THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: CURRENT TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: *This article discusses information on school social work practice in the United States and summarizes recent trends and their implications for the future of school social work. The number of school social workers and current infrastructure available for the development of school social work practice is also reviewed. Five sociocultural trends are summarized that are affecting public schools along with important school-based practice trends such as standardized testing and high stakes accountability measures. The emerging practice trend of evidenced-based practices is discussed in light of its standards and implications for school-based practice. Finally, essential knowledge for strengthening practice competencies to meet the future challenges of school-based practice is highlighted.*

Keywords: school social work, evidence-based practice, practice standards, accountability

INTRODUCTION

For the past one hundred years social workers have been practicing in school systems. School social workers and other school-based services professionals have evolved into an independent profession that offers specialized knowledge and skills for helping people in the context of schools (Allen-Meares, 2004). This article discusses information on school social work practice in the United States and summarizes recent trends and their implications for the future. First, data are presented on the numbers of school social workers and infrastructure supporting school social work practice. Second, information is provided on the current socio-cultural trends affecting public schools, and the affects of current trends on school-based, practice environments. Some of the major opportunities and challenges facing school social workers are also summarized. Third, this article reviews the importance of evidenced-based practices and how this emerging practice trend is destined to influence the practices of school social workers. Finally, this article suggests essential knowledge for strengthening practice competencies to meet the future challenges of school-based practice.

SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE U.S.

Current practice in public schools indicates that there are two groups of social workers that practice in the schools. First, are those who are direct employees of the school district and serve as members of the pupil services team. Second are those who are school-based service providers employed by community-based organizations contracting with the school districts (Franklin, 2004). Expanded school mental health services and school-based health centers and other school-based services providers have greatly contributed to this trend (Brener, Martindale & Weist, 2001). For example, Communities in Schools

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(CIS), a nonprofit community-based agency with 194 programs in some 2600 schools in across 31 states (www.cisnet.org) employs school-based staff including licensed social workers. Typical of this staffing pattern are Houston and El Paso, two of the largest CIS programs in the country, which employ a combined total of some 260 school-based staff, about half of which are not social workers by license or degree (www.cisaustin.org) (cited in Franklin, Harris & Allen-Meares, in press).

The changing climate of education makes it difficult to report an accurate number of school social workers in the U.S. Available data may underestimate the numbers of social workers who work in either full or part-time positions within the schools. The School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA) completed a survey of state departments of education (www.sswaa.org), which reports 14,636 social workers employed by school districts in 50 states and the District of Columbia. The second survey performed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that 8.3% of social worker respondents (4,888 social workers) work in primary and secondary school settings as their primary employer and almost 2% (282 social workers) say school setting are a secondary employer (http://www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/SMA01-3537/default.asp). SAMHSA conducted the survey only with social workers who are members of NASW and estimated that the actual numbers are probably twice as large as the survey indicates (Center for Mental Health Services, 2000). Comparing this data to the findings of the SSWAA data might indicate that this estimate was extremely low.

School Social Work Organizations and Infrastructure

School social workers are supported by two strong national organizations, the School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA) (www.sswaa.org) and the NASW (www.NASW.org). Thirty two state organizations and four regional councils also galvanize the field. SSWAA provides a national, annual conference of some 400 participants, 12 state organizations sponsor annual conferences and training workshops. Texas and Michigan held state conferences in 2003-5, for example, with nearly 500 participants each (Nowicki, 2003). Others participate in regional conferences involving 10 to 12 states, such as the Midwest Council conference (www.sswaa.org).

Social work journals also help to support and inform school social work practice. Children & Schools (http://www.naswpress.org/publications/journals/children/csintro.html) is a journal that provides information on research, practice, and policy issues relevant to school-based practitioners. This journal offers a Practice Highlights Column that encourages practitioners to publish their up-to-date practices. A second journal, The School Social Work Journal (http://lyceumbooks.com/sswjournal.htm) is designed for school social work practitioners, students, and educators. Providing articles on original research, research reviews, conceptual models, and assessment and intervention methodologies, among other topics, the journal encourages effective social work practice in schools.

SOCIO-CULTURAL TRENDS AFFECTING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Most school social workers practice in public education. The educational system is constantly affected by institutional and political trends including local, or federal pressures (Allen-Meares, in press). As Sipple (2004, cited in Allen-Meares in press) states, "The

American public educational system is a beleaguered public institution fraught with relentless criticism..." adding that "...schools are facing ever-challenging and complex educational situations while at the same time an unprecedented inspection and expectation of practice and performance" (p. 1).

Houston (1999) discusses five socio-cultural trends that are impacting public education and have implications for future school social work practice. The first trend is devolution, that is a movement toward decentralizing political authority and placing it in the hands of local leaders and organizations. Trend two is, demasification, which breaks people down into smaller groups and creates more and more choices for our children but fewer and fewer options to unite us into a common set of resources, interests or values. Smaller, exclusive, groups have the potential to create inequities and considerable tensions between interest groups who are left to struggle for waning resources. The third trend is deregulation and all industries have faced this trend, and now education faces it through the eradication of state codes and federal control leading,to increasing choices, vouchers and charter schools.

Trend four is disintermediation, which is occurring through the impacts of technologies on our educational institutions. The Internet, for example, makes it possible to learn anywhere. New technologies are quickly replacing the need for skills learned with those never learned. This creates a continual learning curve and educators have to contend with the fact that skills learned in school today will be antiquated by the time a student graduates. Finally, trend five is the de-emphasis on education for learning's sake. The value of learning for the common good or progress of humanity does not exist in the same proportion as in the 20th century during the progressive era. Corporations and corporate interests, for example, want to know how the skills learned in schools applies to success in the workplace (McLaren,1998).

The future implication for school social workers include an increasing need to give attention to school policy issues so that they can effectively work with educational constituent groups influencing local and national issues that affect the schooling of children. School social workers also need to consider how to keep standards for school social work practice in the face of the changing socio-cultural trends impacting education. For example, at the same time that some states are de-regulating certain educational codes, credentials have become a big issue for compensation in educational systems (Shaffer, 1996). Teachers with more education and who have met the requirements of certain credentials are offered more pay, for example. School social workers have sought to use their credentials in the same manner (Hare, 1996). Unfortunately, however, the education levels and credentials for school social work are the least consistent of any of the school-based services professions. School psychologists, for example, have much more consistent education and credentialing than school social workers. School social work education and credentials vary from Bachelor to Masters degrees, and from requiring specialized certifications and licenses to having no agreed upon credentialing standards (Altshuler, in press). For the future, school social workers must work toward consistent credentials and educational standards. Illinois serves as one of the best states to follow as a model in this quest for consistent credentials.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR PRACTICE WITHIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Current trends indicate that school social work may continue to be a growing profession because populations at risk are increasingly being served within public schools. Studies show that from 12 to 22 percent of all children under the age 18 are in need of services for mental, emotional or behavioral problems (UCLA School Mental Health Project, 2003). Over 70 percent of children receiving mental health care obtain services at school (Center for Health and Health Care in School, 2001) and fall under the care of school social workers and other school-based services professionals. Even conservatively, this means that 10 million school age youth are presenting problems in need of mental health intervention. Unfortunately, the reality on school campuses is that less than one in five children in need of mental health services are receiving treatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) and this indicates that schools are in great need of school social work services.

When a school social worker practices in a school they are able to use their skills to help youths who are perceived to be most at-risk. Latino and African American children, for example, have the highest rates of need for mental health services and are most likely to go without care or the attention of public schools (RAND, 2001). Latinos are also the fastest growing minority group in the United States. Almost 40 percent of Latinos are between the ages of 5 to 24 and the school-age Latino population is expected to grow by 82% during the next 25 years (Bowman, 2004). In 2000, minority students represented 39% of students in public schools. Latino students represented 17% of students, up from 11% in 1972. Students from minority groups are more likely to attend schools in which most students are from low-income families and high minority enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Children with minority status also receive poorer quality mental health care. Many homeless teens, immigrants, teen parents, and youths that are gay and lesbian are also in great need of mental health services, and may receive care only through institutions such as public schools. Schools also present risks for children and school social workers are needed in areas of crisis intervention and response to these risks. According to survey data collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics, for example, in 1999, 8 percent of students in grades six through twelve reported criminal victimization at school, 8 percent of students in grades nine through twelve reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, and 5 percent of students age twelve through eighteen reported that they had been afraid of being attacked or harmed on school property during the past six months (Kaufman et al., 2001). The implications of these data for the future is that schools will remain a very important practice arena for children's mental health and social services. This also means that school social workers will increasingly be involved in the treatment of complex issues involving an increasingly diverse body of at-risk students.

Standardized Testing and High Stakes Accountability

Increasing standards, greater accountability, and tougher performance measures are being enacted in relationship to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Simpson,

LaCava, and Graner, 2004). Under that legislation, the mandating of standardized testing for evaluating academic preparation has been both praised and criticized. Many constituents in favor of public education, including the NEA, educational researchers, educational groups [including school social workers] view the trends toward standardized testing as being an over-emphasized accountability measure (Faircloth, 2004).

The public debate over how standardized testing is transforming public schools is, perhaps, one of the most pressing current issues facing educators including school social workers. Issues include but are not limited to the following a) how schools shape themselves to teach to the test, b) the inappropriateness of relying on a standardized test as a singular outcome measure, c) the stress of the tests on children, and d) the inequities that standardized measures create in children with learning disabilities, language minority and ethnic-minority groups, for example. Many educators in the policy arena, including school social workers (e.g. SSWAA and NASW), are working diligently to revise NCLB and reverse the trends toward more standardized testing (SSWAA, E-Bell, March 7, 2005). In the meantime, however, school social workers on the front-lines are left to work with tensions, calm those who are anxious, and help schools help children perform well on the tests.

Currently, public schools are held to many new performance measures including both funding penalties for low performance as well as cash incentives for high performance. Incentive structures, cost effectiveness, cost accounting, and benefit verses cost analysis are routine performance measures for all schools. Until these types of management practices are moderated or possibly reversed, school social workers, along with other school employees, must prepare themselves to work in high performance, outcome driven work environments. High stakes accountability in which student achievement and other performance measures (e.g. dropout rate) are directly linked to school funding, and accreditation are becoming standard practice. Kentucky, for example, was one of the first states to enact this type of performance-based system (Linn, 2000).

Critics have argued that NCLB makes many demands of schools without providing enough resources to meet those demands. Yet, schools face serious consequences for falling short of expectations. In the new environment of public school administration, low performing schools are identified in a report card type system, and are sanctioned. If a school fails to improve its' performance stiff penalties are enacted including the replacement of administrators and staff. Some states, also, have cut-off funding and required low performing schools to offer vouchers to students to attend another school (Archer, 2004; Goldhaber and Hannaway, 2004).

NCBL has implications for special education students because it requires that they be administered the same standardized tests that other students are required to take (Faircloth, 2004). Schools that have large numbers of special education students are likely to feel a great deal of additional pressure to ensure that these students are able to pass standardized tests. This affects school social workers because they are heavily involved with special education students from assessment to assisting students with academic, health, and mental health needs (Blair, 1993; Tower, 2000).

Because schools have moved to adopt strict performance measures, school social work-

ers have also adapted by continuing to provide standards for practice, and to link social work practice skills with school-based standards (Lee, 2002; NASW, 2002). The prevailing public view indicates that school social workers must focus on how to meet the concerns of multiple stakeholders (e.g educators, parents, government policy makers, and business) who believe that the success of public schools is their responsibility. Future implication of these trends are not completely known but school social workers must be prepared to help schools meet performance standards, and also be able to document their own performance in relationship to the outcome measures being prescribed.

EVIDENCED-BASED PRACTICE

"The future of school social work is going to be influenced by the emerging practice trend of evidence-based practices" (Allen-Meares, in press). In order to keep the field abreast of this cutting edge issue *Children & Schools* published a special issue on evidenced-based practices in schools in 2004. Raines (2004) discusses the relationship between evidenced-based practices and school social work and offers a thoughtful, practice friendly review of this topic for school social workers.

According to Huang, Hepburn, & Espiritu (2003, cited in Allen-Meares, in press):

> Evidence-based practice is an emerging concept and reflects a nationwide effort to build quality and accountability in health and behavioral health care service delivery. Underlying this concept is (1) the fundamental belief that children with emotional and behavioral disorders should be able to count on receiving care that meets their needs and is based on the best scientific knowledge available, and (2) the fundamental concern that for many of these children, the care that is delivered is not effective care. (p. 1)

Many disciplines currently use the concept of evidenced-based practices and Allen-Meares (in press) reviews two prevailing definitions that have influenced educational researchers and the policy makers who are setting the evidenced-based practices for schools. The first definition comes from the medical field. Medicine describes evidence-based practice as using the best available evidence to inform decisions about patient care. Physicians incorporate this new information into their knowledge built from experience in their practice settings along with the beliefs and experiences of their patients. A second definition is provided by the mental health field that defines evidence-based practice as defines evidenced-based practice as practices that have been established trough a combination of empirical research and standards for practice stemming from that research. Criteria in mental health practice may include standardized treatments, program evaluation, controlled trials evaluating practices, or other outcomes from scientific evaluations (Allen-Meares in press). The main focus here is that the research guiding practice standards must meet a certain set of agreed-upon standards.

Franklin & Hopson, (2004) discuss how evidenced-based practices are also becoming a standard for school mental health services and instructional areas in education. The Department of Education, for example, founded the What Works Clearinghouse (http://www.w-w-c.org), that focuses on the dissemination of the evidenced-based practices in education. Criteria for evidenced-based practices in education are set-by the Institute for Educational Sciences which is the research arm for the Department of Education, in

consultation , with a technical services group of distinguished researchers. The four basic criteria include:

1) *employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment; involves data analyses that are adequate to support the general findings; relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable data; makes claims of causal relationships only in random-assignment experiments or other designs (to the extent such designs substantially eliminate plausible competing explanations for the obtained results);*
2) *ensures that studies and methods are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, to offer the opportunity to build systematically on the findings of the research;*
3) *obtains acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or approval by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review; and uses research designs and methods appropriate to the research question posed.*
4) *uses research designs and methods appropriate to the research question posed.*

The Institute for Educational Sciences sets a criteria for screening studies to decide if they completely meet evidence standards or meet the evidence standards with reservations. This helps the Clearinghouse present the best practices in education. Criteria include: a) *Iintervention fidelity [was the treatment delivered correctly and in a high quality manner]; b) outcomes measures; c) extent to which relevant people, settings, and measure timings were included; d) extent to which the study allowed for the testing of intervenion's effect within subgroups; e) statistical analysis and f) statistical reporting. http://www.w-w-c.org/reviewprocess/standards.html*

Every indication suggests that educational institutions may increasingly expect or even possibly guide funding toward the use of evidenced-based practices. This trend would be consistent with practice directions in children's mental health, and the increased emphasis on results and accountability in public schools. Although, it is not known how successfully the evidenced-based practices might be disseminated or monitored for use in education. What is known, is that evidenced-base practices have not been very successfully disseminated within school mental health practice, and the use of effective methods are often not used with the students and families who most need them (Franklin & Hopson, 2004; Hoagwood, 2003). In the future, however, school social workers may be asked to qualify their approaches using a set of standards that meets the criteria for evidenced-based practices in education.

THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

Community-based, clinical and health practitioners from diverse disciplines have increasingly linked with schools and are delivering their services on school campuses. This trend has been influenced by related services provisions and demands of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Faircloth, 2004), the vanishing autonomy of private practice, and the school-linked services movement (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Streeter & Franklin, 2002). The future implication of this trend is for schools to house and/or link

closely with mental health, social services, and other youth development programs. There have been varied projects across the country aimed at increasing the schools involvement with community-based services, and "statewide initiatives were established in California, Florida, Kentucky, Iowa, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, and Oregon, among others" (Taylor & Adelman, in press).

Although, partly designed to address fragmentation and to produce more efficient and effective programs, community linkages with school-based services has not resolved these issues. In fact, co-locating services to school campuses may just move the services fragmentation problem from one level to another as practitioners continue to be as disconnected and the services fragmented on school campuses as they were in the community. The UCLA Mental Health project has considerable data and information on the school and community-based services, and how to practice effectively in these types of school-based services programs (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/). The long term sustainment of collaboration, and the appropriate policies and infrastructure for practice appears to be significant for all successful, school-linked initiatives.

Franklin (1998) and Streeter & Franklin (2002) addressed the possible implications for an increasingly interprofessional work environment created through school-community programs. Such issues as role overlap and increased competition for service delivery by different services providers were suggested. In 2001 the SSWAA held a national conference in Washington DC focused on resolving related issues between the school-based, services professions, and decreasing job elimination of school social workers due to the co-location of mental health professionals to school campuses. Although, anecdotal reports indicate that the overlap of job descriptions and elimination of jobs may still be an issue for some school social workers, one study has shown that despite the overlapping roles , that the school-based services professionals have also found ways to work cooperatively. Agresta (2004) surveyed school social workers, school psychologists and counselors asking them about twenty-one roles. The results of this survey confirmed that job overlap did occur, and especially in the area of counseling services between social workers and counselors. School Psychologists, however, spent considerable more time on psychometric assessment than other school professionals. Interestingly, all the professionals including school psychologists wanted to do more counseling but the results of this survey indicated that the different professionals were coping well with the overlapping roles. For example, little competitive feelings were reported between the disciplines even with the presence of the interprofessional role overlap.

ENHANCING FUTURE PRACTICE COMPETENCIES

To be effective in the future, school social workers have to continue to position their practice competencies in relationship to the challenges of public schools and its' on-going reforms.

Effective Practices with Diverse, Populations At-Risk

Schools are integrally involved with services delivery of the most at-risk children and many of these children are also ethnic minority and from impoverished backgrounds (NCES, 2002). Many other diverse characteristics of students and families also present challenges

to effective practice delivery such as religious diversity, political diversity, and immigration status (Harris & Franklin, 2004). School social workers like all social workers must increase their knowledge for effective practice with diverse populations who also may present more than one risk factor (Altshuler and Kopels, 2003; Caple, Salcido, and Cecco, 1995). This issue overlaps with evidenced-based practices because there is a great need to develop effective practices with co-morbid populations, students of color, and to test these interventions more in the community practice settings including schools, for example (Hoagwood and Johnson, 2003; Schoenwald and Hoagwood, 2001). As school social workers effectively work with these students they can greatly assist schools as a diversity specialist and may also be helpful in training other school personnel in being effective with students of color and other diverse populations. Data indicates that effective service delivery with Latino populations including families with immigrant status may be one of the greatest issues facing public schools both now and in the future (Bowman, 2004).

Preparing for the Challenges of Evidenced-Based Practices

In order for school social workers to prepare for evidenced-based practice it is very important that they learn what are the most effective practices for different student and family issues (e.g. ADHD, substance abuse, parental involvement, facilitating teams, etc.). Fortunately, practice resources are emerging that help the practitioners learn the evidenced-based practices. The What Works Clearinghouse offers evidenced-based reviews of salient practice issues. The School Mental Health Assistant Center (http://csmha.umaryland.edu/; Weist, Evans, and Lever, 2003) also offers many resources for helping practitioners discover evidenced-based practices, and training for school-based, mental health services. Franklin, Harris & Allen-Meares (in press) further provide a comprehensive volume on evidenced-based practices for school-based social workers. As far as practitioners abilities to learn the evidenced-based practices goes, research indicates that reading practice manuals are not as effective as in-service training, and trainings are not as effective as supervision and consultation models (Franklin & Hopson, 2005; Simpson, LaCava, and Graner, 2004). A critical issue for evidenced-based, practice training that must be resolved is the fact that training is extremely expensive, and cost is a major barrier to learning the new methods (Franklin & Hopson, 2005). Shrinking training budgets and lack of provision of effective supervision in schools is an on-going issue for most school-based practices. One future approach to training and supervision might be for school social workers to form alliances with other children's professionals in the community in a strategy to make evidenced-based training and supervision available and more affordable.

Leadership

Rhodes (1999) envisions the new organizational style needed for effective school leadership as a "scaffolding" approach whereby leaders abandon the pyramid style of organization and develop horizontal relationships with their colleagues for the purposes of empowering smaller groups to be more effective. Administrators in schools are increasingly expected to be local problem solvers and capable of developing collaborative relationships, and enhance resources for their school campus. Leadership in school environments re-

quires skills for effective relationship management and coordination. School social workers can take a role in school leadership by working to enhance the importance of differing roles, and helping all professionals work in unity and cooperation.

School social workers can use their knowledge of different systems to increase role autonomy and avoid boundary diffusion between different professionals. Resource mapping and service coordination can also be used to assist schools in maximizing cooperation and decreasing fragmented and overlapping services (Streeter & Franklin, 2002). In schools, for example, case management is a skill emphasized by diverse professionals as school psychologists (Romualdi, V. & Sandoval, 1995; Tharinger, 1995) nurses, (Ross, 1999) and even teachers (Smith & Stowitschek, 1998). The effective implementation of case management in a school, however, requires leadership and coordination. In order to better meet these challenges, school social workers might enhance their competencies as leaders of interprofessional teams and foster additional abilities to facilitate transdiciplinary teamwork among diverse professionals (Streeter & Franklin, 2002).

Increasing Skills for Showing Accountability

Issues of accountability surrounding public schools suggests that school-based services professionals will increasingly be asked to provide outcome data showing that their practices get results. School social workers must enhance their skills in developing ways to measure the effectiveness of their services. There will be a great need for accountability measures that are easy to use and are consistent with the school's expectations for results (Green and Etheridge, 2001). To meet current and future demands for accountability, school social workers might consider measuring outcomes in relationship to the school performance indicators and developing their own report-card type system. Measuring and reporting outcomes require practitioners to have in place a data management and documentation system, that can produce outcome oriented reports that show performance (Franklin, 1999). Report cards for school social work services might be best positioned as marketing oriented tools and placed in the hands of important stakeholders. It is also advisable to provide outcome and positive performances information on a website

Increasing Skills for Using Technologies in Service Delivery

The future of education is intricately intertwined with the increasing use of diverse technologies and school social workers along with other school personnel must become extremely proficient in their use. For example, the Internet and other network and data base technologies will integrate with service delivery. In the future, everything from referrals to progress reports and outcomes measures will be on-line. School-based services professionals, parents and students will communicate with one another on-line. Schools without walls and learning communities may become more prevalent than is imaginable. At a minimum, to meet the future challenges of technology enhancements, school social workers will need to be knowledgeable and possess skills in web-based and Internet technologies, and also be competent in delivering effective and ethical services via these technologies (Giffords, 2003; Pahwa, 2003).

The protection of client records and the struggles to maintain client confidentiality is

also likely to magnify with increased use of electronic technologies. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA; Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, n.d.) has been a challenge for school-based practices and schools have been some times slow to accept the implications of increased confidentiality of health and mental health information, for example (Bergren and Pohlman, 2004). Confidentiality of school records and the personal medical information of students have created incidences where school social workers came into conflict with school personnel over how to interpret the increased demands of HIPAA. Like other personnel providing health and mental health services to students, school social workers have an obligation to challenge unethical practices and to develop appropriate policies (Erlen, 2004; Jonson-Reid, 2000).

Marketing and Contract Management Skills

All practitioners need to have excellent marketing and contract management skills because the school-based services funding is increasingly becoming a complex mix of funds from multiple sources (Poirier and Osher, in press). Funding sources are also increasingly coming from outside the public school system (e.g. mental health, health services, juvenile justice, and foundations) and different sources of funding are often combined in creative ways. With so many funding streams, school social workers must be continually prepared to market their own practices, as well as the programs of the school to diverse organizations. In order to be effective in marketing in schools, school social workers need a target approach that as informed by effective practices. Social Marketing theory is one approach that might be useful because it has been successfully used in the school health and school mental health field and the techniques may prove promising for school social workers too. Social marketing theory blends communication tools (e.g. groups, mass media, and individual) to send its' 'message. It takes into consideration three basic questions in formulating messages that can influence people to change their attitudes or behavior. 1) What motivates the person or group? 2) What is in it for the person or group if they change? 3) What are the competing ideas and messages being sent that must be countered? (Kirkwood & Stan, 2004;Rothschild, 1999).

As school social workers become more involved in working with diverse funders such as foundations, managed care organizations and Medicaid, the details of meeting the contract requirements for these funding sources may intensify. It may also be necessary to develop contracts and collaborations with other community services providers in order to fully take advantage of funding sources such as Medicaid, for example. At a minimum, school-based practice may require that school practitioners be knowledgeable about of several funding mechanisms and their issues for reimbursement. Fortunately, social workers often have more training in these types of marketing and contract management issues than other school-based services professionals. The macro training received in schools of social work may become a direct practice strength in practice situations relying on a need for on-going marketing of services, and the management of the diverse contracts.

CONCLUSION

School social workers have evolved into an independent profession and two distinct groups of social workers are currently practicing in schools.. Those who are employs of

school districts and those who come from community-based programs. School-based social work has developed a considerable infra-structure of specific practice organizations, conferences and journals to support its' development. Public schools, the principal work environments for school-based social workers are currently experiencing numerous cultural transformations and school reforms aimed at improving these systems. Every indication is that school-based social work will continue to be an important practice arena due to the prominent roles that schools currently have in the delivery of mental health and social services to at-risk students. Public schools are wrestling with the implications of increased accountability standards and this is creating a situation where school social workers must work in performance-oriented jobs.

Educational systems are taking steps to adopt standards for evidenced-based practices and this emerging practice trend has implications for the types of practices that social workers must learn and deliver in schools. Trends indicate that school social work and other school-related services is integrating more with community-based practices and this new service delivery approach is creating a need for resource mapping, coordination, and greater collaboration skills. School social workers can enhance future practice competencies by staying attuned to the current issues confronting educational systems and focusing skills development on those areas. Issues such as the increasing diversity of students, evidenced-based practices, leadership, accountability, increasing use of technologies, knowledge of diverse funding sources, and a need for marketing skills are a few of the pertinent issues that might guide practitioners as they select their continuing education.

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