



School Social Work
Association of America

ILLUMINATE THE IMPACT

MSW ADVANCED PRACTICE EXPERTISE

Social Work practice and services are a valued resource in schools. Social Workers are trained and licensed at various practices levels and educational preparation. While bachelors level and masters level practitioners can provide distinctive services in schools, SSWAA recommends MSW level School Social Workers based on training and advanced skills.

MSW Practitioners

Specialized and Clinical Practice

Practitioners understand how to provide therapeutic services in schools, conduct assessments, and create intervention plans for students facing mental health or behavioral issues. Advanced credentials and training are provided for a school-based practice specialization.

Leadership and Advocacy

Training in educational policy and issues of access and engagement, position MSWs to advocate for school policies, lead initiatives related to student well-being, and serve as liaisons between schools, families, and the community.

Independent Practice

With licensure and advanced clinical practice skills, MSWs provide needed behavioral health supports and services, crisis intervention, and take on leadership roles, such as overseeing school-wide prevention programs.

Educational Training

Programs require coursework focusing on deepening knowledge and skills in specialized areas, particularly around clinical and leadership roles. Learning in therapeutic techniques, special education, behavioral and mental health diagnosis, research methods, evidence-based interventions, cultural humility, trauma-informed practices, and broader educational issues like funding, educational equity and community outreach is deepened through MSW preparation.

Licensure

Graduates should be licensed as an MSW practitioner and often have specialized training in school social work. MSW professionals can also gain additional credentials including clinical licensure and independent practice, depending on the state in which they practice. School Social Workers should have state department of education credentialing when it is available in their state indicating their highly qualified status. The SSWAA also provides National Certified School Social Worker (NCSSW) advanced credentialing for experienced practitioners.

BSW Practitioners

Generalist Practice

Work in entry-level roles, often focusing on case management, resource referral, and basic support services.

Supervision

Typically work under the supervision of an MSW.

Limited Clinical Role

Cannot practice independently in clinical settings, and their role is focused on basic support and referrals.

Educational Training

Focuses on foundational social work approaches and ethical practices, with an emphasis on the ecological framework.

Licensure

Graduates should be licensed as a BSW practitioner through state boards of social work based on state practice guidelines.



WHY IT MATTERS

Understand the Difference
MSWs provide advanced clinical care and leadership, while BSWs focus on general support.

Specialized Skills Matter
MSWs handle complex mental health issues, lead initiatives, and provide crisis intervention.

Importance of Education and Licensure
MSWs undergo rigorous training, gaining expertise in trauma, special education, and family engagement.

Impact of Training
MSWs lead prevention programs and support students and staff for long-term success.

Building a Stronger School System
Investing in MSWs with practice expertise strengthens schools and benefits everyone.



SUMMARY

MSWs have a broad scope in school social work, with a focus on clinical practice, leadership, and advocacy, while BSWs have foundational skills and provide essential support services but often need supervision from an MSW.