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SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK: A CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Kutztown University | Millersville University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Social Work

By Nikki M Snyder

May 2020

ABSTRACT

School social workers, although typically underutilized, provide extremely valuable services to school-aged children and their families, entire school districts, and communities. The purpose of this research was to study the level of compliance by MSW programs offering School Social Work with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, identify curricular gaps, and discover curricular areas implemented in these programs that are outside the NASW (2012) standards. The researcher asked the following questions (1) What is the level of compliance with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice by social work programs offering school social work curricula? (2) What are commonly found curricular gaps regarding the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice in the school social work curricula? (3) What are commonly found curricular concepts in school social work curricula that are not included in the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice? The methodology of the current study included a content analysis of the curriculum of MSW programs offering school social work certification/licensure. The sample included 57 programs across the nation, within states that honor school social work certification/licensure. The study analyzed four categories of each curriculum: 1) Master of Social Work program handbooks, 2) available information on the individual program webpages, 3) course syllabi, and 4) all documents combined. The following themes were identified within the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, that occurred in over 60% of the curricula: social justice, ethics and values, qualifications, assessment, intervention, and interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration. The similarities between the most commonly referenced NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the professional core

CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

values of social work as well as the planned change process were explored. The most frequently occurring additional commonalities within the curricula, included the review of school social work roles, school social work policy and law, as well as school social worker involvement with special education accommodations. The research recommends revisions to the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice to better reflect the current roles of school social workers as well as recommendations for modifications to current school social work curricula.

Keywords: school social work, social work curricula, school social work certification

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CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	9
Statement of Purpose.....	10
Research Questions.....	10
Overview of the Methodology.....	10
Rationale and Significance.....	11
Role of the Researcher.....	14
Definition of Key Terminology.....	14
Organization of the Dissertation.....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	20
Introduction.....	20
Brief History of School Social Work.....	20
Critical Milestones.....	23
<i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</i>	24
<i>Education for All Handicapped Children Act</i>	25
<i>No Child Left Behind Act</i>	26
<i>Every Student Succeeds Act</i>	26
Current Roles.....	27
Social Work Education.....	28
Conceptual Framework.....	30
Summary.....	32

Chapter 3: Methodology.....	33
Introduction.....	33
Rationale for Research Approach.....	33
Research Setting/Context.....	34
Research Sample and Data Source.....	35
Data Collection Methods.....	36
Data Analysis Methods.....	37
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	39
Limitation and Delimitations.....	39
Summary.....	40
Chapter 4: Findings.....	42
Introduction.....	42
Demographics.....	42
Curriculum.....	46
<i>Program Handbooks</i>	46
<i>Available Information from Webpage</i>	48
<i>Course Syllabi</i>	50
<i>Combined Documents</i>	52
Summary.....	54
Chapter 5: Analysis and Synthesis.....	56
Introduction.....	56
Discussion.....	56
<i>NASW Standard Themes Within Curricula</i>	57

Social Work Core Values.....	57
Planned Change Process.....	57
<i>Additional Commonalities within Curricula.....</i>	61
<i>Gaps in Curricula.....</i>	63
Professional Development.....	63
Workload Management.....	64
Advocacy.....	65
Curriculum Detail Availability for Prospective Students.....	65
Limitations.....	66
Summary.....	67
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	69
Introduction.....	69
Conclusions.....	69
<i>Research Question Review.....</i>	69
Implications for Social Work Practice.....	70
<i>Recommended Modifications to the NASW Standards for School Social Work Practice.....</i>	70
<i>Recommended Modifications for Current Curricula.....</i>	71
<i>Recommendations for Future Research.....</i>	72
Summary.....	73
References.....	74
Appendix.....	80

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: School Social Work Association of America: Services Provided by School Social Workers.....	4
Table 2: National Association of Social Workers: Standards for Social Work Practice.....	6
Table 3: Education Policy and Law Timeline.....	24
Table 4: School Social Work Programs by State.....	43
Table 5: School Social Work Programs by Region.....	43
Table 6: Terminology for School Social Work Certification/Licensure.....	44
Table 7: Required MSW Credit Hours.....	45
Table 8: Field Hour Requirement Distribution.....	46
Table 9: NASW Standards Within Program Handbooks.....	47
Table 10: Additional Commonalities within Program Handbooks.....	48
Table 11: NASW Standards Within Available Information on Webpage.....	49
Table 12: Additional Commonalities Within Available Information on Webpages.....	50
Table 13: NASW Standards Within Course Syllabi.....	51
Table 14: Additional Commonalities Within Course Syllabi.....	52
Table 15: NASW Practice Standards Within Combined Documents.....	53
Table 16: Additional Commonalities Within Combined Documents.....	54

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

First developed as an independent profession over 100 years ago, the field of social work has drastically morphed into its current, remarkable status. With the initial intention of assisting immigrants and other vulnerable persons to gain the skills necessary to escape a detrimental cycle of economic and social poverty, the profession was pioneered by passionate leaders, who believed in the importance of human relationships, the dignity and worth of all people, and social justice (National Association of Social Workers, 2017; Pierson, 2012). With the establishment of a professional code of ethics in 1960, which provides social workers with a standard for defining the values and principles that guide the conduct of all social work professionals, a functioning definition of social work has been established (NASW, 2017).

The profession of social work strives to meet the basic needs of all people, specifically those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (NASW, 2017). With a strong commitment to social justice, social workers are a unique group of professionals who work to enhance the quality of life of individuals, families, groups, and communities, to recognize their greatest potential in a local and global environment that is socially just and sustainable (Gasker, 2019; NASW, 2017).

Today, social workers can be found providing support to individuals, groups, and entire communities by practicing professional social work in nearly every sector. Social work professionals can be found providing services within a variety of settings: realm of health care, such as hospitals and clinics, the educational system, mental health clinics and facilities, governmental agencies, the criminal justice system, every branch of the military, and a large variety of additional clinical agencies within both the private and public sector. Additionally, social workers provide services for individuals while operating in a plethora of unique roles:

advocate, community planner, case manager, educator, facilitator, administrator, organizational manager, and many others (NASW, 2017). With several levels of educational opportunities, including associates, bachelors, masters, doctorate degrees, and Ph. D. as well as multiple levels of professional and clinical licensure, this group of highly educated and experienced professionals is truly diverse.

A professional social worker, by both ethical standard and professional degree, may be required to work under various titles such as care coordinator, counselor, social services, peer support specialist, therapist, aide worker, support staff, crisis interventionist, and/or case manager. With job requirements and professional expectations as diverse as the titles they work under, the societal confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of the social work profession has developed (Payne, 2007; Sherman, 2016). Depending on the title and location of services, social workers may be expected to perform a wide variety of tasks and services, both within and beyond the scope of social work practice standards. These potentially drastic professional standard variations continue to contribute to the misunderstanding and underutilization of social workers in their respective settings (Kelly et al., 2015; Payne, 2007).

This role ambiguity has been experienced by social workers across nearly every service population, although the impact of this conflict can be best understood when assessing social workers employed within the realm of education. As defined by the National Association of Social Workers (2012), school social workers “seek to ensure equitable education opportunities; ensure that students are mentally, physically, and emotionally present in the classroom; and promote respect and dignity for all students” (p.1). These professionals are serving critical roles as school counselors, home and school visitors, special service providers, peer mediators, and student advocates; however, social workers employed within schools are often marginalized

from the internal operations of the educational system and often lack full professional respect from their host setting (Sherman, 2016; Teasley et al., 2012). Ambiguity of professional titles, inconsistent workplace expectations, and varying perceptions of social work interventions within the workforce have drastically impacted not only the utilization of the social work profession but also created the unique challenge of effectively educating future school social workers within Master of Social Work Programs (Kelly et al., 2015).

In an ever-changing world, approximately one in six school aged-children (2-8 years old) have a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019) and roughly 7.0 million students (ages 3-21) received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, with 34% of those students having specific learning disabilities, according to the 2017 survey (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Most frequently, these concerns are first identified within classroom settings, resulting in schools becoming the primary location for mental health treatment for affected youth (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Hennessy & Green-Hennessy, 2000; Hoagwood et al., 2005; McManama O'Brien et al., 2011). Due to the dynamic needs of these children, as well as the societal implications regarding the overall functioning of the school system, there is a drastic need for well educated, culturally competent, easily accessible school social workers, with clearly defined roles and professional expectations, as well as supportive certification legislation.

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) is a national organization with a distinct vision for the subspecialty of school social work. Founded in 1994 in Edwardsville, Illinois, SSWAA strives to empower school social workers through the promotion of the subspecialty and is dedicated to the creation of a society in which all school social workers are valued, integral members of educational care teams (School Social Work Association of

America, 2012). This organization has established a functional definition of school social work, which highlights the profession's desire to enhance the social and emotional growth, as well as academic outcomes of all students. There are five service categories in which the function of school social workers can be better understood: (1) services to school personnel, (2) services to students, (3) services to parents/families, (4) services to school districts, and (5) school-community liaison (SSWAA, 2012). As detailed in Table 1, school social workers provide valuable services, specific to the profession of social work, across these service populations.

Table 1
SSWAA: Services Provided by School Social Workers

Service Type:	Service Description
Services to School Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing students with mental health concerns Developing staff in-service training programs Assisting teachers with classroom management
Services to Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing crisis intervention Developing intervention strategies to increase academic success Help conflict resolution and anger management Helping children develop social-emotional skills
Services to Parents/Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview the family to assess problems affecting the child's education Work with parents to facilitate support in their children's school adjustment Alleviate family stress for the child to function more effectively in school
Services to District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop alternative programs for dropouts, truants, delinquents, etc. Identify and report child abuse and neglect Providing prevention programs for school violence, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy Helping districts assess school climate and develop school safety plans
School/Community Liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain and coordinate community resources to meet students' needs Helping school districts receive adequate support from social and mental health agencies Coordinate systems of care to provide wrap-around services

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2012) has also published a document identifying the standards for school social work services, as an effort to increase the validity of the practice. This document highlights the evolution school social work has experienced over the past hundred years and describes the current principles and standards that shape the profession. The three principles and 11 standards for school social work services, as outlined by NASW (2012) can be seen in Table 2. These standards not only identify the primary roles associated with school social workers, but also address the theoretical framework that provides a foundation for the subspecialty: Ecological Systems Theory.

Table 2

NASW Standards for Social Work Practice

Principles/Standards	Practice Actions
Principle 1: Education and School Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on increased accountability • Advocate for recourse • Ensure the school is meeting expectations (federal/state/local) • Promote equal educational opportunities • Emphasize on early intervention
Principle 2: Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote equal educational opportunities • Collaborate with students/families/communities/school employees • Identify resources • Utilize Ecological Systems Theory
Principle 3: Multitier Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevention programs - Data-informed decisions • Tier 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small groups - Short-term interventions - Conflict resolution - Social skills - Mental health support • Tier 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term interventions - Intensive individualized strategies - Community agency connection
Standard 1: Ethics and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the utilization of the NASW Code of Ethics
Standard 2: Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandated on state level
Standard 3: Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments of students/families/systems • Removal of barriers to learning • Utilization of the Ecological Systems Theory
Standard 4: Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization of Evidence-Informed Practices
Standard 5: Decision Making and Practice Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in and conduct research • Use data to guide service
Standard 6: Record Keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain accurate data

Standard 7: Workload Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize a multitier framework
Standard 8: Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in continuing education
Standard 9: Cultural Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain cultural competency
Standard 10: Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create positive school climate • Work collaboratively with multiple systems
Standard 11: Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for equal access to education

Although the School Social Work Association of America and the National Association of Social Workers have developed functional roles and responsibilities of school social workers as well as highlighted the major positive impact their services can provide to students, families, and school systems, these professionals are often not considered or protected as school employees. Throughout many states across the nation, professional social workers are providing services within a school host setting, although their positions do not correspond with an education specialist certification category (NASW, 2012). This level of certification legitimizes the role social workers hold within the school setting, and validates social workers' contribution to the overall educational, emotional, and social wellbeing of school-aged children. Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, social workers operating in the host setting of schools, are not considered legitimate members of the educational system, such as their counterparts, and therefore are not entitled to the same professional security. School social work certification is critical to ensure educational equality, clearly established professional standards, and professional accountability for social workers providing services within the school settings (Pennsylvania General Assembly, 2019).

Several state systems across the country do have specific specialist certification for school social workers, established by the Department of Education; however, the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does not have such certification (Allen-Meares, 2006; Sabatino et al., 2011; Teasley et al., 2012). The state of Indiana, for example, requires social workers who wish to practice as a school social worker to hold a Master's degree in social work, have a social work license through the Indiana Professional Licensing Agency, and also obtain a Student Service License from the Indiana Department of Education (Indiana Department of Education, 2020). Providing this additional level of licensure/certification, schools can ensure social workers understand school policies, programs, and practices, to adequately meet the needs of students and families, as well as ensure employment security for school social workers (Indiana Department of Education, 2020).

Although the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does not currently provide school social work certification/licensure, there have been efforts made by social work advocates to support legislative changes. For example, House Bill 390, which was introduced to The General Assembly of Pennsylvania in February of 2019 and referred to The House Education Committee, attempted to create a category of school social worker in the Pennsylvania School Code as well as create a legitimate certification for school social workers (Pennsylvania General Assembly, 2019). Additional efforts to increase the number of highly qualified social workers within schools has been established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as well as Governor Tom Wolf, through "Reach Out PA: Your Mental Health Matters" initiatives (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2020). Although this initiative does not specifically address school social work certification/licensure, it acknowledges the vital mental health services school social workers provide to students, families, and communities.

Problem Statement

Although the School Social Work Association of America and the National Association of Social Workers have developed functional roles and responsibilities of school social workers as well as highlighted the major positive impact their services can provide, these professionals are often not considered or protected as school employees. Throughout many states across the nation, professional social workers are providing services within a school host setting, although their positions do not correspond with an education specialist certification category (NASW, 2012). This level of certification legitimizes the role social workers hold within the school setting and validates social workers' contribution to the overall educational, emotional, and social wellbeing of school-aged children. With the dynamic needs of children ever present within the school setting, as well as the societal implications regarding the overall functioning of the school system, there is a drastic need for well educated, culturally competent, easily accessible school social workers, with clearly defined roles and professional expectations, as well as supportive certification legislation.

There currently seems to be a lack of exposure and preparation for students regarding the practice of school social work, specifically the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice as well as the SSWAA's list of Services Provided by School Social Workers (2012). Research also suggests there is a lack of knowledge of this aspect of the profession within the varied curricula offered by the Master of Social Work programs (Teasley et al., 2012). Very little research currently exists addressing the variations in social work curricula, specifically regarding the list and standards provided by NASW and SSWAA. At this time there is no formal consistency of the education, credentialing, practice, or evaluation of school social workers (Kelly et al., 2015).

It is critical to thoroughly assess and unify the curricula associated with school social work and how it is impacted by state-specific legislation and certification, to appropriately convey the value of school social work, decrease the misunderstanding contributed to role ambiguity, and enhance the foundation of knowledge provided to these students. This research explores the school social work curricula of colleges and universities within states with preexisting certification/licensure for school social workers.

Statement of Purpose

The overall purpose of this research was to study the level of compliance by MSW programs offering School Social Work with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, identify curricular gaps, and discover curricular areas implemented in these programs that are outside the NASW (2012) standards.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the level of compliance with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice by social work programs offering school social work curricula?
- 2) What are commonly found curricular gaps regarding the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice in the school social work curricula?
- 3) What are commonly found curricular concepts in school social work curricula that are not included in the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice?

Overview of Methodology

The methodology of the current study included a content analysis of the curriculum of MSW programs offering school social work certification/licensure. The sample included 57

programs across the nation, within states that honor school social work certification/licensure.

The study analyzed four categories of each curriculum: 1) Master of Social Work program handbooks, 2) available information on the individual program webpages, 3) course syllabi, and 4) all documents combined. Inspired by researchers Harris and Boddy (2017), this methodology included the process of collecting material, multi-stage coding and analyzing. Four stages of data analysis occurred, reviewing program-specific demographic information, assessing for the presence of NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice within the curriculum, assessing for the presence of any additional commonalities within the curriculum, and finally a manually NVivo Pro 12 query and SPSS analysis.

Rationale and Significance

Social work professionals are able to operate in a vast number of settings, due to their dynamic and encompassing education. These individuals are often employed under many different names and titles, with inconsistent professional expectations and role ambiguity. Depending on the title and location of services, social workers may be expected to perform a wide variety of tasks and services, both within and beyond the scope of social work practice standards. These potentially drastic professional standard variations significantly contribute to the misunderstanding of the social work profession (Kelly et al., 2015; Payne, 2007).

School social workers, although typically underutilized, provide extremely valuable services to school-aged children and their families, entire school districts, and communities. Research shows that districts that utilize the services provided by school social workers have higher rates of high school completion than districts that do not employ social workers (Alvarez et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2015). Not only are more students within these districts completing high school, but they are demonstrating greater educational outcomes such as receiving all-around higher standardized test scores (Alvarez et al., 2013).

Although it has been demonstrated that school social workers play a major role within the school setting, the utilization of services varies drastically as well as the presence of school social workers within school districts. Role ambiguity within the school setting, as well as the inconsistent curriculum of school social work programs, has contributed to the misunderstanding and underutilization of school social workers (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). Due to the variation of tasks school social workers are expected to perform under the title of school social workers, these professionals have been found to be at a disadvantage within their host setting, and often lack the respect of non-social work professionals, as their positions do not correspond with an education specialist certification category (NASW, 2012; Teasley et al., 2012). School social workers are frequently considered less than their educational counterparts, as it is perceived that social work interventions are often focused on behavioral objectives, rather than academic. Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, social workers operating in the host setting of schools, are not considered legitimate members of the educational system, such as their counterparts i.e. school counselors, home and school visitors, and visiting teachers, and therefore are not entitled to the same professional security such as tenure potential. School social work certification/licensure is critical to ensure educational equality, clearly established professional standards, universal curriculum and professional accountability for social workers providing services within the school settings (Pennsylvania General Assembly, 2019).

Not considered as professional employees, social workers' contribution to enhancing a student's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic performance is often overlooked. This lack of clarity among the profession of school social workers likely contributes to the misunderstanding and underutilization of services within the school settings and has resulted in school social workers being less visible within the leadership of the school (Kelly et al., 2015).

As an important subspecialty of the profession, the ambiguous titles and roles of school social workers, inconsistencies in program curricula, and lack of legitimate certification/licensure diminishes the positive outcomes and contributions social workers bring to the school setting.

An additional barrier to the implementation of effective school social work is the lack of knowledge of this aspect of the profession within the varied curricula offered by the Master of Social Work programs (Teasley et al., 2012). There currently seems to be a lack of exposure and preparation for students regarding the practice of school social work, specifically the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice as well as the SSWAA's list of Services Provided by School Social Workers (2012). Very little research currently exists addressing the variations in social work curriculum, specifically regarding the list and standards provided by NASW and SSWAA. Overcoming the role ambiguity of school social workers is critical for future social workers, to produce qualified and competent school social workers. At this time there is no formal consistency of the education, credentialing, practice or evaluation of school social workers (Kelly et al., 2015).

Although there is a drastic underutilization of school social workers, the positive outcomes associated with this subspecialty are ever present. As the need for school social workers continues to increase, due to the projected enrollment increase of school-aged children, it is important for future social workers to understand the history of school social work and the variations in the services they provide within the school setting (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Universities providing social work programs must be aware of these needs, as well as the NASW (2012) Standards for School and the SSWAA's list of Services Provided by School Social Workers (2012) and strive to effectively educate social work students on this subspecialty of the profession. It is critical to thoroughly assess and unify the curriculum

associated with school social work and how it is impacted by state-specific legislation and certification, to appropriately convey the value of school social work, decrease the misunderstanding contributed to role ambiguity, and enhance the foundation of knowledge provided to these students.

Currently, there is very little research surrounding the impact professional marginalization of school social workers and the lack of certification/licensure for school social workers have on social work education and curriculum. Students enrolled in schools of social work often appear to be undereducated on the demands of the landscape of school social work and how the continuous shifts of the educational setting relate to the ambiguous roles of school social workers (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). This research will explore the social work curriculum of colleges and universities within states with preexisting certification/licensure for school social workers.

Role of the Researcher

A single researcher, with guidance and support of a dissertation chair and committee, planned and conducted every aspect of the research. The same researcher conducted the search for supporting literature regarding the topic of school social work and curriculum analysis, engaged in the data collection process, and conducted the data analysis. As a current professional associate on the coordinating committee for the Center for the Study of School Social Work at Kutztown University, the researcher aligns with the mission of the center in preparing new school social workers, supporting existing school social workers, and assisting schools in recognizing the purpose and value of school social workers.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Definitions of key terminology frequently used within this dissertation have been provided for appropriate context and to ensure clarity:

Certification Legislation: See also *School Social Work Certification/Licensure*.

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE): Founded in 1952, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the national association representing social work education in the United States. Its members include over 750 accredited baccalaureate and master's degree social work programs, as well as individual social work educators, practitioners, and agencies dedicated to advancing quality social work education. Through its many initiatives, activities, and centers, CSWE supports quality social work education and provides opportunities for leadership and professional development, so that social workers play a central role in achieving the profession's goals of social and economic justice. CSWE's Commission on Accreditation is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States and its territories. More information on CSWE can be found by visiting www.cswe.org.

Course Syllabus: An outline of the subjects in a course of study or teaching.

Master of Social Work Program Guide (MSW Guide): A source for information on Master's in Social Work programs, social work licensure, career paths as a social worker, and more. It provides a directory of all the US universities that offer MSW programs and provides accreditation information as well as links to each of the program tracks offered by each school. More information on MSW Guide can be found by visiting www.mswguide.org.

Field Placement and Field Hour Requirements: In social work education, a field placement is a supervised internship at an organization that provides social services. This staple of social work education is required by all Master programs. Field hour requirements are established by college/university leadership and must be completed by students prior to degree completion.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW): Founded in 1955, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with more than 120,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies. More information on NASW can be found by visiting www.socialworkers.org.

Professional Employee: As defined by the Pennsylvania Statutes Title 24 P.S. Education: Section 11-1101. Definitions:

- (1) The term “professional employee” shall include those who are certificated as teachers, supervisors, supervising principals, principals, assistant principals, vice-principals, directors of vocational education, dental hygienists, visiting teachers, home and school visitors, school counselors, child nutrition program specialists, school librarians, school secretaries the selection of whom is on the basis of merit as determined by eligibility lists and school nurses.

Program Handbook: A collection of college or university-specific documents, policies, procedures, standards, program details, and recourses governing a degree program.

Program Webpage: The portion of a college/university’s webpage that is dedicated specifically to the Master of Social Work Program.

School Leadership: A category of school employees including; school board members, school administration, and school principal and vice-principal (when applicable).

School Social Work: A subspecialty of the profession, which “seeks to ensure equitable education opportunities; ensure that students are mentally, physically, and emotionally present in

the classroom; and promote respect and dignity for all students (National Association of Social Workers, 2012, p.1).

School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA): The School Social Work Association of America is a membership organization, empowering school social workers and promoting the profession of school social work. More information on SSWAA can be found by visiting www.sswaa.org.

School Social Work Certification/Licensure: Legislation that permits a professional social worker to provide social work services within a school setting. This legislative initiative typically establishes a category of *School Social Worker* to the state-specific school code. Requirements for obtaining this certification vary by state, although most commonly social workers must hold a Master of Social Work degree, have completed a field placement, or have employment history within a school setting and submitted a formal application. Frequently referred to throughout this dissertation as certification.

School Social Work Program: A Master of Social Work program, accredited by the Council on School Work Education, that offers the curriculum necessary to meet the requirements for state-specific school social work certification/licensure.

Special Education: As defined by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:
Regulations>>Part B>>Subpart A>>Section 300.39.

Special education.

(a) General:

(1) Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including—

(i) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in the hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and

(ii) Instruction in physical education.

(2) Special education includes each of the following, if the services otherwise meet the requirements of paragraph (a)(1) of this section—

(i) Speech-language pathology services, or any other related service, if the service is considered special education rather than a related service under the State standards;

(ii) Travel training; and

(iii) Vocational education.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation continues with an exploration of the existing literature surrounding the historical shifts of the school social work subspecialty, the current roles and responsibilities of school social workers, the theoretical framework, as it pertains to both the practice of school social work as well as the foundation for this research. The methodology of this dissertation, a content analysis of school social work curricula, is detailed in Chapter III, including the rationale

CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

for the research approach, data collection methods, data analysis methods, as well as limitations and delimitations. Critical findings are reviewed in Chapter IV, while the analysis and synthesis of these findings are thoroughly reviewed in Chapter V. This dissertation concludes with a review of the contributions this research makes to the field of social work education, as well as recommendations for future research opportunities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter highlights the review of literature, which provided context for both the history of school social work, as well as the current roles and conceptual framework of the subspecialty. The researcher utilized databases including EBSCO Discovery Service, Social Work Abstract Plus, and Google Scholar to gather appropriate literature. A brief history of school social work is included within this chapter with a strong focus on the educational policies and reforms that have impacted the profession, such as The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Education for All Handicapped Children Act, No Child Left Behind Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act.

The current roles of school social workers as well as a review of the educational requirements for school social workers is then reviewed. This chapter concludes with a review of the conceptual framework, ecological systems theory, and how it correlates with both the structure of this research and the social work profession.

Brief History of School Social Work

School social work has roots within three major cities, New York City, Boston, and Hartford, Connecticut, dating back to the early 1900s (Allen-Meares, 2006; Costin, 1969; Sherman, 2016; Sugrue, 2017). Typically operating outside of the school system, school social workers of this era worked to create an invaluable link between the home setting and school arena for students in need (Franklin & Allen-Meares, 1997; Sherman, 2016; Sugrue, 2017). Several major influences of this time included the passage of compulsory school attendance laws, the emerging knowledge of individual differences among children and their capacity to

learn, as well as the realization of the strategic place the school system occupied within the current and future lives of the children (Allen-Meares, 2006; Costin, 1969).

In response to the vast number of illiterate children immigrating to the United States, attention shifted to the child's right to an education. With more children located within factories than schools, legislation was passed to ensure the attendance of children in the school system. Attendance became known as an issue that was interwoven with "social ills" such as poverty, health, and poor adult working wages, resulting in social workers inheriting the responsibility of attendance management (Allen-Meares, 2006; Costin, 1969).

As more children began attending schools, the variations in children's needs became increasingly prevalent. There was a drastic increase in the variations in learning abilities, higher occurrences of behavioral disturbances within classrooms, as well as increased awareness of external forces within the community that impacted a child's ability to receive a meaningful education.

With the school setting being the primary outlet for social workers to gain access to children in need, social workers of the time operated as an instrument to secure improvements of social conditions impacting these children (Costin, 1969). The connections between a child's home life and school were fortified, as a better understanding of the importance of these connections surfaced.

The initial role of a school social worker, which was frequently known as visiting teachers, was primarily focused on building connections between a child's life at home and at school, through dynamic service integration (Costin, 1969; Franklin & Allen-Meares, 1997). This relationship was thought to increase attendance, improve educational achievement, and fortify the connections between community and home. Operating as a liaison, a study of the time

found that these social workers were primarily involved in connecting children and their families to necessary community resources, working directly with parents to assist with understanding the needs of their children, and interpreting the child's interactions within the school setting (Costin, 1969). Interestingly, the study, which was conducted by Oppenheimer in 1916, did not identify one-on-one student support (addressing personal issues of students), as a key role of visiting teachers.

The role of school social workers slightly shifted from that of a home-school-community liaison to more of the diagnosis and treatment of difficult children in response to the Mental Hygiene Movement, which established hygiene clinics within schools (Allen-Meares, 2006; Costin, 1969). The Mental Hygiene Movement attempted to address the individual differences of students through educating visiting teachers on techniques for the prevention of maladaptive behaviors (Costin, 1969). Additional societal influences, including that of the Great Depression, greatly impacted both the role and image of visiting teachers, as professionals attempted to eliminate the perception of involvement with law-enforcement duties (addressing attendance) and rather focus on casework with individuals with an emphasis on “the goals of happy, wholesome childhood for all children” (Costin, 1969, p. 445). By the 1960's the practice of visiting teachers shifted yet again, from the original focus on community liaison/connection between school and community and morphed into a clinical focus on the individualized and personal needs of each child (Costin, 1969; Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 1971). Through the late 1900s and early 2000s, school social workers continued to provide one to one clinical support for children with behavioral and emotional concerns, served as liaisons for connecting children and their families to resources within the community, and provided a necessary link between educators and the children and their families (Cuellar & Theriot, 2017; Franklin & Allen-Meares,

1997; Openshaw, 2008; Sherman, 2016; Sugrue, 2017). School social workers completed a plethora of tasks, all while operating under various titles, maintaining ambiguous responsibilities, and working with no universal education standards or professional expectations.

Critical Milestones

Educational policy and law have transformed drastically over the past 75 years. As seen in Table 3, several critical legislative milestones have shaped the education system, resulting in the its current state. Legislative reform, including the Elementary and Second Education Act, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, No Child Left Behind, and Every Student Succeeds Act left their mark on the education system (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Table 3

Education Policy and Law Timeline

Year	Policy/Law	Key Points
1954	Brown vs. Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Supreme Court Case • Determines the act of racially segregating to be unconstitutional
1964	Title VI: Civil Rights Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibits discrimination based on race in public schools
1965	Title I: Elementary and Second Education Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a commitment to equal educational opportunities for all children • Provides funding for the education of disadvantaged children
1972	Title IX: Education Amendments Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibits discrimination based on sex in public schools
1973	Section 504: Rehabilitation Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibits discrimination based on disability in public schools
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires public schools to provide appropriate education to students with disabilities • Now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)
2001	No Child Left Behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established accountability standards for public schools • Penalties were applied to public schools that “needed improvement”
2015	Every Student Succeeds Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established multiple measures for assessing student achievement

Elementary and Second Education Act

Signed into law by President Johnson in 1965, the Elementary and Second Education Act placed national attention on equal educational opportunities for all children (U.S Department of Education, 2020). This civil rights law provided grants to school districts that served a high population of low-income students to ensure students had the materials necessary to achieve their greatest academic potential. These grants included funding for textbook and library books, funding for facilities dedicated to special education initiatives, scholarships for college-bound

students, as well as federal grants for both elementary and secondary education (U.S Department of Education, 2020).

Education for All Handicapped Children Act

A critical milestone in educational law occurred in November of 1975 when President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act into law (U.S Department of Education, 2020). Now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this monumental civil rights measure marked the nation's commitment to ensuring all children, regardless of ability, the opportunity to receive a public education. Providing all children with access to public education, IDEA places emphasis on educating children in the least restrictive environment, through the establishment of inclusive classrooms and curriculum (U.S Department of Education, 2020).

In addition, IDEA oversees the provisions of early intervention, special education, and other related services across the nation. Maintaining the concept of complete inclusion, IDEA ensures services to infants and toddlers (birth through age two) through early intervention services, as well as child and youth (age three through 21) through special education services within the public-school system (U.S Department of Education, 2020). Over the past 45 years, IDEA has been reauthorized and amended by Congress, resulting in the current law, Every Student Succeeds Act, which powerfully states, "Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities" (U.S Department of Education, 2020).

No Child Left Behind Act

As multiple issues within the educational system began to surface in the early 2000s, the No Children Left Behind Act was initiated, with the goal of comprehensive school reform, through school district accountability, reducing the achievement gap, and promoting school choice (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Sabatino et al., 2011; Sabatino et al., 2013; U.S Department of Education, 2020). The legislation identified four critical principles: (1) emphasis on the use of scientifically based curriculum, (2) requiring accountability through assessments that verify students' academic achievement, (3) providing the authority to the individual state to determine the academic standard, and (4) allowing parents to choose to transfer their child to an additional public school, should their school not meet the identified standards (Sabatino et al., 2013).

As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, school social workers were completing sociocultural assessments for special education, and functional behavioral assessments, establishing early intervention and identification techniques in response to students with educational challenges and tailoring services to better align with school goals (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010; Sabatino et al., 2011; Sabatino et al., 2013). Without clearly defined and established professional roles within the school setting, school social workers were expected to undertake various responsibilities to fulfill the expectations of this legislation.

Every Student Succeeds Act

When President Obama reauthorized the Elementary Secondary Education Act in 2015, he also established an updated version of the No Child Left Behind Act, entitled Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S Department of Education, 2020). This act was the first to require statewide assessments for students, establishing a higher degree of accountability for schools to provide evidence-based interventions to all students (U.S Department of Education, 2020). Accessibility

and quality of preschool were also addressed within this amendment. The United States Department of Education proudly reports that high school completion rates are at an all-time high while dropout rates are historically low, which is directly attributed to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as well as the updated Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S Department of Education, 2020).

Current Roles

In response to the various legislative changes impacting the school system, as well as social and cultural changes, the role of school social workers remain as dynamic as the profession. Within the school setting, social workers most frequently provide individual and small group mental health intervention, with the primary role of crisis intervention, case management, and prevention (Cuellar & Theriot, 2017; McManama O'Brien et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2010). The services provided by school social workers often occurs on a continuum, as one end focuses on the individual approach to targeting the mental health/emotional/behavioral difficulties of a student, while the other end serves to integrate positive behavior support and socio-emotional learning into daily school activities.

The 2012 Standards for School Social Work Practice published by NASW clearly demonstrates the drastic shift school social work practice has endured over the past 100 years. Typically operating with an ecological perspective, as suggested by the NASW (2012) document, school social workers demonstrate an understanding for how a child's behavior is impacted by the environment around them, including the school system (teachers, peers, other school employees, etc.), their community, parents, and guardians (Sherman, 2016). Attempting to address a myriad of concerns and issues, social workers within the school setting are forced to focus on deficits rather than contributing and enhancing provisions of service (Phillippo &

Blosser, 2013). School social workers utilize a multidisciplinary approach, collaborating with various entities within the school system, to fulfill the countless roles they currently occupy: decreasing the occurrence of bullying, prevention, and crisis planning during events of school violence, and preventing truancy and dropout (Cuellar & Theriot, 2017; Cuellar & Mason, 2018; Webber, 2018; Werner, 2014). Although these additional roles are not directly addressed by the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice or the SSWAA's list of Services Provided by School Social Workers (2012), the value these services bring to the school setting is undeniable.

Social Work Education

Most commonly, social workers providing services within the school setting have obtained a Master's degree from an accredited social work program (NASW, 2012). Although there are educational standards required for social work programs, established by the Council on Social Work Education, curriculum content varies among programs, resulting in future school social workers experiencing an educational disadvantage. Research has found that social work students, who have been enrolled in a generalist Master of Social Work program, lack the preparation needed to successfully and ethically serve as school social workers (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010). In states such as Indiana, which offers school social work certification/licensure through the Department of Education, school social workers are required to complete a specific curriculum, ensuring adequately educated school social work practitioners (Indiana Department of Education, 2020).

The educational preparation received by social work students, within states across the nation that do not offer school social work certification/licensure, varies greatly (Kelly et al., 2015; Sabatino et al., 2011). A study of social work curriculum, which analyzed 58 syllabi from

universities across the country, suggests incomplete coverage of empirical literature surrounding topics including: bullying, sexuality education, policy changes that impact social work practice within schools, shifts in mental health prevalence, and positive behavior supports available to school social workers (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010).

Variations in social work curricula have contributed to misperceptions of the profession, according to Jones, Vela, Vang, and Walden (2006). The study (Jones et al., 2006) conducted at California State University assessed the perception of the social work profession among nearly 200 college students. Students were administered questionnaires addressing their knowledge of key social work terms, specific degree requirements, and attitudes towards various employment settings. Sadly, not only did the study conclude that non-social work majors were under informed in the professional functions of social workers, but students enrolled as social work majors also expressed misperceptions of the profession (Jones et al., 2006). The authors concluded that the social work profession must continue to build its professional identity through increased exposure and public image, community outreach, and remediation of social work curricula (Jones et al., 2006).

Additionally, research has identified a major gap in the continuing education programs available for school social workers who are beyond the entry-level positions. With little to no available continuing education options, school social workers who are currently practicing in the field are not able to enhance their knowledge of present theory, improved practice strategies, current policy and legislation that may impact the profession or engage in evidenced-based research possibilities (Sabatino et al., 2011).

Conceptual Framework

As described by the School Social Work Association of America (2012), as well as current and historical literature, school social workers provided services within the multitude of systems that impact students. These systems include, but are not limited to, students' peers, teachers and other school employees, parents and families, the school district, as well as the community they live and attend school within. Each system influences the behavior of the student, as they intersect with each other. The ecological systems theory, which will serve as the theoretical framework of this study, highlights the interrelated systems within an individual's life and how these subsystems influence the individual as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Burns et al., 2015; Rogers, 2010).

The ecological systems theory was pioneered by Urie Bronfenbrenner, a child psychologist, who was born in Moscow, Russia in 1917, although immigrated to America at the age of six (Ceci, 2006). Bronfenbrenner was greatly influenced by his father's position as a physician for the individuals that were developmentally disabled, as well as his personal experience as a father of six (Brendtro, 2006). Throughout his career, the theorist pursued three mutually reinforcing themes: "(a) developing theory and research designs at the frontiers of developmental science; (b) laying out the implications and applications of developmental research for policy and practice; (c) communication, through articles, lectures, and discussions, the finding of developmental research to students, the general public, and policy makers in both the private and the public sector" (Ceci, 2006, p. 173).

Bronfenbrenner also described an individual as being influenced by and influencing their unique environment, including home, school, community, and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Burns et al., 2015; Ceci, 2006; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). *The Circles of Influence*, as mapped by

Bronfenbrenner, provides a visual representation of the ecologies that directly and indirectly impact children as well as the hierarchy in power of influence (Brendtro, 2006). This physical depiction can be described as a small circle in the center, representing an individual/child, with additional circles surrounding the original circle, growing in size as the image branches out.

Bronfenbrenner described this structure as having five major external forces, which are represented by the ascending circles: microsystems (family, school, church, peers), mesosystems (groups, neighborhood), exosystem (social services, legal system, mass media), macrosystem (attitudes and ideologies of the culture), and chronosystem (patterns of environmental events and transitions over the life course), all of which contribute to a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Merriam et al., 2007). The circles that are in closest proximity to the center (individual/child) are depicted as having the greatest impact and influence on the individual's life.

Research conducted by Marraccini, Fang, Levine, Chin, and Pittleman (2019) also utilized Bronfenbrenner's model while conducting a content analysis of school climate and student development. The researchers utilized a range of theories, including resilience theory, attachment theory, social control theory, and social cognitive theory, although they acknowledged that many of those theories build from Bronfenbrenner's original ecological systems theory. In Bronfenbrenner's model, there is a clear reciprocal link between environmental context and development where this study considers the connection between school social work certification/licensure, the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, and current school social work curriculum (Marraccini et al., 2019).

School social workers demonstrate Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory perfectly, as they provide a valuable link between students and their environment. This study will utilize

this theory while acknowledging the environmental influences that directly and indirectly impact the colleges'/universities' school social work curriculum. These ecologies, including the type of institution (private vs. public), the state the college/university is located within, and the state-specific certification/licensure of school social workers will be considered during this study.

Summary

This chapter has provided a brief history of the field of school social work, including how historical and current legislative initiatives have impacted the current state of social work. Educational law, such as The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Education for All Handicapped Children Act, No Child Left Behind Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act were reviewed. The current roles of school social workers, as described by both the National Association of Social Workers and the School Social Work Association of America were reviewed, including the education requirements for school social workers and the limitations of the current education system. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework, ecological systems theory, and its connection to both school social work practice and the methodology of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The overall purpose of this research was to study the level of compliance by MSW programs offering School Social Work with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, identify curricular gaps, and discover curricular areas implemented in these programs that are outside the NASW (2012) standards. This chapter includes the methodology of the current study, which included a content analysis of the curriculum of MSW programs offering school social work certification/licensure. The study analyzed four categories of each curriculum: 1) Master of Social Work program handbooks, 2) available information on the individual program webpages, 3) course syllabi, and 4) all documents combined. The four-stage process of data analysis, as well as design strengths and limitations, are reviewed within this chapter. In addition, this chapter discusses both procedures for sampling and data collection.

Rationale for Research Approach

A critical content analysis of the Master of Social Work program handbooks, available information on individual program webpages, and course syllabi associated the colleges/universities within states that honor school social work certification/licensure was conducted. The method of content analysis was selected, as it is a method of determining the presence of specific topics, through transforming qualitative material into quantitative data (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Content analysis is a research method for studying forms of communication, consisting primarily of coding and tabulating the occurrence of certain forms of content (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This methodology was additionally selected due to the advantage of accessibility to program content, limiting the need for obtrusive means of data

collection, as well as its frequency in international social work education analysis (Garvis et al., 2013). An additional strength of content analysis is the strength of reliability (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

The process of collecting, multi-stage coding, and analyzing the manifested content of the Master of Social Work programs' documents was mirrored from research conducted by Harris and Boddy (2017) who conducted a content analysis of social work courses in Australia. Once obtained, the collected handbooks, available information advertised on the college/university's webpage pertaining to the school social work concentration/certificate program, and course syllabi were uploaded into the software program NVivo 12 Pro (NVivo) to be analyzed. The curriculum and program specifics within each college/university documents were reviewed as a way of determining if the principles and standards identified within the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Services were present within the curriculum. The manifested content of the program documents was coded utilizing a priori coding categories established by the NASW (2012) standards. These principles and standards were selected to increase study validity, as NASW is a reputable and reliable organization that strives to enhance professional growth and development of the social work profession through the creation of professional standards (NASW, 2020).

Research Setting/Context

This research was conducted within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the home state of the researcher. Although the physical setting is insignificant due to the methodology of this research, the current legislative initiatives within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides context for inclusion criteria of the research.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does not currently provide school social work certification/licensure, although there are several efforts being made by social work advocates to support legislative changes. For example, House Bill 390, which was introduced to The General Assembly of Pennsylvania in February of 2019 and referred to The House Education Committee, attempted to create a category of school social worker in the Pennsylvania School Code as well as create a legitimate certification for school social workers (Pennsylvania General Assembly, 2019). Additional efforts to increase the number of highly qualified social workers within schools has been established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as well as Governor Tom Wolf, through “Reach Out PA: Your Mental Health Matters” initiatives (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2020). Although this initiative does not specifically address school social work certification/licensure, it acknowledges the vital mental health services school social workers provide to students, families, and communities.

Due to the potential implications this legislative initiative may have on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, specifically as it pertains to school social work education and curricula, the inclusion criteria of school social work concentration/certification programs within states that offer school social work certification/licensure was established.

Research Sample and Data Sources

The population being assessed within this study is the Master of Social Work programs with concentrations/certification programs in school social work from colleges and universities across the nation, within the states that offer school social work certification/licensure. At the time of this study, of the 50 states (excluding U.S. territories), 33 states met this inclusion criterion (established through critical review of the state-specific Department of Education webpages). Within these 33 states, colleges and universities were included if they offered a

Master of Social Work program with a concentration/certification program in school social work. Colleges and universities that only offered online/distant learning programs were excluded as well as programs established specifically for advanced standing students. At the time of this study, within states that school social work certification/licensure exists, 57 colleges/universities had an advertised concentration/certification program in school social work. Some of the data were excluded, or determined to be “missing” due to program variations and differences in terminology and labeling.

The Institutional Review Board of Kutztown University determined this research to be exempt from review, due to the lack of human participants, as this research was conducted through the analysis of collected documents.

Data Collection Methods

The states that offer school social work certification/licensure were identified through a multi-tiered Internet search. The state-specific Department of Education webpages were frequently utilized as well as individual states’ Association of School Social Workers’ webpages when applicable. Links for the webpages associated with these organizations were obtained through The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA, 2020). Once the states with school social work certification/licensure were identified, the program search tool established by Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) was utilized to locate the specific programs offering school social work (CSWE, 2020). CSWE provides a search engine that identified two specific parameters pertaining to school social work: school social work concentration and school social work certificate program. Both parameters were independently run within the search engine to establish the sample of colleges/universities. Additional programs were identified through MSW Programs Guide to ensure maximum inclusion. The webpages of the colleges/universities were

then visited and reviewed to verify and assess the presence of a school social work concentration/certificate program. Following the institution's Internal Review Board's approval for an exempt study, the Master of Social Work handbooks, and corresponding course syllabi for required courses were requested from the colleges/universities through direct email solicitation using the email addresses of directors, deans, and other school administrators found on the college/university webpages. When available, handbooks, information advertised on the college/university's webpage pertaining to the school social work concentration/certificate program, and course syllabi were acquired directly from the college/university webpages.

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis occurred in four stages. The first stage consisted of analyzing the demographic information of the colleges/universities within the sample as well as the basic information of each program. Where the state the school is located in, their geographic region associated with the state, and how the school identifies themselves (private or public) were assessed by frequency. Each program was then assessed by the verbiage utilized when addressing school social work certification/licensure, the number of credit hours required for the Master of Social Work degree, the additional credit hours required for school social work certification/licensure, the departments from which additional credit hours must be received for the certification/licensure, and the number of required field placement hours. These program-specific categories were organized in NVivo through unique codes, all of which can be found within Appendix: Code Book.

The second stage of analysis was completed by carefully reviewing each of the collected handbooks, website material, and program syllabi, assessing for the presence or absence of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice. Documents were individually

reviewed twice by a single researcher. Content within the documents that correlated to specific NASW (2012) practice standards was identified, highlighted, and coded within NVivo (see Appendix: Code Book). This process was conducted twice in order to ensure accuracy and minimize potential error. A query was then run through NVivo to assess the presence or absence of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, in each of the three document categories: (1) program handbooks; (2) information available on the college/university webpage; (3) course syllabi. In addition, the documents obtained from each college/university were combined together, to determine the presence or absence of the NASW (2012) practice standards within the available curriculum of each program. The document categories for each school were then assigned the following codes: 0= No presence noted, and 1= Presence noted for each of the three NASW (2012) practice principles and 11 practice standards.

The third stage of analysis was completed after critically reviewing all available documents. Several additional themes were identified across the curricula that did not directly correlate with a specific NASW (2012) practice principle or standard. All documents were carefully reviewed for a third time, resulting in the discovery of 24 additional commonalities across the curricula. Each of the three document categories: (1) program handbooks; (2) information available on the college/university webpage; (3) course syllabi, were analyzed and additional themes were coded in NVivo. As previously conducted in stage two of the data analysis, the documents obtained from each college/university were combined, to determine the presence or absence of the additional themes within the available curriculum of each program. The document categories for each school were then assigned the following codes: 0= No presence noted, and 1= Presence noted for each of the 24 additional commonalities.

The fourth and final stage of analysis included manually entering the previously established codes (0= No presence noted, and 1= Presence noted) for all collected data into IBM SPSS Statistics software. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the overall frequency of the coded material within the assessed documents.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Each of the stages of data analysis was conducted twice in order to ensure accuracy and minimize potential error. Data were coded with the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, a nationally recognized document that was published by an extremely well respected and well-known organization within the social work profession. Due to the discrete nature of the search terms and clearly defined verbiage used to describe the practice principles and practice standards, as well as the data being coded through four stages of analysis conducted by a single researcher, reliability was not of concern (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Limitations and Delimitations

Although this study assessed 57 Master of Social Work programs that offer certification/programs in school social work, the details of the population are significantly more difficult to assess. As shown in Table 5: Terminology for School Social Work Certification/Licensure, there is a major disparity in the verbiage utilized when describing school social work across the nation. Due to the variations in terminology and titles, there may be a number of school social work programs that were inadvertently excluded from this study. Additionally, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) was utilized to establish the sample through the multilevel search engine tool that identified school social work programs as well as certification programs (www.CSWE.org). It was found that this tool did not provide an exhaustive list of programs, again, likely due to variations in terminology, resulting in this

specific sample. Of the 57 programs assessed, the course syllabi, which served as critical documentation addressing curricula, were only collected from about 50% of the colleges and universities, as only half of the colleges/universities were responsive to the request of documentation.

This study focused specifically on school social work programs located within states that offer school social work certification/licensure; although there are numerous reputable school social work programs within states that currently do not honor certification/licensure for school social workers. These states were purposely excluded from this study; however, additional research that included states that currently do not have school social work certification/licensure would be valuable in identifying possible variations in curricula.

Summary

A critical content analysis of the Master of Social Work curricula within states that honor school social work certification/licensure was conducted. The research was conducted with a sample of 57 school social work programs and analyzed four categories of each curriculum: 1) Master of Social Work program handbooks, 2) available information on the individual program webpages, 3) course syllabi, and 4) all documents combined. The Master of Social Work handbooks and corresponding course syllabi for required courses were requested from the colleges/universities through direct email solicitation using the email addresses of directors, deans, and other school administrators found on the college/university webpages. When available, handbooks, information advertised on the college/university's webpage pertaining to the school social work concentration/certificate program, and course syllabi were acquired directly from the college/university webpages.

The data analysis occurred in four stages. The first stage consisted of assessing demographic information associated with each program. The second and third stages were completed by carefully reviewing each of the collected handbooks, website material, and program syllabi, assessing for the presence or absence of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice as well as additional commonalities among the curricula. Documents were individually reviewed twice by a single researcher. Content within the documents that correlated to specific NASW (2012) practice standards or identified as additional commonalities were identified, highlighted, and coded within NVivo (see Appendix: Code Book).

The fourth and final stage of analysis included manually entering the previously established codes (0= No presence noted, and 1= Presence noted) for all collected data into IBM SPSS Statistics software. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the overall frequency of the coded material within the assessed documents.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The data were analyzed through four stages; program demographics; content analysis for the occurrence of NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice; content analysis for the occurrence of additional commonalities; and descriptive statistics for occurrence frequencies. Results were displayed first through program demographics, followed by the occurrence of both the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice as well as additional commonalities within the four categories of each curriculum: 1) Master of Social Work program handbooks, 2) available information on the individual program webpages, 3) course syllabi, and 4) all documents combined. All results are displayed in tables throughout the chapter.

Demographics

The states that honor school social work certification/licensure were divided geographically into six regions: Northeast Region (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont), Southeast Region (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia), Midwest Region (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin), Southwest Region (Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), Rocky Mountain Region (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming) and Pacific Coast Region (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington). The Midwest Region houses the most school social work certification/certificate programs (n=22), while the state of Illinois independently houses 10 of the noted programs. Table 4 shows the distribution of

colleges/universities within each state while Table 5 shows the distribution within the previously noted regions.

Table 4

School Social Work Programs by State

State	Frequency	Percent
Alaska	1	1.8%
California	5	8.8%
Colorado	2	3.5%
Connecticut	1	1.8%
Illinois	10	17.5%
Indiana	2	3.5%
Iowa	1	1.8%
Kentucky	2	3.5%
Maryland	1	1.8%
Massachusetts	3	5.3%
Michigan	7	12.3%
New Mexico	1	1.8%
New York	4	7.0%
North Carolina	5	8.8%
Ohio	3	5.3%
Oregon	1	1.8%
Tennessee	2	3.5%
Virginia	3	5.3%
Washington	1	1.8%
Wisconsin	1	1.8%
Wyoming	1	1.8%

Note: n=57

Table 5

School Social Work Programs by Region

Region	Frequency	Percent
Northeast Region	9	15.8%
Southeast Region	14	24.6%
Midwest Region	22	38.6%
Southwest Region	1	1.8%
Rocky Mountain Region	3	5.3%
Pacific Coast Region	8	14%

Note: n=57

The verbiage associated with the school social work certification/licensure varied drastically across the nation. There were 13 variations of the certification/license noted, although the most frequent terminology utilized was Pupil Personnel Services Credential (n=17) followed by Professional Educator License: School Support Personnel Endorsements (n=11). The frequency of terminology can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

Terminology for School Social Work Certification/Licensure

Certification Verbiage	Frequency	Percent
Pupil Personnel Services Credential	17	29.8%
Type C certification in School Social Work	1	1.8%
Special Service Provider Endorsement	2	3.5%
Professional Educator Certificate	1	1.8%
Professional Educator License: School Support Personnel Endorsement	11	19.3%
Student Services License	2	3.5%
School Social Work Endorsement	1	1.8%
Educator License: Other Instructional Services	7	12.3%
Adjustment Counselor	3	5.3%
School Social Work Approval	7	12.3%
Instructional Support Providers	1	1.8%
School Social Work License	3	5.3%
Educational Staff Associates	1	1.8%

n=57

Of the 57 colleges/universities within the sample, 75% of those were public institutions (n=43) while 25% were private (n=14). CSWE identified about 36% of the colleges/universities as having a “school social work concentration” (n=21), nearly 30% as having a “school social work certificate program” (n=17), and roughly 33% of the sample was not identified by CSWE as having either parameter, but were listed on MSWGuide.com as offering school social work certification/licensure (n=19).

The credit hours required for the Master of Social Work program were wide-ranging from 54 credits (n=4) to 78 credits (n=1), although over half of the programs required 60 credits

(n=32). Four programs did not clearly provide the number of required credit hours, resulting in missing data, as seen in Table 7. Nearly 95% (n=54) of the identified programs highlighted the requirement for field placement, although the required hours among the colleges/universities had varied drastically. Table 8 identifies the variation of field hour requirements. The additional classes required for the school social work concentration/certification (beyond the credit hours required for the Master of Social Work) varied from one additional required course (n=9) to six additional required courses (n=1). Most programs however required two (n=16) or three (n=16) additional courses to meet the concentration/certification requirements. All 57 programs required additional social work classes, while 38% required students to pass an education course (n=22), 3.5% required enrollment in a psychology course (n=2), and 3.5% required students to choose an additional elective (n=2).

Table 7

Required MSW Credit Hours

MSW Credits	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
54	3	5.3%	5.3%
56	1	1.8%	7.1%
57	1	1.8%	8.9%
60	32	56.1%	65%
61	2	3.5%	68.5%
62	4	7%	75.5%
63	3	5.3%	80.8%
64	2	3.5%	84.3%
65	2	3.5%	87.8%
71	1	1.8%	89.8%
75	1	1.8%	91.4%
78	1	1.8%	93.2%
Unknown	4	7%	100%

Note: n=57

Table 8

Field Hour Requirement Distribution

Required Field Hours	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<899	3	5.3%	5.3%
900-999	20	35.1%	40.4%
1,000-1,099	14	24.6%	65%
1,100-1,199	7	12.3%	77.3%
1,200-1,299	7	12.3%	89.6%
1,300-1,399	3	5.3%	94.9%
Unknown	3	5.3%	100%

Note: n=57

Curriculum

The curricula were assessed in four stages. The first three stages reviewed the occurrence or absence of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice within the three collected document categories: (1) program handbooks; (2) information available on the college/university webpage; (3) course syllabi. The fourth stage was completed by combining all collected material from each college/university to assess as a whole.

Program Handbooks

Handbooks were collected from nearly 85% of the 57 colleges/universities within the sample (n=48). The program handbooks were found to provide rather limited information on the school social work concentration/certificate program, but rather comprehensive information regarding the Master of Social Work degree requires. All 48 handbooks did address the first NASW (2012) standard, ethics and values, although very few additional standards were found, as seen in Table 9. Similarly, there were limited occurrences of the 24 additional commonality themes within the handbooks. As shown in Table 10, the most frequent included the discussion of school social work credentialing (n=5), closely followed by the programs' focus on an ecological systems theory (n=4).

Table 9

NASW Standards within Program Handbooks

NASW Practice Standards:	Information from Program Handbook	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
P1: Education and School Reform	2	4.2%
P2: Social Justice	3	6.3%
P3: Multitier Intervention	1	2.1%
S1: Ethics and Values	48	100%
S2: Qualifications	4	8.3%
S3: Assessment	4	8.3%
S4: Intervention	4	8.3%
S5: Decision Making and Practice Evaluation	3	6.3%
S6: Record Keeping	0	0%
S7: Workload Management	0	0%
S8: Professional Development	0	0%
S9: Cultural Competency	4	8.3%
S10: Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration	4	8.3%
S11: Advocacy	1	2.1%

Note: n=48

Table 10

Additional Commonalities within Program Handbooks

Additional Commonalities	Information from Program Handbooks	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
Credentialing	5	10.4%
Review of School Social Work Roles	2	4.2%
School Social Work Policy and Law	4	8.3%
Self-Awareness and Regulation	1	2.1%
Personal Safety	0	0%
Supporting Students with Disabilities	1	2.1%
Abuse of Students: Mandating Reporting Laws	1	2.1%
School Safety	0	0%
Special Education	2	4.2%
Attendance and Truancy	0	0%
Working With “Special Populations”	1	2.1%
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	0	0%
Sex, Pregnancy, and Sexuality	0	0%
Child Development	0	0%
Teaching Practices	0	0%
Family Engagement	1	2.1%
Working with Gifted Children	1	2.1%
Counseling	1	2.1%
Crisis Intervention	0	0%
Diagnosis and Use of DSM IV	0	0%
Ecological Systems Theory	4	8.3%
Trauma Informed Care	2	4.2%
NASW Standards	0	0%
SSWAA Standards	0	0%

Note: n=48

Available Information from Webpage

The information provided by colleges/universities on program webpages was extremely detailed and comprehensive. Each of the three practice principles were identified through the

provided information, and nine of the 11 practice standards were reviewed. The practice principle, social justice, as well as the practice standard, ethics and values, were cited most frequently by both occurring in 54.5% of the program webpages (n=31). As seen in Table 11, practice standards, workload management, and professional development were absent from this document category. When reviewing the additional commonalities within the available information on the program webpages, there was a similarity between the information obtained from the program handbooks. As seen in Table 12, school social work credentialing was one of the most frequently coded commonalities (n=20). The importance of school social work law and policy was cited on 40% of the program webpages (n=23).

Table 11

NASW Standards within Available Information on Webpage

NASW Practice Standards:	Available Information on Webpage	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
P1: Education and School Reform	26	45.6%
P2: Social Justice	31	54.4%
P3: Multitier Intervention	9	15.8%
S1: Ethics and Values	31	54.4%
S2: Qualifications	27	47.4%
S3: Assessment	23	40.4%
S4: Intervention	26	45.6%
S5: Decision Making and Practice Evaluation	14	24.6%
S6: Record Keeping	3	5.3%
S7: Workload Management	0	0%
S8: Professional Development	0	0%
S9: Cultural Competency	15	26.3%
S10: Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration	29	50.9%
S11: Advocacy	7	12.3%

Note: n=57

Table 12

Additional Commonalities within Available Information on Webpage

Additional Commonalities	Available Information on Webpage	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
Credentialing	20	35.1%
Review of School Social Work Roles	18	31.6%
School Social Work Policy and Law	23	40.4%
Self-Awareness and Regulation	2	3.5%
Personal Safety	1	1.8%
Supporting Students with Disabilities	14	24.6%
Abuse of Students: Mandating Reporting Laws	8	14%
School Safety	13	22.8%
Special Education	14	24.6%
Attendance and Truancy	7	12.3%
Working With “Special Populations”	10	17.5%
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	17	29.8%
Sex, Pregnancy, and Sexuality	4	7%
Child Development	7	12.3%
Teaching Practices	7	12.3%
Family Engagement	11	19.3%
Working with Gifted Children	6	10.5%
Counseling	11	19.3%
Crisis Intervention	11	19.3%
Diagnosis and Use of DSM IV	2	3.5%
Ecological Systems Theory	7	12.3%
Trauma Informed Care	5	8.8%
NASW Standards	1	1.8%
SSWAA Standards	0	0%

Note: n=57

Course Syllabi

A total of 59 syllabi were collected from 48.3% of the colleges/universities within the sample (n=28). This document category had the highest occurrence of practice standard inclusion, as all three practice principles as well as all 11 practice standards were identified

within the documents. Nearly 40% of the syllabi addressed practice principle, multitier intervention, practice standard, ethics and values, as well as practice standard, assessment (n=23). As shown in Table 13, standards that were previously excluded from the program handbooks as well as the available information on the programs' webpages were identified in the course syllabi. Each of the 24 additional commonalities were identified within the syllabi, with slightly over half addressing working with students within a context of special education (n=30). Table 14 shows the increased focus on the roles of school social workers (n=21) as well as school social work policy and law (n=20).

Table 13

NASW Standards within Course Syllabi

NASW Practice Standards:	Information from Course Syllabi	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
P1: Education and School Reform	16	27.1%
P2: Social Justice	18	30.5%
P3: Multitier Intervention	23	39%
S1: Ethics and Values	23	39%
S2: Qualifications	19	32.2%
S3: Assessment	23	39%
S4: Intervention	21	35.6%
S5: Decision Making and Practice Evaluation	1	1.7%
S6: Record Keeping	1	1.7%
S7: Workload Management	1	1.7%
S8: Professional Development	20	33.9%
S9: Cultural Competency	19	32.2%
S10: Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration	5	8.5%
S11: Advocacy	5	8.5%

Note: n=59

Table 14

Additional Commonalities within Course Syllabi

Additional Commonalities	Information from Course Syllabi	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
Credentialing	9	15.3%
Review of School Social Work Roles	21	35.6%
School Social Work Policy and Law	20	33.9%
Self-Awareness and Regulation	7	11.9%
Personal Safety	2	3.4%
Supporting Students with Disabilities	15	25.4%
Abuse of Students: Mandating Reporting Laws	15	25.4%
School Safety	16	27.1%
Special Education	30	50.1%
Attendance and Truancy	6	10.2%
Working With “Special Populations”	15	25.4%
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	18	30.5%
Sex, Pregnancy, and Sexuality	11	18.6%
Child Development	10	17%
Teaching Practices	11	18.6%
Family Engagement	13	22%
Working with Gifted Children	5	8.5%
Counseling	4	6.8%
Crisis Intervention	14	23.7%
Diagnosis and Use of DSM IV	7	11.9%
Ecological Systems Theory	13	22%
Trauma Informed Care	13	22%
NASW Standards	3	5%
SSWAA Standards	2	3.4%

Note: n=59

Combined Documents

All collected documents (n=164) from each college/university were combined to establish one all-encompassing document for each of the 57 colleges/universities. Once combined, the presence of the NASW (2012) practice standards for school social work become much more distinguishable, as nine of the categories (three practice principles and 11 practice

standards) occurred in over 50% of the curricula. As shown in Table 15, the most frequently occurring standard remained ethics and values (n=55), followed relatively closely by intervention (n=40) and interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration (n=40). When reviewing additional commonalities, as seen in Table 16, there were strong similarities with information obtained from program syllabi, as the roles of school social workers (n=34) as well as school social work policy and law (n=34) were most frequently occurring.

Table 15

NASW Practice Standards within Combined Documents

NASW Practice Standards:	Information from Combined Documents	
	Occurrence	Percent of Total
P1: Education and School Reform	33	57.9%
P2: Social Justice	38	66.7%
P3: Multitier Intervention	23	40.4%
S1: Ethics and Values	57	100%
S2: Qualifications	39	68.4%
S3: Assessment	37	64.9%
S4: Intervention	40	70.2%
S5: Decision Making and Practice Evaluation	31	54.4%
S6: Record Keeping	3	5.3%
S7: Workload Management	1	1.8%
S8: Professional Development	20	35.1%
S9: Cultural Competency	32	56.1%
S10: Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration	40	70.2%
S11: Advocacy	11	19.3%

Notes: n=57

Table 16

Additional Commonalities within Combined Documents

Additional Commonalities	Information from Combined Documents	
	Occurrence	Percentage of Total
Credentialing	26	45.6%
Review of School Social Work Roles	34	59.6%
School Social Work Policy and Law	34	59.6%
Self-Awareness and Regulation	10	17.5%
Personal Safety	3	5.3%
Supporting Students with Disabilities	24	42.1%
Abuse of Students: Mandating Reporting Laws	21	36.8%
School Safety	24	42.1%
Special Education	31	54.4%
Attendance and Truancy	11	19.3%
Working With “Special Populations”	23	40.4%
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	28	49.1%
Sex, Pregnancy, and Sexuality	14	24.6%
Child Development	13	22.8%
Teaching Practices	15	26.3%
Family Engagement	18	31.6%
Working with Gifted Children	9	15.8%
Counseling	15	26.3%
Crisis Intervention	21	36.8%
Diagnosis and Use of DSM IV	57	12.3%
Ecological Systems Theory	20	35.1%
Trauma Informed Care	15	26.3%
NASW Standards	4	7%
SSWAA Standards	2	3.5%

Note: n=57

Summary

This chapter reviewed the frequencies of program demographics, as well as the frequency of occurrences of both the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the additional commonalities within the four categories of each curriculum: 1) Master of Social Work program handbooks, 2) available information on the individual program webpages, 3)

course syllabi, and 4) all documents combined. The research identified very few NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice or additional commonalities within the program handbooks. Available information on program webpages was found to be more descriptive and inclusive than the handbooks, although the collected syllabi provided the most comprehensive coverage of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the additional commonalities within the curricula.

Once the collected documents were combined, the presence of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the additional commonalities became much more distinguishable. Of the 14 NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, six occurred in over 60% of the curricula: social justice, ethics and values, qualifications, assessment, intervention, and interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration. The most frequently occurring additional commonalities within the curricula included the review of school social work roles, school social work policy and law, as well as school social worker involvement with special education accommodations.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Synthesis

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the themes identified within the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, that occurred in over 60% of the curricula: social justice, ethics and values, qualifications, assessment, intervention, and interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration. The similarities between the most commonly referenced NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the professional core values of social work as well as the planned change process are explored throughout the chapter. The most frequently occurring additional commonalities within the curricula are also referenced, including the review of school social work roles, school social work policy and law, as well as school social worker involvement with special education accommodations. The chapter concludes with the identification of gaps found within the school social work curricula and the reiteration of research limitations.

Discussion

This analysis of the Master of Social Work curricula, concluded that the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice are not purposefully integrated into the school social work curricula, although the foundational concepts of the standards and practice principles are integrated within the content. Over two thirds of the standards and practice principles were present within over half of the programs assessed, although very few programs formally acknowledged the existence of the document. This finding was rather shocking, as NASW is a largely respected organization within the profession of social work and the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice document has been vastly distributed.

Overall, the curricula were found to indirectly review several NASW (2102) standards extremely thoroughly, including those associated with the several of the core values of the social work profession: social justice, the importance of human relationships, and competence (NASW, 2017) as well as specific steps of the planned change process: assessment, intervention, and evaluation (Gasker, 2019). There was also strong representation of several additional commonalities within the curricula, including: the review of school social work roles, school social work policy and law, school social workers' involvement with students who receive special education accommodations, and working with students who are experiencing mental health concerns and substance use, misuse, and abuse. Although these practice principles and standards were reviewed with great detail within the curricula, several aspects of the NASW (2012) Standards for Social Work Practice appeared to be missing or underrepresented within the curricula, including: workload management, recording keeping, professional development, and advocacy.

NASW Standard Themes Within Curricula

Core Social Work Values

In 2017, NASW revised the profession's *Code of Ethics*, a document that is intended to serve as a guide to professional conduct of all social workers. The *Code of Ethics* booklet is often required for both BSW and MSW students, as this document addresses six core values; (1) service, (2) social justice, (3) dignity and worth of the person, (4) importance of human relationships, (5) integrity, (6) competence; six ethical principles: (1) social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems, (2) social workers challenge social injustice, (3) social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person, (4) social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships, (5) social workers behave in a

trustworthy manner, (6) social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise; and six ethical standards: (1) social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients, (2) social workers' ethical responsibilities to colleagues, (3) social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings, (4) social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals, (5) social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession, (6) social workers' ethical responsibilities to the broader society, that are embraced by social workers and utilized as the foundation for all social work practice (NASW, 2017). Several of these core values intertwine with the NASW (2012) standards for school social work practice, as were identified within the curricula.

Nearly every program assessed in this study highlighted the importance of social work ethics and values within the curricula. Although this study focused on school social work curriculum, it is expected that these concepts would be present in every program, regardless of the specialization, as they serve as a core foundation of the profession. Additionally, well over half of the programs included the need for the promotion in social justice. In the *Code of Ethics*, social workers are expected to challenge social injustices through the pursuit of social change (NASW, 2017). Similarly, focus within the school social work curricula is placed on social justice as it pertains to equal educational opportunities for all children, by challenging injustices that may hinder a child from meeting his/her greatest academic potential.

The NASW (2012) standards highlight cultural competency as a critical component to school social work practice. *The Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2017) also addresses the need for social workers to be competent within the professional's selected area of practice. Although the core values do not specifically identify cultural competency, the code does include cultural awareness and social diversity within the ethical standards (NASW, 2017). This aspect of the

curricula is immensely important, as school social workers are in contact with nearly 50.6 million students within the public-school system, all with their own unique and diverse cultural backgrounds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The importance of human relationships, a core value of the social work profession, was also found to be strongly represented in the school social work curricula. Interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration, an NASW (2012) standard, was cited in over half of the programs, while family engagement, noted as an additional commonality found within the curricula, was present within a third of the programs.

These areas of curricula focus perfectly align with the values of the social work profession and are clearly demonstrated within the school social work programs. Because of the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics' similarities to the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, it was expected that these areas of focus would be extremely well represented within the school social work curricula.

Planned Change Process

Another theme found within the most commonly cited NASW (2012) standards was those associated with the planned change process. As a foundation of generalist social work practice, the planned change process consists of several stages that are intended to be dynamic and interactive (Gasker, 2019). These stages include: self-reflection, engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up, serve as a pathway for social workers to utilize when working with individuals towards agreed-upon goals (Gasker, 2019). Several of the stages of the planned change process coincide with specific NASW (2012) practice standards and were strongly represented within the school social work curricula. These practice standards,

which included assessment, intervention, and decision making and practice evaluation were present in well over half of the assessed curricula.

It is noteworthy that the highest occurring step of the planned change process was intervention, while the least occurring was decision making and practice evaluation. It is worrisome that school social work students may be missing a major aspect of social work practice, effective evaluation. Evaluation should be occurring throughout the entire planned change process, as it is a critical aspect of establishing goals, the implementation of an intervention, and the formal evaluation process (Gasker, 2019). The aspect of evaluation is certainly not missing from the school social work curricula, although it appears as though this area could be expanded upon to match the degree of curricular attention as the other stages of the planned change process.

Although there is a high occurrence of several steps within the planned change process within the curricula, there are also major gaps. The NASW (2012) standard addressing record keeping is tragically absent from a large majority of the school social work curricula being assessed. The lack of education regarding appropriate recording keeping is supported by research conducted by Savaya (2010) which focused on social workers' reluctance to invest the time and effort necessary to produce meaningful documentation. This study found that much of the information found within the assessed documentation was unclear, unorganized, and also lacked critical information about interventions and client outcomes (Savaya, 2010). Professional social workers are expected to produce timely, accurate, and detailed documentation on provided services, although the current curricula would suggest that students are not being thoroughly educated on this critical aspect of social work practice.

Additional Commonalities within Curricula

This study reviewed not only the presence of the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, but also reoccurring commonalities within the curricula that did not directly correlate with a specific standard or practice principle. These additional topics found most commonly within the curricula appear to address the more specific tasks and workplace requirements of school social workers. Over half of the programs thoroughly reviewed the roles, responsibilities, and historical shifts of school social work practice. Nearly half of the assessed programs dedicated an entire course to social work practice within school settings. The information covered within this class was often additionally presented and reviewed within the first module of advanced courses, as it serves as a foundation to build upon throughout the school social work curricula.

An additional commonality across the school social work curricula that was strongly represented in over half of the programs was the school social workers' involvement with students who receive special education accommodations. The combined topics of meeting the needs of students receiving special education accommodations, working with the "exceptional" child, and supporting students with disabilities were most commonly depicted within the curricula as a stand-alone course. Course learning objectives of these topic-specific courses include: examining personal, societal, and systemic biases associated with persons with disabilities; analyzing challenges of students with disabilities; interpreting education terminology relating to special education; understanding the various categories of disabilities as recognized by the federal government; and understanding the school social worker's role within identification, referral, assessment, and planning of educational programs for students with disabilities. This focus does seem justified, as research has identified that nearly 7.0 million

school-aged children receive special education services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Nearly half of the assessed programs also placed a strong focus on student mental health and substance use, misuse, and abuse. Although there were few entire courses dedicated to these topics, numerous courses devoted ample time to review this important aspect of school social work practice. These topics provide extremely valuable resources and information to the social work profession, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) reports that approximately 4.4 million school ages children have been diagnosed with anxiety and 1.9 million have been diagnosed with depression. Mental health concerns experienced by children often manifest through disruptive classroom behavior and/or learning and concentration difficulties. In addition to the number of students experiencing mental health challenges, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) reports 30% of high school students reported drinking some amount of alcohol within the past 30 days, while a staggering 17% reported riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. These statistics clearly demonstrate the need for school social workers to be aware of the effects both mental health concerns and substance use and abuse have on students.

Interestingly, there were far more commonalities identified within the curricula that did not correlate with a specific NASW (2012) practice standard than originally expected. The current literature did provide some insight into the occurrences of these topics, although the representation within the curricula was extremely large. These findings suggest a strong disconnect between the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the day-to-day expectations of school social workers. This disconnect is concerning, as it negatively contributes to the misunderstanding and underutilization of social workers within the school

setting. If legislative initiatives continue to advocate for the increased presence of social workers within the school system, it is critical to establish an all-encompassing set of professional standards for school social workers to guide practice as well as curricula.

Gaps in Curricula

Overall, it was found that the current school social work curricula do indirectly address a majority of the NASW (2012) standards for school social work practice, although there are several areas for growth and curriculum expansion that were noted. The major areas identified as being underrepresented within the curriculum included the awareness and importance of professional growth and continuing education, workload management, and advocacy. Additionally, there was found to be a major disconnect with the availability of information on program formatting and curriculum of school social work programs for prospective students.

Professional Development

The available literature on school social work indicates that social workers that are currently practicing as school social workers do not have appropriate opportunities for continuing education and professional development (Sabatino et al., 2011). This coincides with the gap in the current curricula regarding professional development, as only 35% of the programs assessed addressed the NASW (2012) standard. As noted within the *Code of Ethics*, it is vital for social workers to remain aware of new best practice models, theoretical frameworks, and current research that may directly impact social work practice (NASW, 2017). Students who are educated on the need for continued education and professional development may be more interested in enrolling in available programs and advocating for the creation of new training programs and continuing education opportunities.

Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it is hopeful that current legislation initiatives, as well as this research, will encourage both social work students and currently practicing social workers to pursue educational opportunities to obtain the credentials necessary to practice as school social workers. As the interest in school social work increases, and the need for meaningful and effective continuing education opportunities becomes more apparent, it is hopeful that organizations such as NASW and SSWAA will provide school social workers with additional opportunities for professional development and continuing education.

Workload Management

A major gap within school social work curricula was found to be the discussion of the NASW (2012) standard, workload management. Although this standard focuses mainly on the social worker's ability to manage professional responsibilities by identifying priorities, as well as working collaboratively within the school setting and district, it also mentions the importance of remaining aware of needs of the individual social worker. All too often the needs of the professional setting overshadow the individual needs of the social worker as a person. This extremely important aspect of the social work profession, as well as numerous other helping professions, has been a major topic of discussion, specifically regarding burnout and compassion fatigue.

Social workers are already extremely likely to experience high levels of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress, as social workers commonly work in high-demand settings with vulnerable populations (Caringi et al., 2017). With an abundance of literature available on mental health concerns of social workers, it is surprising to see the minuscule presence of topics such as workload management and worker safety within the curricula.

Interestingly, the physical and mental safety of students was noted rather strongly within the curricula, although very few programs even mention the idea of worker safety. Verbal aggression and the use of threatening language are commonly experienced by social workers when working with children and families (Robson et al., 2014). Research has found that as many as 67% of social workers have experienced some form of violence within the past 12 months, typically in the form of verbal abuse and intimidation (Koritsas et al., 2010). These findings are particularly concerning, as school social work students are not being educated on effective ways to maintain their own mental and physical safety within the workplace.

Advocacy

Throughout the entire NASW (2017) *Code of Ethics*, great importance is placed on the social worker's role to promote the general welfare of society, through the development of people, their communities, and the environment. Although the action of advocacy is critical for these forms of social promotion, the actual word "advocacy" is sparse within the school social work curricula. The NASW (2012) standards include the importance of advocacy when addressing education and school reform, which was strongly represented within the curricula, although it was most commonly used in the context of advocating for school resources, rather than needs of students and families. It is critical for social work programs to educate future social workers on the value of not only micro, direct client practice, but also macro social work, including advocacy, policy reform, program evaluation, and additional methods of social work leadership.

Curriculum Detail Availability for Prospective Students

Prior to enrolling in a Master's program, students should be provided with all information necessary to make an informed decision on the best program to help them meet their professional

goals. This information should include program structure, possible concentrations, availability of subspecialties and certification opportunities, course requirements and sequence, as well as curriculum structure and standards. Unfortunately, the program documents that provide the most information on the curriculum were the course syllabi, which is often not accessible to non-students. This information was only made available after direct solicitation, although this was successful in about half of the requests. Without proper exposure to the curriculum content, students are often blindly selecting Master of Social Work programs without the information necessary to make informed decisions. This research can provide future students with the information necessary to make critical decisions on a Master of Social Work program, prior to enrollment, based on how well the curriculum connects to their professional goals.

Limitations

Although this study assessed 57 Master of Social Work programs that offer certification/programs in school social work, the details of the population are significantly more difficult to assess, as there is a major disparity in the verbiage utilized when describing school social work across the nation. Due to the variations in terminology and titles, there may be a number of school social work programs that were inadvertently excluded from this study. Additionally, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) was utilized to establish the sample through the multilevel search engine tool that identified school social work programs as well as certification programs (www.CSWE.org). It was found that this tool did not provide an exhaustive list of programs, again, likely due to variations in terminology, resulting in this specific sample. Of the 57 programs assessed, the course syllabi, which served as critical documentation addressing curricula, were only collected from about 50% of the colleges and

universities, as only half of the colleges/universities were responsive to the request of documentation.

Additionally, this study focused specifically on school social work programs located within states that offer school social work certification/licensure; although there are numerous reputable school social work programs within states that currently do not honor certification/licensure for school social workers. These states were purposely excluded from this study; however, additional research that included states that currently do not have school social work certification/licensure would be valuable in identifying possible variations in curricula.

Lastly, the research focused on the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice when assessing the curricula. Although this document is an extremely valuable tool for school social workers, the document is slightly outdated, as it was published in 2012. Since the document's publication, there have certainly been political, cultural, and legislative occurrences that have impacted the roles and goals associated with school social work practice. Due to these potential shifts, assessing school social work curricula strictly based on the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice would not have resulted in an accurate assessment, therefore the review of additional commonalities within the school social work curricula was conducted, with the goal of capturing these disparities. An additional content analysis of school social work curricula, utilizing a more representative and updated tool may provide additional valuable information.

Summary

This chapter focused on the themes identified within the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, that occurred in over 60% of the curricula: social justice, ethics and values, qualifications, assessment, intervention, and interdisciplinary leadership and

collaboration. The similarities between the most commonly referenced NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice and the professional core values of social work as well as the planned change process were explored. The most frequently occurring additional commonalities within the curricula, including the review of school social work roles, school social work policy and law, as well as school social worker involvement with special education accommodations were reviewed. The identification of gaps found within the school social work curricula and the reiteration of research limitations concluded this chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This final chapter begins with a review of the operational research questions for this study as well as the original hypotheses. Final thoughts of the researcher are then explored, including implications for social work practice, such as recommended modifications to the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, recommended modifications for current curriculum, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

Research Question Review

The overall purpose of this research was to study the level of compliance by MSW programs offering School Social Work with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, identify curricular gaps, and discover curricular areas implemented in these programs that are outside the NASW (2012) standards. The operational research questions for this study became:

- 1) What is the level of compliance with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice by social work programs offering school social work curricula?
- 2) What are commonly found curricular gaps regarding the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice in the school social work curricula?
- 3) What are commonly found curricular concepts in school social work curricula that are not included in the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice?

As the number of school social work programs continues to rise across the nation, it was hypothesized that a great deal of critical planning was utilized when developing the curricula of these programs. With the publication of the NASW Standards for School Social Work Practice in 2012, as well as its accessibility and versatility, it was hypothesized that there would be strong connections between these standards and the curricula of the school of social work programs. In addition, it was hypothesized that there would be several additional commonalities within the curricula that did not directly correlate with a specific NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Practice standard, as evidenced by the current literature on school social work practices.

Overall, the hypothesis regarding the degree of critical planning necessary in developing school social work curricula was supported, as the curricula were found to be dynamic and representative of school social work topics found within the literature. The strong connection between the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice that was originally hypothesized was not supported by this research. Although there were several aspects of the NASW (2012) document that were well represented within the analyzed curricula, the presence of the standards and practice principles were underwhelming. Shockingly the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice were only directly recognized in two programs, wildly discrediting the original hypothesis.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Recommended Modifications to the NASW Standards for School Social Work Practice

Although the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice is an extremely valuable tool for school social workers, the age of the document is alarming. As evidenced by this research, there appears to be a drastic disconnect between the published practice principles and standards and the current school social work curricula. This research identifies a critical

void in multiple practice skills and foundations of knowledge necessary for school social workers in the current educational climate.

With multiple legislative initiatives in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania working to secure school social work certification, it is necessary to have a document that correctly identifies the skills possessed by school social workers, highlights the knowledge base developed through the Master of Social Work education, and demonstrates the immense resource school social workers are to school systems. The current NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice do not accurately portray this subspecialty of the social work profession and ultimately understates the value of school social workers. Although this research has not established formal recommendations for revisions of the 2012 document, it does however, stress the dire need for revisions that are reflective of the current roles school social workers hold within the school setting.

Recommended Modifications for Current Curricula

Overall, the current school social work curricula do not appear to reflect many of the practice principles and standards identified in the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice. Key gaps in curricula that were identified within the study include macro social work practice skills, such as advocacy and professional development. This study supports the historical shift of the social work profession, from a focus on social reform towards individual treatment and clinical interventions (Krings et al., 2019). As evidenced by this study, social work curricula, specifically school social work, place a strong emphasis on traditionally clinical/micro topics and inadequately represent topics such as policy reform, program development, program evaluation, and advocacy.

It is strongly recommended that school social work programs, as well as generalist social work programs, evaluate the current curricula and make modifications necessary to convey the importance of both clinical/micro and macro social work practice. Program curricula may benefit from demonstrating the connection between these levels of practice, rather than a distinction as one or the other. Although social work students often express a stronger interest in clinical/micro social work, the concept that policy and legislative initiatives (macro social work) directly impact nearly every aspect of clinical social work, including frequency and duration of interventions and availability and accessibility of services must be emphasized within social work curricula (Krings et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

As previously stated, the current NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice does not accurately represent the daily practice skills and employment requirements of school social workers, and therefore may not have been the ideal tool used to conduct this research. After further review, it was determined that additional research of school social work curricula, utilizing alternative coding standards, may provide a more accurate representation of current school social work education.

The School Social Work Association of America provides a document that outlines the services provided by school social workers, which highlights why today's schools need social workers, who are school social workers, and what services they can provide (SSWAA, 2012). This document, Table 1 within this dissertation, although also published in 2012, is far more representative of school social work practice than the 2012 NASW document. If utilized as a coding tool for future research, it may provide a more accurate representation of the depth of current school social work curricula.

Additionally, interviewing school social workers who are currently working in the school setting regarding their job description, current daily operations, and employment expectations may provide a more accurate assessment of the current school social work curricula. A mixed-methods approach, including both a content analysis of school social work curricula and the qualitative interviews of school social workers would likely produce the most accurate school social work curriculum analysis.

Summary

In conclusion, this research attempted to study the level of compliance by MSW programs offering School Social Work with the National Association of Social Worker's (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice, identify curricular gaps, and discover curricular areas implemented in these programs that are outside the NASW (2012) standards. The study suggests that current school social work curricula does not directly reflect the NASW (2012) Standards for School Social Work Practice. Although these standards were determined to be an unfavorable coding tool to assess school social work curricula, the curriculum analysis was successful in identifying several curricular areas of strength, as well as content gaps that may require additional curricular attention. As legislative initiatives within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania continue to advocate for the certification of school social workers, it is critical that an ideal school social work curriculum is established, with appropriate practice principles and standards that adequately prepare future school social workers to reach their greatest professional potential.

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Appendix: Code Book

SPSS Codes:

State

1. Alaska (AK)
2. California (CA)
3. Colorado (CO)
4. Connecticut (CT)
5. Illinois (IL)
6. Indiana (IN)
7. Iowa (IA)
8. Kentucky (KY)
9. Maryland (MD)
10. Massachusetts (MA)
11. Michigan (MI)
12. New Mexico (NM)
13. New York (NY)
14. North Carolina (NC)
15. Ohio (OH)
16. Oregon (OR)
17. Tennessee (TN)
18. Virginia (VA)
19. Washington (WA)
20. Wisconsin (WI)
21. Wyoming (WY)

Region

1. North East Region
2. South East Region
3. Midwest Region
4. Southwest Region
5. Rocky Mountain Region
6. Pacific Coast Region

Private Vs. Public

1. Private
2. Public

CSWE Verbiage

1. Concentration
2. Certificate Program
3. Not Listed

Certification Type

0. Unknown
1. Pupil Personnel Services Credential (PPSC)
2. Type C Certification in School Social Work
3. Special Service Provider Endorsement
4. Professional Educator Certificate
5. Professional Educator License: School Support Personnel Endorsements
6. Student Services License
7. School Social Work Endorsement
8. Educator License: Other Instructional Services
9. Adjustment Counselor
10. School Social Work Approval
11. Instructional Support Providers
12. School Social Work License
13. Educational Staff Associates
14. Other

MSW Credits

0. Unknown
1. 54
2. 56
3. 57
4. 60
5. 61
6. 62
7. 63
8. 64
9. 65
10. 71
11. 75
12. 78

School Social Work Credits:

0. Unknown
1. 3
2. 4
3. 6
4. 8
5. 9
6. 10
7. 12
8. 14
9. 15

Field Hours:

0. Unknown
1. <899
2. 900-999
3. 1,000-1,099
4. 1,100-1,199
5. 1,200-1,299
6. 1,300-1,399

Number of Required Classes:

0. Unknown
1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5
6. 6

Social Work Classes Required:

0. No
1. Yes

Education Classes Required:

0. No
1. Yes

Psychology Classes Required:

0. No
1. Yes

Additional Elective Required:

0. No
1. Yes

NVivo Nodes:

- P1:** Education/School Reform
- Increased accountability
 - Advocate for resources
 - Meet expectations
 - Promote equal educational opportunities
 - Emphasize on early intervention

P2: Social Justice

Promote equal educational
opportunities
Collaborate with students, families,
communities
Identifying Resources
Ecological Systems Theory

P3: Multitier Intervention

P3T1: Tier 1

Prevention Programs
Data-informed decisions

P3T2: Tier 2

Small group, short-term
interventions
Conflict resolution
Social skills
Mental health needs
Crisis intervention

P3T3: Tier 3

Long-term interventions
Intensive individualized
strategies
Community agency
connection/referral

S1. Ethics and Values

NASW Code of Ethics

S2. Qualifications

State Department of Education
Historical Perspective/Understanding

S3. Assessment

Assessments of students, families,
systems, organizations
Remove Barriers to Learning
Ecological Systems Theory

S4. Intervention

Evidence-Informed Practices

S5. Decision Making and Practice
Evaluation

Conduct Research
Use Data to Guide Service

S6. Record Keeping

Maintain Accurate Data

S7. Workload Management

Multi-tier Framework

S8. Professional Development

Continuing Education

S9. Cultural Competence

Multicultural Understanding

S10. Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration

Create Positive School Climate

Work Collaboratively with school
(Link)

S11. Advocacy

Equal Access to Education

E3: Credentialing

Should be overseen by the DOE

State consultants should be available

E4: Review School Social Work Roles

E5. School Social Work Policy and Law

Laws impacting School Social
Workers

Current Legislation

Policy Reform

E6. Self-Awareness and Regulation

Personal Reflection

E8. Supporting Students with Disabilities

Physical and Mental

Requirements for Support

E10. Abuse of Students

Physical, Mental, Sexual, Etc.

Mandating Reporting Laws

Collaboration with Police, Children
and Youth Services

CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

E11. School Safety

- Planning and Safety Committees
- Shootings and School Violence
- Natural Disaster Preparation

E12. Special Education

- Laws and Regulations
- IEP Development & Implementation
- FBA Development & Implementation

E13. Attendance and Truancy

- Laws and Regulations
- Prevention

E14. Working with “Special Populations”

- Military Families
- Migrant Families
- Homelessness
- Etc.

E15. Mental Health and Substance Abuse

- Laws and Regulations
- Suicide
- Bullying
- Overdose and Death

E16. Sex, Pregnancy, and Sexuality

- Teen Pregnancy
- LGBTQA
- Laws and Regulations

E17: Child Development

- Age Appropriate Stages

E18: Teaching Practices

- Teaching Methods
- Guidelines and Principles
- Assessments and Standards

E19: Family Engagement

- Importance of Inclusion

CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

E20: Working with Gifted Children
“Exceptional Children”
Laws and Regulations

E21: Counseling
Direct Social Work Intervention

E22: Crisis Intervention
Conflict Resolution
School-Wide Initiates
Multitier Intervention

E23: Diagnosis
Use of DSM IV

EST: Ecological Systems Theory
Utilization Within the School Setting
As a Social Work Practice

TIC: Trauma Informed Care
Utilization Within the School Setting
As a Social Work Practice

NASW: NASW 2012 Standards
Presence of Within the Curriculum

SSWAA: SSWAA Standards
Presence of Within the Curriculum