



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

State Superintendent Candidates' Responses to WSSWA

Sheila Briggs

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

School Social Workers play an integral role in the success of our schools by bringing unique knowledge and skills to the student services team. School Social Workers allow schools to have trained mental health professionals onsite who can assist with mental health concerns, behavioral concerns, positive behavioral support, academic, and classroom support, consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators as well as provide individual and group counseling/therapy. As the needs of our kids and families continue to grow, school social workers are more and more essential to our schools. And while our social workers are often spread incredibly thin, they are also most effective in supporting our children and families in a proactive way, like helping children understand and cope with their feelings, helping to connect a family to resources, and being a caring adult that creates a sense of belonging for kids in a school. School social workers are almost always the critical link between the school and the family and often are the difference maker in the success of a struggling child.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

I will fight for the resources we need to address the growing mental health crisis in our schools. We can continue making significant investments by hiring School Social Workers who will help meet the needs of our students. Kids need access to comprehensive mental health support to ensure they are healthy and ready to learn. The number of students dealing with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues has skyrocketed in recent years. Nearly 60% of our high school students reported a significant mental health need in 2019, and the long-term trends of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts have been heading in the wrong direction for the last few years. While social workers can be most effective in proactively supporting kids and families, the ratios in our schools and districts is often so high that they become crisis responders. And while they are an important part of any school's crisis response team, with proper funding and reasonable ratios, it would be more effective to provide support that works to reduce crisis situations.

3. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

Strong licensing standards are important to ensure our students have access to highly qualified social workers. School social work is actually a more specialized area within the larger field of social work. Working with children in a school setting is unique, and we need to make sure our school social workers are adequately trained and licensed to do this



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

important work. It is imperative that School Social Workers live the mission of school they serve, while supporting student learning, educational equity and social justice for every student by reducing or eliminating the social, economic, and environmental barriers that may interfere with a student's ability to maximally benefit from his/her education. They must also have an understanding of human development and behavior and the application of theoretical frameworks to understand the interaction among individuals and between individuals and families, groups, organizations, and communities. While shortages of qualified and licensed school social workers is a very real concern, we have to find innovative ways to support the training and licensure to ensure every school has access to a licensed school social worker.

Joe Fenrick

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

As a current teacher at Fond du Lac High School I see the day to day functions of a school and how integrated our School Social Workers are to the success of our students. Each and every day they meet with some of our students who are hard to reach and make profound impacts in the students' lives. School Social Workers are vital to our schools and we need more dedicated individuals in every school.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

Absolutely! On the Fond du Lac County Board of Supervisors I am the Chairman of the Social Service and Human Service Committees. With my expertise in education I helped form a partnership with our schools to have School Social Workers provide us updates on events, and how Fond du Lac County can better support our School Social Workers. As a result from these meetings, as Chair, I helped increase funding and services to our schools for School Social Workers and Social Workers throughout the county. This increase of funding led to additional positions and training. As State Superintendent I will encourage every county to form partnerships with their schools to better support School Social Workers.

3. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

The pandemic has exasperated the need for highly qualified School Social Workers that was already prevalent before. We need more School Social Workers in every building in every school district. We need to maintain the strong licensing standards to ensure a highly educated staff so schools can provide excellent care for our students.



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

Troy Gunderson

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

School Social Workers play a critical role in their ability to impact both the child and their family by connecting school services with outside agencies. As a member of the leadership team School Social Workers play the important role of reminding the team that the social and emotional development of children is a critical precursor for any and all student achievement. Schools must serve the soul of a child before reaching their mind.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

Yes, an expanded commitment to School Social Work is part of the “Students Ready to Learn” part of my campaign platform. I firmly believe we must do more to support young families to ensure all children are ready to learn when they arrive at school. This includes full day programming for four-year-old children and additional services for all three-year-old children. I also recommend creating ways for school districts to offer community leadership in the area of daycare. I support additional resources for School Social Workers in order to better serve children and their families. School Social Workers play an important role in coordinating available county resources. The areas in our state doing the best work in service to our children are those where barriers to cooperation between agencies and non-profit groups have been removed. Examples include the mental health clinic in Ashland High School which collaborates with the local hospital, Ashland County, and the Bad River Tribe to serve children while attending school, and the many non-profit groups working with the Sheboygan School District to create after school programs for all children. School Social Workers play a critical role in helping to make my vision of “Students Ready to Learn” a reality for all kids.

3. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

Yes, I support strong licensing standards for School Social Workers to ensure our students and families are served by knowledgeable professionals. I will work with our institutions of higher education to create expanded pathways to degree and certification. The pandemic revealed the power of distance learning. We must create ways for folks in rural Wisconsin to continue their education and gain licensure with more independent, flexible, and inexpensive options. I also support expanding opportunities for shared services in our rural areas. Allowing school districts and county agencies to work together to provide School Social Worker services will improve access and reduce cost.



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

Dr. Shandolyon Hendricks-Williams

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

Social workers are integral in ensuring academic success for students as well as critical supports for families. Initially, when deciding to enter the field of education, I considered serving as a social worker. I graduated with my associate degree in human Services from Milwaukee Area Technical College and was inducted as a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. I earned my bachelor degree in human services from Springfield College and earned the distinction as valedictorian, a member of the Dean's List and Cum Laude. Initially, I was going to pursue a master's degree in social work but opted out to become a special education teacher. As the parent of a child with multiple, severe disabilities, I know first hand the critical role that social workers play in stabilizing families as well as supporting and honoring home based parental involvement. When my son was diagnosed with left hemiparesis (cerebral palsy), it was a social worker that visited our home weekly to assist me with dealing with the emotional and mental stress associated with being told that my son will not perform as other students. It was a social worker that described to me the grieving process that I would experience while coming to terms with the fact that my son wouldn't play sports and interact with his peers in an age appropriate manner. It was a social worker that connected us with a Birth to 3 program and other valuable community-based resources. I still remember the social worker who was of most assistance to me when I struggled with my son's transition to middle school. She and I later completed the doctorate program at National Louis University together. She as well as other social workers helped me move along the trajectory towards continuous improvement, leading me to become the epitome of parental involvement at its highest level as I seek office as the next State Superintendent.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

Yes. My bill of Rights for Wisconsin Students calls for the following:

- Each student shall receive social worker services, as needed, to ensure the student's academic success.
- Each student shall receive related services (speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, transportation, nurse, social work, etc), as needed, to ensure the student's success on achieving IEP goals and objectives.

Under my leadership every school will have a Social Worker, not only because of my experience but also because our students and families need this valuable service as we transition to post COVID stability.

3. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

Robust licensing standards and constant evaluation are key to ensuring success for all members of an education community—including educators, administrators, parents, mentors, and social workers. I will continue to engage the Teacher Education, Professional Development and Licensing (TEPDL) team in courageous conversation on how to ensure that we maintain strong licensing standards in our Educator Preparation Programs and balance the need to ensure that we maintaining a robust pool of highly qualified social workers to serve our students and families in Wisconsin's schools.



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

Deborah Kerr

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

I have had the pleasure of working with wonderful School Social Workers in my career. I'll never forget the work of my team in dealing with the early challenges of COVID. I was very proud, especially of my SSWs.

In my experience, School Social Workers have unique knowledge and skills to contribute to schools. As mental health professionals with extensive, Master's-Level training, you bring a great deal of expertise to situations involving student behavior and adjustment, schoolwide PBIS, academic challenges, and more. Within Student Services teams, School Social Workers are often the ones who can connect all the dots, where home, school, and community collaboration are central to student performance.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

Absolutely! I was so pleased to see our state legislature provide funding in prior budgets for expanded School Social Work positions focused on student mental health. I would work to continue that expansion, and to ensure that training programs have the staff and resources necessary to prepare new professionals for the field.

2. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

Yes. While we want to encourage entry into the profession, it should never come at the expense of high standards for professional training and recertification. DPI's role should be to ensure that schools can be well-staffed with highly skilled and trained professionals in all areas of expertise.



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

Steve Krull, PhD

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

I've been very fortunate to have worked with phenomenal School Social Workers in my time as an educator. SSW are a very important part of the team and we even spent additional funds to expand services at Garland (the school I run).

The role of the SSW is very extensive. Though we do respond to concerns very well, we make an active effort to be proactive. We keep our ear to the ground and are very aware of what is going on with our kiddos so we can ensure they have the support they need to be successful.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

Yes, we need more School Social Workers. This is especially true after the pandemic. To truly expand SSW's across districts, we must address our funding system. There are so many inequities in funding that prevent robust programming across the state.

3. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

I believe that initial licensing should prepare college students to be ready for the challenges facing our SSW's. We would extend training so that SSW's can meet the individual needs of every child.



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

Dr. Jill Underly

1. What do you see as the role of School Social Workers in a district and in the overall Student Services Team?

I believe that School Social Workers play a crucial role on our Student Services Teams and in the districts they serve. School Social Workers aid students and families in issues such as student engagement, truancy, mental health, IEP teams, and connecting them to resources in the community. School Social Workers also support school psychologists, guidance counselors, building principals, and our educators in helping provide critical services that support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of our students and their families, especially in times of need.

2. Do you support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to school districts across the state?

I believe there's a severe shortage of professionals in our schools that support the emotional wellbeing of our students. As part of my plan to provide direct funding to districts and schools to fix this shortage, I absolutely support efforts to provide more School Social Workers to help accomplish this goal and provide the services and care our students and their families need.

3. Further, do you support maintaining strong licensing standards for School Social Workers in order to ensure students and families effectively receive the services they desperately need?

I absolutely believe we need to maintain strong licensing standards for School Social Workers, as they provide such an important, and at times sensitive, service to our schools and students.

While maintaining very strong standards, I would also work to identify roadblocks in the licensing and recruitment processes that may create unnecessary burdens to professionals looking to enter this critical profession. There is a significant shortage of school social workers in Wisconsin and I like what other states are doing, such as Minnesota, where they are able to license LSWs, LGSWs, LISWs, and LICSWs, under the supervision of MSWs to serve children and families in our school districts. Advocating for a tiered licensing system for school social workers would get these much needed professionals into our rural and urban schools, which are disproportionately experiencing this shortage. I am also in favor of expanding our graduate programs in School Social Work to UW System schools located in the western part of Wisconsin, in Platteville, LaCrosse, and Stout.