



# SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

National Practice Model 2.0

**A Framework for 21st Century School Social Work Practice**



School Social Work  
Association of America

# Overview

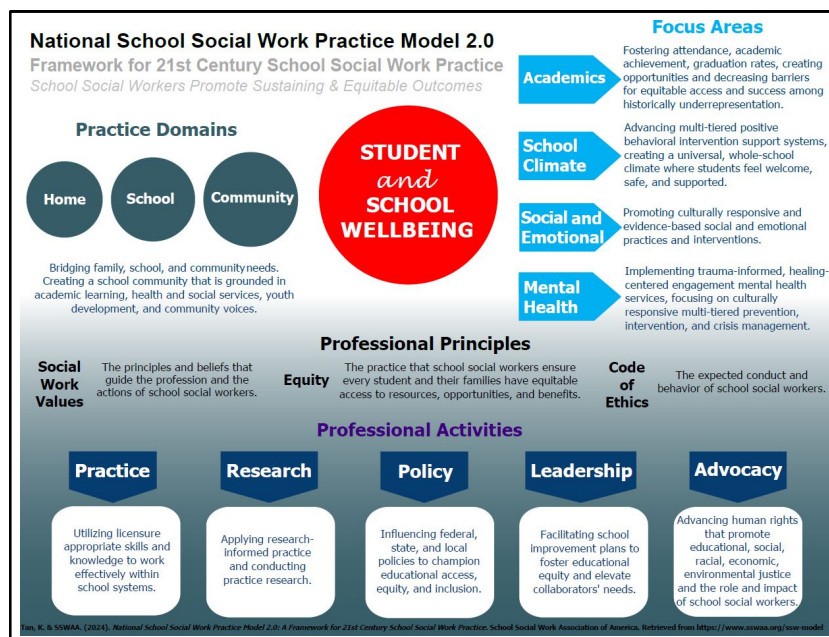
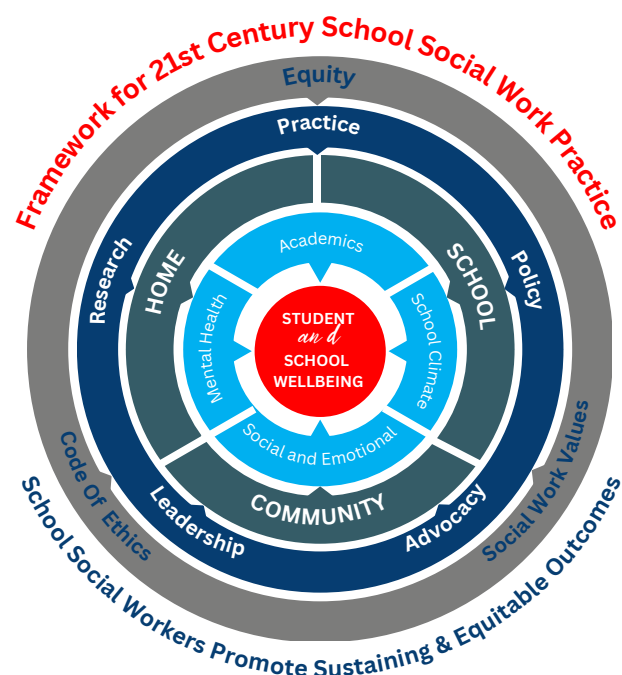
## The National School Social Work Practice Model 2.0:

The Framework for 21st Century School Social Work Practice outlines the critical values, domains, focus areas, and professional activities of school social workers as we enter into the next decade and beyond. School social work is a specialized form of professional social work practice. This model was developed to inform policymakers, administrators, educators, allied professionals, and key collaborators about the work of school social workers who operate in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade contexts.

### The model aims to:

- (1) define the scope of work that can be expected from school social workers,
- (2) promote consistency in the training of school social workers, including certification, and
- (3) promote the importance of school social workers as vital members of school teams.

The goal is to advance sustaining and equitable student and school well-being outcomes.



Downloadable at <https://www.sswaa.org/ssw-model>

## The Practice Model 2.0

School Social Workers Promote Sustaining and Equitable Outcomes

### Dimensions of Equity

School social workers work to establish anti-racist, anti-oppressive, diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments. The profession is dedicated to dismantling racially oppressive practices both within schools and communities. School social workers ensure that historically marginalized, racialized, and minoritized students and families have equitable access to resources, opportunities, and benefits. They acknowledge the intersectionality of social identities and the interconnectedness of intersecting inequities. School social workers address the multiple disparities that exist across all dimensions of equity such as, race, social, economic, health, educational, gender, sexual orientation, culture, environmental, intergenerational, legal, spatial, and many more.



## Qualifications of School Social Workers

School social workers are qualified professionals with a minimum of a master's degree in social work from a higher-education institution and accredited by a cognized governing body, such as the Council of Social Work Education. School social workers complete foundational coursework on school social work practice and policy. School social workers must also be appropriately certified and licensed by their state's governing bodies to operate in schools. School social workers possess specialized knowledge and technical skills and develop competencies in all elements presented in the practice model. They are asked to be involved in their state associations and be registered members and nationally certified by the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA).



## Factors Influencing School Social Work Practice and Impact

Multiple factors influence the percentage of time, effort, and impact of school social workers in the areas outlined in this model. This ratio of school social workers to the number of students served in a building is a critical consideration. SSWAA recommends that the ratio of one full-time equivalence of a school social worker to students be 1:250. Other factors include the prevailing sociopolitical context, state and district policies, the quality of resources to reduce risk factors for students in the school, the ability of the school social worker to be critically reflective and foster racial equity and other dimensions of equity, and the availability of other services in the community.

## Social Work Values, Code of Ethics, and Social Justice

School social workers uphold the values that comprise the Code of Ethics governed by the National Association of Social Workers, including the principle of social justice. School social workers promote equitable access to resources, services, and opportunities in the school environment. They are called to work with and advocate for students and families who experience various forms of inequities and barriers in their schools and communities, especially those from historically marginalized, racialized, and minoritized segments of society. School social workers must be cognizant and develop capacities to address the critical issues that impact the lived experience of the students and families that they serve. School social workers must advance the principles of cultural humility and be reflective of their own social identities and positionalities in their practice.

## Student and School Wellbeing: Domains of Practice, Focus Areas, and Professional Activities

The Practice Model 2.0 encourages school social workers to promote sustaining and equitable outcomes across all dimensions of equity through three inter-related domains: home – school – community. The model highlights the primary functions of school social workers through four focus areas: academics, socioemotional, mental health, and school climate. School social workers also advance sustaining and equitable outcomes through five professional activities: practice, research, policy, leadership, and advocacy.



The principles of social work values, ethical practice, and equity are infused in each of the domains, focus areas, and professional activities.

### Domains of Practice: Home-School-Community

School social workers bridge families, schools, and communities in fostering more responsive educational systems that center on youth and community voices. School social workers integrate academic learning, health and social services, youth development, and community voices. Students' social environments, including relationships and interactions across their homes, school settings, and community contexts, profoundly affect them and their well-being and educational success. Facilitating communication and promoting linkages across the home, school, and community systems is a central and longstanding characteristic of the profession. School social workers are called upon to examine and acknowledge the historical and current socio-political contexts of the home-school-community interlinkages in which they operate. School social workers must promote healing and restore relationships within the communities of their students and families that have been historically strained and harmed based on past and current racialized and historical trauma.

### Focus Areas: Academics, Social and Emotional, Mental Health, and School Climate

School social workers adopt a whole-child, whole-school approach to their work. They offer prevention, intervention, and postvention at the individual student-level and at the universal school-level. School social workers support academic success by attending to students' academics and socioemotional skills, their mental health wellness and resiliency through establishing a diverse and inclusive school climate.

School social workers are thus called to address all forms of inequities that exist in the student body and school environment. They work to remove both tangible and intangible barriers to student and school success and positive youth development. They take a holistic approach to assessing and intervening with students and schools and consider their broader social and environmental influences in the following four focus areas:

**Academics:** School social workers foster attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates; create opportunities; and decrease barriers for equitable access and success among all students especially our historically excluded and minoritized student populations.

**Social and Emotional:** School social workers promote culturally responsive and evidence-based/research based socioemotional practices and interventions. They recognize and value students' intersecting social identities and lived experiences in ways that support their socioemotional development.

**Mental Health:** School social workers implement trauma-informed, healing-centered engagement with mental health services, focusing on developing equitable and responsive multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) including prevention, intervention, and crisis management.

**School Climate:** School social workers advance multi-tiered positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) systems. They work to create a universal, equitable, whole-school climate where students feel welcome, safe, and supported.

## Professional Activities: Practice, Research, Policy, Leadership, and Advocacy

The Practice Model 2.0 encourages school social workers to engage in a range of strengths-based and culturally responsive professional activities that promote student and school success. They work collaboratively with staff, families, and community organizations to provide a comprehensive and equitable system of support in ways that meets the diverse needs of students. They also engage in policy reforms bringing attention to the needs of their students, families, and communities and in ways that increase resources for those most in need. School social workers actively engage in the following five micro- and macro-level professional activities:



**Practice:** School social workers utilize licensure appropriate skills and knowledge to work effectively within school systems. They engage in strengths-based and culturally responsive practices, recognizing the ways in which the social context impacts individuals, and valuing the heritage, backgrounds, and lived experiences of students and families.

**Research:** School social workers apply critically reflexive, race conscious research to inform their practice and engage in practice research to evaluate the effectiveness of their practice. They utilize research to understand and identify areas of needs and inequities in their work with students and schools.

**Policy:** School social workers champion federal, state, and local policies that promote educational access, equity, and inclusion. They engage in policy reforms to eliminate the causes of systemic inequities that serve as barriers to student and school success.

**Leadership:** School social workers facilitate school-improvement plans to close educational achievement gaps and give voice to collaborator needs. They provide and facilitate training, professional development, and consultancy to school staff that promote equity in education.

**Advocacy:** School social workers advance human rights and promote educational, social, racial, economic, and environmental justice. They advocate for the needs of students and families in ways that promote the equitable distribution of resources and services.



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An earlier version of the practice model 2.0 was discussed by SSWAA's Board of Directors. The final version was approved on December 14, 2023 to be launched on January 1, 2024: Terrilyn Rivers-Cannon (President), Christy McCoy (Past President), Tish Brookins (Secretary), Marina Badillo Diaz (Northeastern Representative), Lindsey Oliver (Southern Representative), Mary Boyd (Midwest Representative), Patrick Mulkern (Western Representative), Summer Woodside (University Representative), and Brandy Hall (Student Representative).

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Correspondence concerning the model should be addressed to: [ContactUs@sswaa.org](mailto:ContactUs@sswaa.org)

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