



School Social Work
Association of America

ILLUMINATE THE IMPACT

WHAT MAKES A HIGHLY QUALIFIED SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER?

A highly qualified School Social Worker is essential to student success, breaking down barriers to learning and fostering a supportive school environment. The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) defines this standard with three key pillars:

1. Education

A Master of Social Work (MSW) from a CSWE-accredited program ensures that School Social Workers have the specialized training to bridge the gap between education and social services. Their expertise in systems thinking allows them to address student needs holistically—within the school, family, and community.

2. Competence

Highly qualified School Social Workers are leaders in student support, ensuring positive academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health outcomes.

- Provide evidence-based services and multi-tiered interventions
- Promote access to resources, social justice, and engagement for all students
- Strengthen school climate and build staff capacity
- Use data-driven decision-making to enhance student achievement
- Foster collaboration between families, schools, and communities

To continue to practice at the top of licensure, School Social Workers must commit to ongoing professional development and continuous self-reflection to adapt to evolving student needs.

3. State Certification & Licensure

To maintain high professional standards, SSWAA advocates for:

- State Board of Education endorsement
- Master-level state licensure
- National school social work certification

School social work is a specialized, evidence-based profession—not an interchangeable role. Through advanced education, demonstrated competence, and proper licensure, school social workers drive student success and advocate for resources and services for all students.



Crucial for Success

Highly qualified School Social Workers are key to student success, addressing both academic and emotional needs.



Clear Standards

The three criteria to be highly qualified include education, competence, and state certification.



Professional Standards Matter

Licensure and certification are important to ensuring top-level expertise.



Advocating for Change

Advance social justice and advocate for improvements in schools that ensure access for all students.



Positive Impact

Improve student outcomes through evidence-based practices.



SUMMARY

A highly qualified School Social Worker is essential for student success, addressing learning barriers and fostering support. The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) defines qualifications through three pillars: an MSW, competence in evidence-based practices, and state licensure or national certification after 4 years of practice experience. These standards ensure effective, holistic services that promote student well-being, educational equity, and systemic change.