



School Social Work Association of America Legislative Statement

ASWB Professional Licensing Exam Pass Rate Disparities

In August 2022, the Association of Social Work Boards, ASWB, published the 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis, highlighting disparities in exam pass rates for different demographic groups. ASWB reports, "The data reflect a multitude of factors that can affect performance on a licensing exam, including educational background, preparation, and length of time between graduation and testing. The differences in pass rates also reflect societal opportunity gaps for historically underrepresented groups."

SSWAA opposes any circumstances which lead to or support inequity across licensure or certification and supports efforts to address issues impacting the school social work profession. SSWAA is committed to striving for equity and addressing discriminatory practices and policies in social work education and the licensing process. Thus, our goal is to ensure that all School Social Work practitioners have equitable opportunities for licensure while balancing the need to maintain the highest professional standards across social work certification and licensure.

Why is it Important

SSWAA recognizes:

- Professional competencies and measures ensure high standards and that the School Social Work profession is valued along the same lines as other professional degrees (e.g., medical, law, and other educational professionals).
- Licensing and certification regulate the profession by providing minimum standards to which licensees are held accountable. These steps are designed to protect the public, so they have the assurance that social work practitioners meet the profession's competencies.
- Specific legislation enables licensed school social workers to bill for Medicaid, creating accountability and an additional funding source for school social work services.
- Maintaining licensing and certification ensure school social work practitioners continue to be key providers of mental health services to youth in schools.
- Reducing standards may further erode and undermine the validity of our profession by allowing individuals to practice social work in schools and the field without a consistent exam requirement.
- Inconsistent certification standards across states confound this issue, whereby a school social work practitioner must look to more than just the ASWB exam to ensure professional consistency of standards.
- This issue must be contextualized by ongoing de-professionalization efforts spreading across the country (e.g., anti-union, teachers, librarians, and school mental health professionals).
- Completely removing the LMSW and LCSW levels of licensure disrupts the progress the SSW profession has made in billing for Medicaid in schools.

Action Steps

SSWAA recognizes the need to address the limitations of current processes for certification and licensure. We propose:

- Addressing the current shortcomings and inequities that exist in the current ASWB exams, including the Licensed Bachelor of Social Work (LBSW), Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW), and Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) or equivalent. In addition to the steps ASWB has committed to addressing the exam shortcomings [in its ASWB social work examination update](#), SSWAA recommends immediate action via the following steps:
 - a. ASWB provides access to additional data for further analysis of testing disparities, including the differentiation and scoring process data.
 - b. ASWB to offer free retesting after a second failed attempt.
 - c. ASWB offers accessibility to modular testing.
 - d. ASWB conducts consistent annual exam analysis reporting to show efforts centering equity are making an impact (not a one-time fix but a continual assessment);
 - e. ASWB eliminates testing time restraints.
 - f. ASWB provides specific data associated with incorrect responses to assist participants in preparation for re-taking the exam after the 2nd failed attempt.

Some states are responding to the 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis by proposing and passing legislation to eliminate ASWB exam requirements to obtain state professional licensure. SSWAA recommends:

- If legislation requiring licensure or certification has been removed or does not exist, we encourage developing alternative pathways to licensure which demonstrate competencies and social work knowledge.
- Several states allow licensed social workers (e.g., LMSW and LCSW) to bill for Medicaid, and a pathway for licensure needs to be in place to continue this practice.

Next Steps

In addition to the specific recommendations for addressing the disparities in the ASWB exam, SSWAA also recommends:

- Continued review of ASWB data and monitoring of the progress ASWB is making toward addressing the disparities in the exam.
- Contracting with state school social work associations, NASW (state and national), state boards of health/social work, and legislators to encourage actions that partner and collaborate in revising the ASWB exam to address the current disparities related to passing the exam.
- Contacting college and university social work programs to ask for a review of data on how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are embedded in teaching and social work student learning (examining learning across racial, ethnic, gender, and marginalized groups).

In alignment with NABSW, SSWAA believes immediate action is needed to assist those impacted. SSWAA is committed to working with ASWB and other professional Social Work organizations to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion for all practitioners.

Additional Information & Resources

- [ASWB Exam Rate Analysis](#)
- [ASWB social work examination update](#)

- [CSWE Addressing Licensing Exam Pass Rate Data](#)
- [NASW Opposes Association of Social Work Boards \(ASWB\) Exams](#)
- [NABSW Open Letter to Association of Social Work Board \(ASWB\)](#)

Approved by the Board of Directors, May 11, 2023

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