherence to due process guidelines and limited knowledge of policy	Demonstrates knowledge of district, state and federal policies and adheres to due process guidelines	Teaches other staff members about policies and due process guidelines	
Frequently absent or tardy	Adequate attendance	Excellent Attendance	
Attire may be inappropriate	Appropriate attire	Consistently professional attire	
May not get back to people in a reasonable amount of time	Responds to most messages in a timely manner, usually within 48 hours	Responds to most messages in a timely manner, usually within 24 hours	
Has little or no personal improvement plan	Sets professional goals designed to improve and/or expand SSW role and skill level	Assists or supervises others in setting professional goals	
Notes:			

Adapted from St. Paul Public Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, Owatonna Public Schools, and Minneapolis Public Schools.

School social work positions differ depending on such variables as the needs of the student population being served, funding available and the school's unique needs. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that all of the evaluation questions would be relevant. In addition, common sense would dictate that a school social worker would not be expected to exceed standards in every area.

Sample Professional Development Process for School Social Workers

Tenured school social workers are required to maintain and improve their professional skills. Continuing education includes post-graduate classes; professional workshops or conferences; and participation on district, state and/or national work related committees. School social workers require current data on research-based, successful interventions for students who are not succeeding at school. School district staff development that is designed for teachers does not always meet the unique needs of a school social worker.

One system used in schools is a professional development process (PDP) (Danielson Model). This process requires the school social worker to develop and implement an annual plan with measurable goals that will be reviewed on a regular basis with documentation of progress toward goal achievement. The plan must be in written form, submitted to the administrator and become a permanent part of the social worker's employment file. Administrators want the goals and activities of the social worker's plan to relate to the school or department improvement plan.

Professional development plans will vary in each individual district. Planning tools could include the district school social work job description and/or a district school social work performance evaluation (See page 24 for an example). Methods used to determine plan effectiveness may include peer coaching or feedback, development of a professional portfolio, formal and informal observations, participation in a study group, analyzing student data, reviewing student work, action research and journaling. This process can be used as an evaluation tool and would be more helpful than an administrator evaluating a school social worker with a rubric designed for teachers.

Peer Group Consultation and Supervision Groups

School social workers may use the Peer Consultation/Supervision Group Model to meet the state directives for supervision. Peer groups may also serve as a vehicle for training and in-servicing social workers around important practice issues. Peer groups are generally organized according to Elementary, K-8, Middle School, Secondary and Special Education involvement. Membership can also be determined by a group of social workers who identify a specific year-long project or activity or by a group of social workers who need supervision for licensure requirements.

A peer group model is used in Minneapolis Public Schools. Membership in the School Social Work Peer Group is required of all social workers, regardless of assignment. Peer groups accommodate new members when appropriate. It is preferred that Elementary School groups are composed of members assigned to schools within a reasonable geographic area. Peer groups meet monthly for a minimum of nine times for at least one and one-half hours each meeting. Scheduling must be cleared with building administrators and should be scheduled to interfere as little as possible with building responsibilities. Social workers may accrue recertification credits from group participation according to attendance documentation on meeting summaries submitted to the Social Work Office.