



NASW SPECIALTY PRACTICE SECTIONS
SPRING/SUMMER ■ 2024

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SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

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Letter from the Chair



I have always known that what sets us school social workers apart from other professions is our ethics; our approach to embrace the whole student, their families, their communities; and our desire to address matters of social injustice that affect vulnerable youth. As we navigate the contemporary challenges facing our education system, we must address the urgent need for quality supervision of school social workers. The recent wave of attacks on public education, diversity, and inclusion has only amplified the significance of our role in supporting students and advocating for their well-being.

Ongoing efforts to restrict discussions on race and diversity and undermine social-emotional learning (SEL) programs are substantial obstacles to creating affirming and inclusive learning environments. These policies not only hinder academic progress but also pose significant risks to our students' mental health and overall development. In the face of these challenges, our role as school social workers becomes increasingly crucial. We are tasked with upholding the highest standards of ethical practice while ensuring that our students receive the support and guidance they need to thrive. However, to fulfill this responsibility, we must have access to high-quality supervision provided by experienced school social work professionals.

High-quality supervision enables school social workers to navigate complex ethical dilemmas, process challenging situations, and make informed decisions that prioritize student well-being. By receiving guidance from experienced school social workers, we can continue to evolve and adapt our practices to meet the ever-changing needs of our schools and communities. Such supervision creates a strong foundation of support and professional development, empowering us to confront the attacks on public education and diversity. It equips us with the tools and resources to advocate for inclusive curricula, promote SEL, and create affirming spaces where all students feel embraced and supported.

Creating mere *accepting* spaces is insufficient; we must strive to cultivate *affirming* environments where all students feel embraced for who they are. When we do, we strengthen our profession, enhance our ability to serve as catalysts for positive change, and ensure that our students receive the support they deserve.

Robert Lucio, PhD, LCSW, Chair, School Social Work Specialty Committee

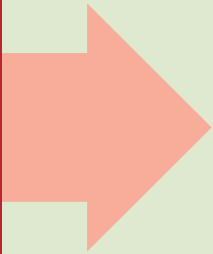
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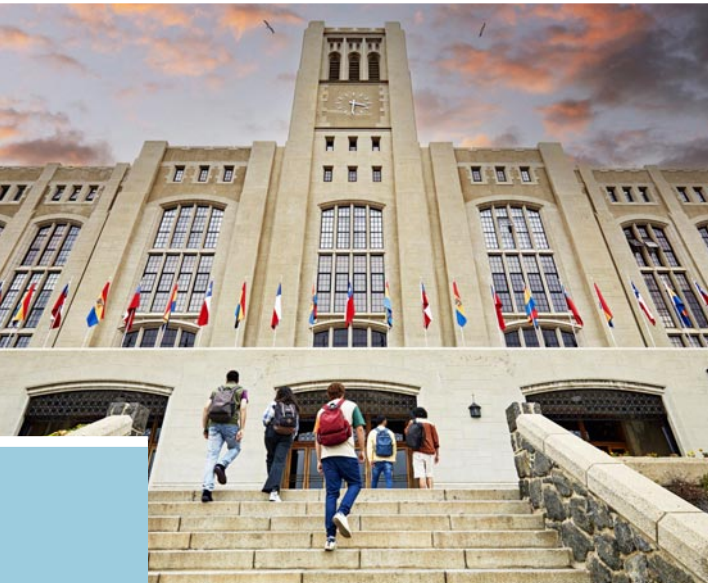
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CENSORSHIP IN EDUCATION and Contemporary Challenges for Social Work?

BRANDON D. MITCHELL, PHD, MSW



In August 2020, in typical Fox News fashion, Tucker Carlson interviewed

Christopher Rufo, a fellow with the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank. The two discussed sensationalized depictions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training in the federal government. This

was a pivotal moment; within one month, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13950, banning “divisive concepts” in the federal government and imposing restrictions on “race and sex stereotyping.” Although the EO was overturned by President Biden, it laid the foundation for subsequent trends of education censorship. States have

proposed hundreds of bills and enacted legislation that include bans on race and diversity curricula and the teaching of critical race theory (CRT). Pen America reported that since 2021, 307 educational gag-order bills have been introduced, and 40 have been enacted into law (Young et al., 2023).

As the censorship movement progressed into 2022, legislators adopted new forms of identity-based oppression, including bans on gender-affirming care, sports bans, and restroom-facilities bans that target trans youth. The Human Rights Campaign (2023) reported that 22 policies (22 states) have enacted legislative bans on

gender-affirming care. These services are crucial to the most basic forms of health care for transgender and nonbinary youth. For example, in a sample of 104 patients ages 13 to 20, researchers found that gender-affirming care (i.e., puberty blockers, hormone therapy) was associated with “60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up” (Tordoff et al., 2022). The Movement Advancement Project (n.d.a, n.d.b) reported that legislation in 23 states has barred trans youth from participating in sports that align with their gender identity, and legislation in 12 states prohibits trans youth from using restrooms and facilities aligned with their gender identity. The impact on the health and well-being of these young people is still largely underinvestigated. Laura Beth Kelly (2023) reported on these policies’ chilling effect—whereby teachers may self-censor amid increases in social and political fear. As social workers, we must be cognizant of the evolving recensions on youth rights and strategize on new mechanisms of support, inclusion, and healing amid ongoing oppression driven by conservative elites and Republican legislators.

As the censorship movement continues, legislators have introduced bills to impose restrictions on, limit the power of, and outright abolish DEI content and institutions in

higher education. Since 2023, 52 bills directed at higher education have been introduced, and 7 have been signed into law (Lu et al., 2024). This censorship strategy was taken directly from an elite playbook, as disclosed by the Manhattan Institute in its online article “Abolish DEI Bureaucracies and Restore Colorblind Equality in Public Universities.” The authors acknowledged their intent to “abolish DEI bureaucracies, end mandatory diversity training, curtail political coercion, and end identity-based preferences” (Rufo et al., 2023). Christopher Rufo is one leader of the attack on public education institutions; however, it is a much deeper, strategically orchestrated movement involving corporations, think tanks, legislators, lobbyists, school board advocacy groups, nonprofits, media moguls, and journalists advancing the conservative agenda of both neoliberal hegemony and privatized capitalism. For example, an array of legislation in recent years has shed light on this playbook—to promote corporations, undermine democracy, and erode the rights of American citizens. As the U.S. Supreme Court has shifted right, the country continues to see the erosion of American rights—most notably, the recensions of reproductive rights, affirmative action, voting rights, and workers’ rights; drag-show bans; de-professionalization efforts (i.e., lowering

credentialing standards) against teachers and school-based mental health professionals; and legislation attacking social-emotional learning (SEL). This last matter has a foreseeable direct impact on school-based social workers and the profession of social work more generally.

Legislators have introduced bills to impose restrictions, limit funding, or abolish SEL in schools. The mental health implications of such repressive policy changes may be catastrophic for students. Given the challenges of the pandemic on student mental health and well-being, many young people have been experiencing rising mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and suicidality (Watson et al., 2022). As economic precarity continues, populations living without permanent residences or who are unhoused are drastically on the rise (Parrot et al., 2022). Although it appears that most anti-SEL legislation has failed or died in committee, such attempts’ corollary impact on schools—even in geographic regions without state-level censorship policies enacted—should not be underestimated. In other words, as soon as these trends make their way into the mainstream media, school systems and social workers are likely to be affected in deleterious ways, with little research documenting the impact. For example, anti-SEL legislation died in Iowa; however, the SEL resources

previously posted to the Iowa Department of Education website have been removed.

To understand the movement of education censorship more clearly, school social workers must realign to the structures that fund, design, and unify networks to facilitate the spread of oppressive policies; undermine public education; and solidify private, charter, parochial, and for-profit school expansion. For example, the lobbyist firm the American Legislative Exchange Council has been actively creating model legislation for states and posting on YouTube workshops that are directly designed to spread the attacks on public education institutions. Next, the unity of network elites designs a policy agenda, forms model legislation, and uses mezzo-level influencers to spread propaganda and draw attention. For example, sensationalized discourse in the media works to solidify and build allegiance with school board advocacy groups and nonprofits such as Moms for Liberty and Parents Defending Education. These groups are linked to dark-money funding (Joyce, 2022; Ravitch, 2021) and have opened local chapters in at least 30 states; their role in the political process is being increasingly documented. As network elites influence lobbyists and legislators to construct oppressive policies, school-board advocacy groups (e.g., Moms for Liberty) create new forms of censorship and

attempt to influence school boards across the country. The clearest impact has been the rise of book bans across the United States and the removal of inclusion policies for LGBTQ+ and historically minoritized youth of color. In 2023, Pen America reported 3,362 instances of book bans, a 33 percent increase over 2022 (Meehan et al., 2023).

PROMOTING NEW AVENUES OF INCLUSION AMID OPPRESSIVE POLICIES AND ATTACKS

Social workers across the country are working to reaffirm their support for youth in schools through new mechanisms of inclusion and reinvigorated efforts to convey the benefits of social work services and by promoting new avenues of healing with open arms. To lessen the fear created to divide Americans, we as a profession must do more to convey the value of social work. In schools, we can do more to convey the benefits of school social workers to parents to reduce stigma and political divides, build bridges through conversations, and circumvent fear. It is crucial to keep in mind that these hateful and oppressive policies are designed by right-wing elites; the media works to garner political support and galvanize the voting base. This means there is always an opportunity to show the damage of these policies on schools, youth, mental health, well-being, and, eventually, academic outcomes.

To keep readers abreast of the censorship movement, many wonderful organizations are documenting policy changes and advocating for change, such as these:

Pen America
The Movement Advancement Project
Human Rights Watch
Network for Public Education

Brandon D. Mitchell, PhD, MSW, is an adjunct professor at the University of Tennessee. His research is positioned along two pathways. One seeks to examine and understand the impact of policies and media discourse on education, youth development, and school-based support mechanisms; the other aims to improve the role and practice of school social workers toward healing-centered frameworks and justice-oriented action. He can be found online at www.bdmitchell.com and reached by email at brandon.mitchell@louisville.edu.

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Upcoming Live SPS Webinars

Climate Literacy: Mapping the Landscape for Collective Wellbeing

Monday, June 17, 2024 (1- 2 pm ET)

Presenter: Jean E. Balestrery PhD, MA, MSW, LICSW, MAC

CEs: 1 Social work contact hour

This presentation addresses climate as an environmental driver of health. The aim of this presentation is to increase climate literacy by mapping the landscape of climate change, climate impacts, climate justice and climate resilience. Climate literacy is viewed through a multi-level lens that includes micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels. The session emphasizes implications for social workers and implications for our collective wellbeing as a global society.

Objectives:

- Social workers will be able to distinguish the myths from the facts about spanking.
- Social workers will be able to describe the latest research regarding the harms of corporal punishment.
- Social workers will review trauma-informed resources for safe and effective parenting.

Responding Ethically and Competently to “Emotional Support Animal” (ESA) Letter Requests

Thursday, July 11, 2024 (1 – 2:30 pm ET)

Presenter: Janet Hoy-Gerlach, LISW-S, LCSW, PhD

CE Category: 1.5 Ethics contact hours

Increasing numbers of social work practitioners are asked by their clients to write “Emotional Support Animal (ESA) letters” to verify eligibility for ESAs as an accommodation in rental housing. Uncertainty on how to respond to such requests creates barriers to housing access for people facing housing instability who are eligible for ESA support as a housing accommodation under the U.S. Fair Housing Act. The purpose of this webinar is to equip social work practitioners to ethically and competently respond to ESA letter requests through addressing the related basic skills, knowledge, and professional values entailed in such.

Objectives:

- Attendees will be able to articulate the ethical and legal responsibilities related to verification of need for an ESA.
- Attendees will be able to describe at least one of each type of therapeutic human benefits associated with non-human animal companionship: biological, psychological, social, and emotional.
- Attendees will be able to identify and differentiate the different therapeutic roles commonly held by animals: pet/companion animal; Emotional Support Animal (ESA); and service animals.
- Attendees will be able to describe and assess for eligibility for Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) under the U.S. Fair Housing Act (FHA), and describe how state-specific laws can further interface with FHA ESA eligibility
- Attendees will be able to document reliable documentation of ESA eligibility via the “ESA letter”.

Visit the **SPS Webinar Catalogue** for more details and registration.

PROMOTING SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK through Quality Supervision

KEN RAUTIOLA, EDS, LCSW, NCSSW



Quality supervision is essential to the sustainability and growth of the school social

work profession. The demands placed on school social workers in today's schools are complex and diverse. Such practitioners often work in isolation from their peers or have limited contact with other school social workers (Phillippo et al., 2017). Without supervision, school social workers are left rudderless—and often sequestered—in an environment where they may be seen as guests. Without the support of quality supervision, even certified or licensed school social workers may not be adequately prepared for the demands of their position. As school environments co-evolve; to evolve, school social workers must likewise continue to develop to meet the challenges that arise.

Current issues that may challenge school social workers include inconsistent state certification and licensing standards, censorship, funding, retention, recruitment, and the sustainability of the school social work profession. Qualified supervision for school social workers can reduce the negative impact of all these emerging and historical issues, which are often interconnected. Supervision by an experienced

social worker may create a foundation of success, or at least safety, for school social workers, who should not have to face these challenges alone.

To understand the complexities of school social work, it is important to review the professional standards established by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA). Social work supervision can be described as administrative, professional, evaluative, and educational (Raines, 2017). Although administrative supervision may be provided by a school administrator or another educator (Raines, 2017), an experienced social worker best provides professional, educational, and evaluative supervision.

Both NASW and SSWAA have identified the value and need for school social workers to be supervised by social workers. Schools often ignore or do not fund this recommendation, leaving the supervision of school social workers to school administrators or special education professionals—if supervision is provided at all. The profession must acknowledge that many school social workers do not receive formal supervision. Although education leaders may be



highly skilled and knowledgeable about student instruction and school law, they are not social workers. Social workers have a clearly defined professional code of ethics, and many school social workers provide clinical services within schools. A licensed clinical social worker should always provide clinical supervision.

The social work profession also embraces the ethical practices outlined in the *NASW Code of Ethics*; professional, educational, and evaluative supervision must be based on the professional social work ethics established by the

NASW. As school social workers seek to collaborate with educators and other related service providers, ethical issues will inevitably arise (Raines, 2017). School social workers need supervision to process these ethical issues and dilemmas and consistently make decisions aligned with the *NASW Code of Ethics*.

Experienced and qualified school social work supervision is the profession's expectation; however, school social workers need support in the absence of a professional supervision standard. Several options may

fill some of this need. The school district or school social worker may contract with an experienced social worker to provide the necessary supervision. This model has several limitations, including the lack of authority within the local educational agency and the cost, which may rest with the individual school social worker. Another option is peer supervision or peer consultation, in which school social workers collaborate to work through challenges and other supervisory needs. Peer consultation also has the limitation of lacking authority within the local educational agency, (LEA). Additional opportunities to access support may include mentoring, coaching, and group supervision; however, none of these forms of supplemental support includes decision-making authority within the LEA, nor do they fully meet the need for administrative, professional, educational, and evaluative supervision.

Although these alternatives may provide valuable supplemental support to school social workers, they do not and should not replace quality supervision. The supports mentioned lack the rigor needed to support the professional, educational, and evaluative needs of school social workers in an ongoing and professional manner. To provide high-quality support to students, school social workers must continue to advocate for the professional supervision that they need. While the NASW and SSWAA have incorporated the need for professional social work supervision into standards and practice recommendations, there remains an absence of current research on the impact

or value of school social work supervision (Sewell, 2018). New research to further assess the importance of supervision for school social workers is needed.

School social workers have been supporting schools for more than a century. During this time, the context and role of school social workers have evolved to meet the needs of students and the school community. As this role has evolved, the need for experienced social work supervision has remained steadfast. With recent government investment in increasing school-based mental health providers, including school social workers, the need for qualified social work supervision has grown. More new social workers are being hired in schools, and these practitioners need professional, educational, and evaluative supervision to support their professional development. There are currently not enough social workers to fill community needs, so social work supervisors must also work to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of currently employed school social workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In schools that do not currently provide supervision to school social workers, it is important to take steps to mitigate this gap and support the quality of school social work practices. Linking school social work support to existing resources, organizations, and practices is one way to accomplish this goal. These steps may include the following:

1. Schools provide all school social workers with supervision that aligns with the NASW Standards of School Social Work Practice and the SSWAA National School Social Work Practice Model.
2. In the absence of supervision, school social workers advocate to receive supervision from experienced social workers.
3. School social workers create and maintain connections to professional organizations that support them. These organizations include the NASW, SSWAA, and state school social work organizations.
4. School social workers supplement administrative supervision with peer consultation, group supervision, mentoring, professional coaching, and consultation opportunities. Experienced school social workers should provide these supports.
5. Experienced school social workers seek opportunities to provide mentoring and supervision within their local education agencies.
6. Researchers target social work research on school social work supervision, creating a foundation of literature to identify the benefits of qualified supervision and best practices of school social work supervision.

Ken Rautiola, EdS, LCSW, NCCSW, is a nationally certified school social worker and a member of the NASW School Social Work Specialty Practice Section. Ken is currently employed as the Mental Health Distinguished Educator at the Maine Department of Education. He can be reached at sswmaine@gmail.com.

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The School Social Work Toolkit



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The School Social Work Toolkit

Hands-On Counseling Activities and Workshops

Alison Varianides

The School Social Work Toolkit is a “how-to” resource for social workers, counselors, and mental health professionals in education. This book encompasses the direct practice part of the school social worker’s job as well as the administrative and policy-driven aspects, such as child abuse reporting, disciplinary interventions, training, and dealing with teachers and parents.

The workbook is divided into seven main sections:

- Defining Your Role as a Social Worker
- Individual Counseling Activities
- Group Implementation and Counseling Activities
- Workshops and School Programs
- Communicating with Teachers and Professional Development
- Communicating with Parents
- Crisis Intervention—Protocols and Assessments

The toolkit provides hands-on activities and workshops about various social work topics. In addition, the book contains a multitude of invaluable, modifiable sample forms and policy drafts for the school social worker—especially one who acts in an administrator role.

The first of its kind, *The School Social Work Toolkit* contains real-life examples of how to talk to teachers and parents about students facing a variety of common struggles that are, nevertheless, frequently difficult to discuss and how to conduct student and teacher trainings.

Connect to End COVID-19

Engage in NASW’s National Initiative Today!

Every day more people are vaccinated, but there are many others who have not been vaccinated, despite the demonstrated safety of the vaccines and their high degree of effectiveness in preventing severe illness and death. Connect to End COVID-19 is a national \$3.3 million Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded initiative that helps social workers and their clients to make informed decisions about life-saving vaccines.

NASW and the NASW Foundation are partnering with the Health Behavior Research and Training Institute at The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work on this campaign—which includes national and state chapter-level training, tools, and information to promote vaccine confidence.

Register today for complimentary [self-study webinars](#), including CEUs; and, learn more about the campaign by visiting [NASW’s website](#).



The Connect to End COVID-19 initiative is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$3.3 million with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.



Visit the Connect to End COVID-19 booth at the [NASW National Conference](#) June 19-22 in Washington, DC.
We look forward to meeting you!

Call for Social Work Practitioner Submissions

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/Careers/Specialty-Practice-Sections/Author-Guidelines](https://socialworkers.org/Careers/Specialty-Practice-Sections/Author-Guidelines). If you need more information, email sections@socialworkers.org.



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