
Education Censorship and the Chilling Effect on School Social Work

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Over the past few years, state legislators have proposed and enacted legislation that undermines youth rights and imposes education censorship. To discuss the impact on support-based mechanisms in schools, qualitative interviews ($n = 11$) and one focus group were conducted with school social workers. This study privileges practitioner wisdom to help understand the impact of education censorship and provide advocacy strategies in orientation to the National School Social Work Practice Model 2.0. Qualitative interviews were used to assess knowledge, impact, and advocacy efforts in the context of education censorship, with findings interpreted through thematic analytical techniques. Findings are categorized into three themes: impact of education censorship, preexisting challenges, and advocacy and resistance. The severity of education censorship was shaped by variations in policies enacted, geographic location, and school factors such as role, caseload, and orientations to advocacy. The discussion is aligned with the National Model to help prioritize equitable and holistic school-based practice. The article concludes by delineating recommendations for research, practice, and advocacy.

KEY WORDS: *education censorship; equity and inclusion; justice-oriented practice; school mental health; youth rights*

Historically, schools have been sites of social and political turmoil, and this has been especially true in recent years. From the health and economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic to the Black Lives Matter movement for racial justice, on through the enduring wars in Ukraine and Gaza—all have been affected by the ensuing injustice. Uniquely vulnerable to the turmoil are youth in schools, especially as the contemporary instances of strife and trauma are built on preexisting inequities that disproportionately oppress racially minoritized youth (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). At the same time, these challenges may be exacerbated by education censorship and the ongoing attacks on youth rights (Mitchell et al., 2024). In this article, the impact of education censorship is explored in the context of the National School Social Work Practice Model 2.0 (Tan & School Social Work Association of America [SSWAA], in press) to build justice-oriented and holistic support for youth.

EDUCATION CENSORSHIP SCOPE AND PREVALENCE

Building on the pandemic turmoil, a network of actors and organizations have united to impose an

array of repressive policies and curricula recensions (Joyce, 2022). The policy impact was catalyzed by President Trump's Executive Order 13950 (rescinded by President Biden), which provided the foundation for subsequent state-level race and diversity censorship policies (Alexander et al., 2023). Since 2020, transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive youth have faced prohibitions on their participation in sports, use of restroom facilities, and access to gender-affirming care (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.; Movement Advancement Project, 2025a, 2025b). More recently censorship has taken shape at progressive frameworks such as social-emotional learning (SEL) and diversity, equity, and inclusion (Lu et al., 2023; Mitchell et al., 2024).

The attack on public education has been a systematic and coordinated effort of elite networks, including lobbyists (e.g., American Legislative Exchange Council), corporations, and think tanks (e.g., Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute), with model legislation designed and doled out to state representatives (Cunningham, 2022). As elite networks design and propose legislation, many censorship policies have been enacted without buy-in and support from constituents—this means support must be garnered and procured after the

fact (Mitchell, 2024). The media manufacture buy-in through politically dichotomized discourse to reify social divides and perpetuate censorship through rising forms of political contention (Ferris & Robbins, 2024). Political contention may infiltrate school boards (e.g., Moms for Liberty) often under the guise of “local influence” (Joyce, 2022). Collectively, schools face the multidimensional effects of education censorship driven by (a) policies, (b) media discourse, (c) school boards, and (d) political division (Mitchell, 2024)—leveraging fear to support privatization, school choice, and for-profit education (Giroux, 2023).

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

To strategize on the advocacy and responsibility of school social workers (SSWs) in response to the rising trends of education censorship and restrictions on youth rights, we must be grounded by the orientation of the field. Practice is shaped by a confluence of factors, including state certification standards (Mitchell et al., 2021), educational preparation (Kelly et al., 2023), role ambiguity (Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020), administrative knowledge (Stalnecker et al., 2022), and desire for justice-oriented practice (Ball & Skrzypek, 2020; Lucio et al., 2024). Mitchell and colleagues (2021) reported that only 32 states prepare SSWs at the master’s level—leaving 15 states with undefined regulations. In the states requiring master’s level preparation, 11 have school social work specialization programs; however, more research is needed to determine course requirements and training related to justice-oriented practice (Mitchell et al., 2021). In the face of varied state standards and limited knowledge regarding educational preparation, questions remain about whether SSWs are being prepared for how to address inequities, shape policy reform, and promote schoolwide youth well-being (Lucio et al., 2023). Lipsky (2010) offers practice implications, noting that SSWs may operate as *street-level bureaucrats*—with little ability to target inequities or move beyond the school-based status quo. Therefore, as role ambiguity, varied role perceptions, and lack of administrative buy-in persist, SSWs may be underemployed, utilized in ways incongruent from training, and bogged down in school crises and administrative burdens that limit their ability to attend to justice-oriented practice (Lucio et al., 2024).

These structural inequities in professional training and the development of school social work relate

intricately to the ongoing presence of school-based inequities. Black and Brown youth continue to experience disproportionate exclusion, including suspensions, expulsions, arrests, and referrals to law enforcement (Mitchell & Greer, 2024). In response, schools often turn to corporate-based reform, including surveillance, police, metal detectors, clear backpacks, and school hardening measures (e.g., locked doors, no windows). The punitive school environment may be prioritized over (a) understanding youth behavior; (b) targeting the economic inequities in the school and community; or (c) realigning with culturally responsive and inclusive measures across curricula, pedagogy, and practice (Milner, 2015). Okonofua and colleagues (2016) add that empathy-based interventions may be more successful at reducing the school reliance on discipline. These practices are crucial to recognize amid the attacks on youth development, oppressive policy reform, and education censorship (Henry et al., 2023). Given the state of educational inequities, SSWs may benefit from an ethical realignment and justice-oriented practice, with the National Model providing an opportunity to facilitate these shifts toward equity.

NATIONAL SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE MODEL 2.0

To build unity and move the profession into the 21st century, the National School Social Work Practice Model 2.0 guides the equitable practice of SSWs (Tan & SSWAA, in press). On the outermost level, practice shall be guided by principles of social work values, ethics, and equity. Next, the model prioritizes the intersections and relationships across practice, policy, leadership, advocacy, and research. Consistent with the ecological orientations of the original practice model, the linkages between the home, school, and community are emphasized. On the inner levels, practice should boost school climate; academics; and social, emotional, and mental health. All levels intersect, are mutually reinforcing, and are designed to support student and school well-being, promote equity, develop macro-to-micro perspectives, and unite practice with research grounded by the professional ethics.

STUDY PURPOSE AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of education censorship on school social work practice. Interviews with SSWs were guided by

two research questions: (1) What are the perspectives, awareness, and knowledge of SSWs regarding education censorship policies and the impact on school social work practice? (2) In what ways, if any, do SSWs attempt to reduce harm caused by education censorship policies in their schools?

This research is operationalized by my identities as a White, cisgender assistant professor of social work and my research interests in promoting educational justice. For several years, the impact of education censorship has spanned a network of actors and organizations, enacting policy, leveraging the media to facilitate divides, building censorship into school board processes, and impacting schools in myriad ways. I believe in promoting justice-oriented school social work—and to do this we must (a) have awareness regarding the ongoing trends of oppression; (b) equip SSWs with knowledge and skills to promote youth well-being and target inequities; and (c) build collaborative research-to-practice partnerships to promote the viability of the field and sustain holistic, youth-centered support.

METHOD

Qualitative interviews ($n = 11$) and one focus group with three participants were conducted with SSWs regarding the shifting landscape of education censorship. Recruitment progressed with support from both state and national school social work associations and university institutional review board approval. Interested participants were invited to complete a demographic survey and asked their preference for either an individual qualitative interview or a focus group session. Semistructured interviews were designed to assess three components: (1) knowledge and awareness related to education censorship; (2) the impact of education censorship, if any, on school social work practice; and (3) practice relative to advocacy and resistance. Participants were provided an opportunity to provide concluding remarks.

Interviews, which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were conducted virtually, recorded, and transcribed verbatim, then the recordings were stored securely in a private cloud-based drive, with analysis conducted in MaxQDA using thematic analytical guidance (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and alignment with the National Model (Tan & SSWAA, *in press*). Two stages of analysis were used to (1) build the organization of thematic categories and (2) orient in alignment with the model. All transcripts

were read over multiple periods of time, intersected with memos and code clustering techniques, and overlaid with important contextual factors.

FINDINGS

Participants spanned eight states—and all data were deidentified to protect anonymity. Participants identified as White (79 percent), Black (14 percent), or Indigenous (7 percent). All participants identified as women, and 42 percent had more than 20 years of experience in schools. The participants identified politically as liberal (29 percent), Democrat (36 percent), independent (7 percent), moderate (7 percent), or preferred not to say (21 percent). Practitioners practiced in rural (43 percent), suburban (29 percent), urban/suburban (21 percent), and urban (7 percent) schools. Roles spanned micro (37 percent), micro/macro (35 percent), micro/mezzo (7 percent), micro/school mental health (7 percent), mezzo/crisis intervention (7 percent), and macro (7 percent). Findings are categorized into three themes: (1) impact of education censorship, (2) preexisting challenges, and (3) advocacy and resistance. Table 1 links the qualitative analysis to the National Model to outline opportunities for realignment and practice unity by tying qualitative exemplar quotes for each theme to the four overarching dimensions of the model: practice domains, principles, focus areas, and activities.

Theme 1: Impact of Education Censorship

Several participants located in geographic regions where education censorship bills had been introduced, and in some cases enacted into law, discussed the impact of these policies. Regardless of the enactment of state education censorship policies—including anti-critical race theory (CRT) curriculum bills, anti-LGBTQ bills (e.g., gender-affirming care, sports and restroom bans), and anti-SEL bills—the legislative impact of education censorship was noticeable in schools. For example, Olivia noted the impact of a proposed anti-gender-affirming care bill:

The student was on hormone [treatment], and they came in sobbing, like screaming, full-on panic attack, just had gotten the news that this bill was proposed and they thought they were going to have to go off hormones and basically were, like, “Our representatives want me dead?”

Table 1: Qualitative Analysis and National Model Alignment

Qualitative Analysis		National Model			
Theme	Exemplar Quote	Practice Domains	Professional Principles	Focus Areas	Professional Activities
Impact of censorship	“The student was on hormone [treatment] and they came in sobbing, like scream-crying, full-on panic attack, just had gotten the news that this bill was proposed and they thought they were going to have to go off hormones and basically were, like, our representatives want me dead?” —Olivia	Home School Community	<i>Code of Ethics</i>	Mental health	Policy Advocacy
	“The censorship policies start intertwining with people’s morals and beliefs, and if the superintendent, administrators, school boards are all on board, then we’re scared because even if you think it’s in the best interest of the student, it definitely impacts your practice.” —Chloe	Home School Community	Social work values	School climate	Practice
	“Individual therapy, psycho-education groups, clinical groups, workshops have all been cut.” —Amelia	School	Equity	Student and school well-being	Practice
Preexisting challenges	“I was so driven by my caseload that I really had a hard time doing any type of macro systems.” —Rurna	Home School Community	Equity	Student and school well-being	Practice Policy Advocacy
	“Rural areas don’t really have a school social worker.” —Olivia	Home School Community	Equity	Student and school well-being	Practice
Advocacy	“Advocate for the events that do take place in the communities.” —Mala	Home School Community	<i>Code of Ethics</i> Equity	Student and school well-being	Advocacy
Barriers to advocacy	“It’s harder to do our jobs. It’s not wrong to support them, but as we progress in our profession we will have pushback because we are the boots on the ground.” —Judy	Home School Community	Equity	School climate	Practice

Ava discussed the impact of school boards:

Post COVID we’ve gone the way of Moms for Liberty with our school board. Previously,

parents could request that a book be removed, then the school board basically said, no, we want to decide if a book gets removed. And so the school board put forward

a directive to the superintendent for that to be allowed.

Chloe added:

The censorship policies start intertwining with people's morals and beliefs, and if the superintendent, administrators, school boards are all on board, then we're scared because even if you think it's in the best interest of the student, it definitely impacts your practice.

Beyond the impact of state and school board censorship policies, school social work practitioners illuminated the direct impact of school procedures and mandates on the students they support. For example, Judy commented on the recent banning of 23 books in their district. Olivia discussed the implications of book bans:

I try not to be hyperbolic and make things sound bigger than they are, but the principal directed teachers to get rid of their books with the only use [in] a classroom. There has been a huge chilling effect on reading and books.

Niesha added:

Literally the library and counseling are the two places where you go to feel like a human, and they're the two places under attack right now. So, I just try to share anecdotally my experience of, hey, your policies are directly impacting not just me, but [also] kids.

Olivia, who worked in multiple rural schools, reported: "The biggest issue that I see is race-based. Some books are going to be taken out about racial differences in fear that some students may feel ostracized or disrespected when that's not the intention."

In addition to the policy implications and book bans, Amelia noted that "individual therapy, psychoeducation groups, clinical groups, workshops have all been cut." Rurna discussed two districts no longer adhering to the SEL curriculum: "We will not assess SEL at all because it's critical race theory." In a different state, Katie discussed changes to SEL: "They changed the name of SEL to Skills for Learning and Life, but just changing the name to appease the parents, and they immediately saw

through it, you know?" Although some participants reported pushback to SEL curriculum, this was not occurring in all schools. When asked about SEL pushback, Niesha responded: "Actually no, they love it. They want more of it. There are even ongoing efforts to provide SEL curriculum to parents."

Theme 2: Preexisting Challenges

Building on the impact of education censorship on school social work practice, participants pointed out how censorship may impede their ability to carry out their professional responsibilities. The majority (but not all) of practitioners in this study worked in multiple schools, navigated extremely large caseloads, and maintained varied practice obligations amid ongoing state, district, and school challenges related to policies, politics, and religion. Rurna noted: "I was so driven by my caseload that I really had a hard time doing any type of macro systems."

Practitioners discussed supporting youth from a variety of different backgrounds, alongside some corollary practice challenges. Ava and Chloe highlighted the beauty and challenges of supporting the cultural diversity of youth in their schools and the need for individualized support in working with students from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela. They mentioned the trauma facing youth and families due to border crossing relocations and sensed that as the political hostility to immigrant families increased in coastal border states (e.g., Florida), people may navigate further into inland states. Practitioners in multiple schools discussed the challenges of supporting immigrant youth and their families—and how certain schools, at times, appeared to be transition points—with some youth only temporarily enrolled in their school for a short period of time. These challenges made the ability to provide resources and support all the more difficult, confounded by language barriers and unforeseen trends in relocation. Furthermore, less is known about whether schools were failing to meet the needs of these immigrant youth and families.

Practice was also shaped by education and training limitations (i.e., micro-level focus), and role variations amid geographic variations (i.e., state) and population characteristics (i.e., rural; suburban; urban). Participants discussed role orientation and practice barriers. Rurna noted: "Giving the predominance

of Individualized Educational Plans and behavior plans, it was really difficult to try and work on culture, climate, and systems change.” Olivia said: “Rural areas don’t really have a school social worker.” Gwen added: “Some days you are just chasing your tail responding to crises.”

The relationship between censorship and youth mental health was documented at length—with *all* participants underscoring concerns about youth mental health. Olivia highlighted the “trepidatious and fear-based culture,” and Mala noted that censorship policies “limit the students’ ability to have access to mental health in the rural areas.” Chloe stated: “All these issues that students are bringing up, it is impacting their mental health.”

Theme 3: Advocacy and Resistance

Amid a host of challenges due to censorship and preexisting practice demands, SSWs were often youth advocates and leaders striving for new forms of inclusion. Many practitioners discussed the need for school-based advocacy and inclusion, including specific strategies. For example, Katie stated: “We are the voices for our kids—we have to be the change.” Gwen underscored the importance of a supportive school environment for advocacy: “One of the reasons I’ve been here as long as I have is with both principals, my personal beliefs have aligned with them, when it comes to discipline and supporting students’ mental health needs.” Niesha spoke to the importance of school social work and macro-level advocacy, connections with state school social work associations and legislative advocacy committees, and the need to control the narrative around social work: “Every social worker providing direct services should lobby at the state level. It’s critical because I think a lot of people at the table are not in the trenches doing the work.” Olivia suggested increased advocacy and connection with youth through book clubs where they could read young adult fiction so that students could see their identities, experiences, and stories represented in literature and have space to talk: “I did a book study last school year with a group of high school girls, and it’s just so cool for them to be like seen in representative literature, and it’s hard when those books are banned.”

Mala suggested SSWs should “advocate for the events that do take place in the communities.” This may include museums, cultural festivals, and working to convey the importance of cultural

gatherings and bringing youth to participate and engage in these diverse and rich learning environments. Olivia added: “Allowing the students to acknowledge and practice their culture in the schools, or to be out of schools because of that.” Yet, SSW practitioners also discussed barriers and resistance to advocacy.

Theme 3 has a subtheme: barriers and resistance to advocacy. Participants discussed how advocacy was hampered by education censorship, working conditions, and fear related to their role in the school system. Rurna noted: “We as public employees do not necessarily have protected speech. I mean, we do have freedom of speech, but there is a cost to that as a public employee who can censor our speech.” Katie stated: “It’s harder to do our jobs. It’s not wrong to support them, but as we progress in our profession, we will have pushback because we are the boots on the ground.” Judy discussed these challenges:

I had a young student today suggest that they may be pregnant, and I am not permitted to talk about how to prevent that or even talk about how to prevent any other health ramifications that can come from any [sexual] activity between two partners.

Chloe underscored the lack of policy guidance for supporting gender-expansive youth, stating: “We don’t have anything written in policy regarding gender identity.” Niesha added:

We know education censorship is happening, but we don’t know what our rights are, and I feel the same way, in terms of running groups and coming up against anything that has to do with CRT and controversial topics. I get confused regarding our restrictions and our abilities to talk to students.

Participants discussed the need for access to services, increased parent engagement, and community-based advocacy efforts. Rurna stated: “I think that’s where we’re all lacking, that educational piece to our communities. From the school to the community and engaging parents in networks.” Amelia noted the limitations of continuing education: “I found most of the training is very clinical, as if you’re working in a hospital setting or having your own private practice. That’s a very different role

than actually working in a school.” Chloe discussed role variations, ambiguity, district-level variations, and the need for national organizational support: “We just need a standard set of, this is what a school social worker can do, or does, or is supposed to do.”

DISCUSSION

In this study, interviews with SSWs were used to understand their role and practice in the context of education censorship. The severity of education censorship varied by the presence of state policies enacted, geographic variations (i.e., state, school type), and school factors (e.g., administrative support, role orientation, caseload). Practitioners discussed advocacy, resistance, and practice barriers shaped by isolated roles, preservice training limitations (e.g., micro focus), lack of relevant continuing education options, and increased aspects of fear (e.g., job security) related to censorship. As outlined in the findings and reflected in Table 1, censorship produced rippling effects on student well-being and school social work practice. With the negative impact of censorship on student well-being, it appears that all *focus areas* corresponding to the National Model were affected. Put another way, research has illuminated how the promotion of student well-being may develop positive academic outcomes (Kaya & Erdem, 2021), shape a healthy school climate and culture (Bradley et al., 2018), promote growth through social and emotional development (Taylor et al., 2017), and improve mental health (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). By mapping education censorship to the National Model, we can see where SSWs may need additional support, how practice is affected, and document where inequities are most prevalent and where rectification is needed.

Nearly all participants spoke to the impact of censorship on school social work practice, which was intricately related to preexisting role challenges and youth mental health. Participants spoke about the removal of therapy sessions, workshops, and efforts to dismantle preventative frameworks (e.g., SEL). Censorship affected youth well-being through policy changes and fear, which directly altered school social work practice. Preexisting challenges of school social work practice, including high caseloads, multischool employment, role ambiguity, high student need, and limited ability to attend to macro work, policy, and advocacy were inextricably tied to the ramifications of education censorship.

The school-based impact of censorship may be amplified due to the limitations and orientations of preservice training, current practice inequities, and competing demands (e.g., crises; pandemic). Collectively, there is a complex interplay between (a) the effects of censorship; (b) the preexisting barriers to equitable practice; and (c) the ongoing challenges for advocacy, resistance, and youth-centered support. To strategize on building reinvigorated support for youth, several recommendations are delineated.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications of censorship alongside preexisting role challenges underscore the need for recommendations to build support for SSWs. Table 2 orients the National Model to the qualitative analytical findings to outline several recommendations. In the school, the first recommendation is to enhance the promotion of healing-centered frameworks to combat the effects of censorship. For example, equity-driven, prevention-oriented, and inclusive-minded support for youth can aid SSWs in their ability to provide schoolwide mental health support and relationship-rich and youth-centric mechanisms of empowerment that are rooted in a structural framework necessary to attend to inequities. To build youth-centered support, enhanced connections are needed between the home, school, and community, alongside renewed efforts for school-based collaboration of professionals. Therefore, simple acts of inclusion can entail open office hours for students to drop in and ask questions and creating space to have these discussions. To do this, we can focus on our ethical and equity orientations rather than the structurally imposed social and political divisions. Part of this work entails modeling healthy conversations and building relationships so that critical conversations and conflict are recognized as necessary for healthy youth development (Ginwright, 2022). Concurrently, we must focus on *policy* rather than *politics*—although these efforts must be organizationally supported through advocacy, leadership, and attention to inequities.

From a professional standpoint, one recommendation is aimed at improving the viability of school social work. This includes organizational attention to advocacy and leadership to support practitioners, alongside the implementation of the National Model and enhanced efforts to define roles, reduce ambiguity, and build consistency in educational

Table 2: Qualitative Analysis and Practice Recommendations

Qualitative Analysis			
Theme	Exemplar Quote	National Model Focus Area	Practice Recommendation
Impact of censorship	“The student was on hormone [treatment] and they came in sobbing, like scream-crying, full-on panic attack, just had gotten the news that this bill was proposed and they thought they were going to have to go off hormones and basically were, like, our representatives want me dead?” —Olivia	Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing-centered frameworks • Inclusive support • Prevention-oriented • Equity-driven
	“The censorship policies start intertwining with people’s morals and beliefs, and if the superintendent, administrators, school boards are all on board, then we’re scared because even if you think it’s in the best interest of the student, it definitely impacts your practice.” —Chloe	School climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing-centered frameworks • Inclusive support • School-based collaboration • Role definition
	“Individual therapy, psychoeducation groups, clinical groups, workshops have all been cut.” —Amelia	Student and school well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional advocacy • Policy and advocacy • Organizational leadership
Preexisting challenges	“I was so driven by my caseload that I really had a hard time doing any type of macro systems.” —Rurna	Student and school well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional advocacy • Policy and advocacy • Education and training • Role definition
	“Rural areas don’t really have a school social worker.” —Olivia	Student and school well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional advocacy • Role definition
Advocacy	“Advocate for the events that do take place in the communities.” —Mala	Student and school well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing-centered frameworks • Inclusive support
<i>Barriers to advocacy</i>	“It’s harder to do our jobs. It’s not wrong to support them, but as we progress in our profession, we will have pushback because we are the boots on the ground.” —Judy	School climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional advocacy • Policy and advocacy

preparation and training. An extension of this is to enhance professional organizational connections (e.g., National Association of Social Workers, SSWAA, Council on Social Work Education) to build on each other’s support for the field. We must move beyond a myopic focus on one type of SSW and toward rethinking our roles amid domains such as generalist, special education, micro, and macro practitioners. Efforts to improve role clarity can also help to convey the value to administrators; build connections across the home, school, and community; articulate evidence of effectiveness; and build practitioner self-efficacy. Viability entails educating and training SSWs to be leaders and stewards of equity promotion to build preventive frameworks

while enhancing advocacy and policy efforts. Professional viability must also be supported through preservice training and continuing education that focuses on guidance for dealing with controversial topics and enhancing communication in the home, school, and community. In addition, policy support for SSWs is needed, with professional advocacy efforts necessary to provide role clarity and stepwise action for a given topic such as censorship.

On a scholarly level, a final recommendation should be geared around understanding network influences and the mechanisms of education censorship. Efforts to procure healing-centered frameworks in schools and improve the viability of the field must begin with knowledge and awareness

regarding the ongoing trends of censorship and the unique and varied impact in specific geographic regions. As the National Model provides an opportunity for role solidification and equitable service provision, we must be equally attentive to the macro-level constraints on practice, such as censorship (Mitchell et al., 2024). We must do more to understand how these movements are shaped, including the networks involved (e.g., actors, organizations), how the media play a major supportive role, and the related impact on school boards and schools. Network influences devise a policy agenda, utilizing model legislation shaped by lobbyists and elite organizational structures, which is then spread across U.S. states and proposed and enacted by legislatures (Joyce, 2022). Enacted policies represent only a fragment of the impact—with discourse playing a major if not equally forceful role in shaping political divides and social contention (Mitchell, 2024). When we are divided socially or politically, the opportunities to sustain the neoliberal agenda are amplified, with corporations benefiting from privatization and for-profit educational “solutions” (Francisco & Burris, 2023). Elite networks thrive in the implementation of oppressive policies through disinformation and misinformation. Two strategies to combat these tactics include (1) building research-to-practice partnerships to convey the value and importance of progressive reform and (2) enhancing the connections between the home and school environments to reduce ambiguity and improve relationships.

Conclusion

Through several years of oppressive legislation, the policy and discursive effects were prevalent in schools, impacting school social work practice and youth well-being. Through fear and uncertainty, the impact encompassed geographical regions even without state-level censorship policies. Practitioners were challenged by preexisting role orientations, youth mental health needs, underemployment, role ambiguity, and varied administrative guidance. To boost inclusive frameworks and youth-centered support, we must build coalitions, strategize on reform, incorporate practitioner wisdom, and move forward in unity to promote justice-oriented practice. As the attacks of education censorship affect schools, youth, and the social work profession, we can support school social work practitioners through a solidified practice model that articulates roles, offers clarity for

practice orientation, provides knowledge for administrators in their guidance and hiring, and aligns educational preparation with a contemporary focus. The National Model can be used as an instrument to help solidify the equitable practice of SSWs, reduce ambiguity, and improve role delineation as aligned to school system needs. **CS**

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