

School of Social Work

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Dear Chair Dougherty,

Portland State University School of Social Work supports HB 2550. HB 2550 will provide school social worker services as a core component of all educational service districts and Oregon needs access to school social workers.

Professional Social Workers are Integral to the Success of Oregon Schools and Students

School social workers are a vital element in efforts to increase school success for K-12 students. Social workers are trained to provide interdisciplinary interventions that increase student academic achievement and psychosocial functioning in the school setting. The aim of school social work is to improve educational outcomes for students by: (1) removing structural barriers to learning; (2) increasing collaboration among schools, families, and communities; and (3) creating relationships with and among students, families, and communities that will promote positive functioning.

Challenges Facing Oregon Schools

Higher needs and fewer resources – According to the 2014 National School Social Work Survey students seen by Oregon social workers have greater needs than the national average based on higher involvement with special education, community mental health, child welfare and juvenile justice services. Oregon school social workers note that large caseloads and restrictions of their role by administrators or district policy are challenges to serving more students. ([Portrait of Oregon School Social Workers Findings from the National School Social Work Survey 2014.](#))

Chronic Absenteeism – [The Chronic Absenteeism Report](#) (2016) commissioned by Oregon's Chief Education Office and coauthored by Dr. Ann Curry-Stevens, PSU School of Social Work faculty, notes Oregon has one of the highest levels of chronic absenteeism. One in five Oregon students routinely misses more than 10 percent of their school days, which increases in high school and contributes to 26 percent of students not graduating on time. Students of color, students with disabilities and students living in poverty are at the greatest risk for absenteeism. Some of the recommendations to address this problem are:

- Increase educator professional development and support with respect to building culturally responsive and sustaining practices and school communities.
- Increase the number of meaningful partnerships between schools/districts and community based organizations, especially culturally specific organizations. □
- Revise policies and procedures to eliminate discipline disparities.

Unmet mental health needs – 18-20 percent of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment to major life functions (Dore, 2005), only one in five receives necessary services (Kaffenberger, Seligman, 2007). Untreated mental health issues may impact students'

educational experience and result in poor educational outcomes. (Erford, Newsome & Rock, 2007). Using the Effective School Staffing Model, the School Social Work Association of America recommends a ratio of 1 school social worker per 250 students. (School Social Work Association of America)

Impact of Trauma - The Oregon legislature and the Oregon Health Authority have recognized the impact of psychological trauma on health, mental health and school outcomes. House Bill 4002 “requires professional development and support for school staff ... to create a culture in the district and community that is informed about how to understand, recognize and respond to trauma.” Trauma Informed Oregon, the statewide collaboration developed to promote and sustain trauma informed practices, is based in the PSU School of Social Work and provides statewide professional training on trauma informed practices.

Social Workers are uniquely trained to collaborate with other school professionals to address these challenges

Portland State University School of Social Work prepares masters level social workers (MSW) around the state, and since 2011 has a school social work specialization that leads to the TSPC initial School Social Worker license.

PSU’s MSW Program prepares graduates for effective professional practice as school social workers. Guided by an ecological framework, social work values, and a commitment to culturally responsive and evidence based practice, the curriculum is designed to build competencies related to working with students, families, schools, communities, and the larger society. In addition to coursework, students complete 1000 hours of field practicum, 500 hours in a K-12 school setting and the other 500 hours are in a community based agency serving children, youth, and families.

School social workers are key to the multi-tiered systems of support. As collaborators with other professionals they are situated to address school culture, as well as the individual, family, and community issues that impact school success. School social worker can:

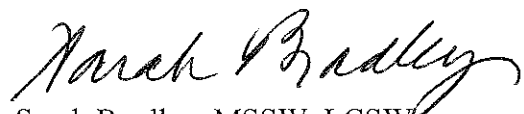
- Identify and address student mental health issues
- Identify and address family and environmental factors that impact school success
- Develop meaningful, culturally specific partnerships with families and communities
- Identify school policies and practices that impact racial disparities
- Educate staff about and implement trauma informed practices
- Utilize evidence based prevention and intervention strategies to address psychosocial factors that impact student outcomes.

We urge the Oregon House Committee on Education to support HB 2550. Oregon school districts need to have choices for how best to meet the needs of their children and families.

Respectfully submitted,



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