Supervision of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) is essential to school success and student achievement. The primary role of SISP is to serve students with specific needs not addressed by classroom educators (AIR, 2014). Each SISP professional employed by schools is expected to meet the standards and ethics for their profession. The roles and duties of school social workers are delineated in the SSWAA National Model (2013) and the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services (2012). The ethics for school social workers are provided by the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and the Supplemental Ethical Standards for School Social Work Practice (2015).

Supervision entails two primary functions, including professional and administrative. Each of these functions involves both formative and evaluative reviews. Tenure reviews should be inclusive of both professional and administrative perspectives. Professional supervision refers to the oversight of professional practice within the specific profession related to the education, ethics, and legal duties relevant to that profession. It is essential that evaluators have the qualifications and experience to make legitimate judgments about educator effectiveness (AIR, 2014). Administrative supervision focuses on the functioning of the service unit, including personnel issues, contractual and organizational practices, and working conditions. Administrative supervision addresses the performance of job duties in accordance with conditions of employment and assigned responsibilities. While it is common for professionals working in a multidisciplinary environment to have administrative supervision from someone outside of the profession, it is always best that professional supervision be provided by someone within the profession (NASW & ASWB, 2013).

**Professional Supervision**

New school social workers are especially in need of educational supervision. They need to learn about the needs of the students; the culture of the school environment; how their role fits into the total school staffing model for addressing social, emotional, and behavioral needs; and their role in multi-tiered systems of support. New school social workers may also be working toward clinical licensure in their state and those requirements should be taken into consideration when schools provide a supervisor. Early career school social workers need regular (e.g., weekly) meetings with a more experienced social worker to function effectively in a school environment.

Ethical issues abound in schools where different professionals strive to work collaboratively to help students in need. Common issues include student autonomy and parent involvement, consent for services, limited confidentiality, and ethical decision making. No professional ever outgrows the need for ethical consultation or supervision. New predicaments occur regularly in schools and social workers must have access to another professional who knows and understands the codes of ethics undergirding social work practice.
Legal issues arise for school social workers wishing to achieve clinical licensure (LCSW or equivalent). Most state laws require that the supervisor of clinical hours also holds the desired license in the same profession (Menon, 2016). Most states also permit direct contact hours in a school setting to be used toward clinical licensure. It generally benefits schools to employ school social workers who also hold clinical licensure because more highly trained school social workers can provide a broader array of services to students. LCSWs can diagnose mental disorders or developmental disabilities. LCSWs also administer and interpret measures of psychosocial functioning, develop appropriate treatment plans, and provide behavior therapy or psychotherapy. When social work services are included in a student’s IEP, school districts can bill for Medicaid reimbursement at a higher rate when using an LCSW.

**Recommendations**

The School Social Work Association of America recommends that school social workers be provided professional supervision by a certified, credentialed or licensed social worker with at least three years of experience working within schools.

Graduate students, interns, and early career school social workers require at least one hour of individual weekly support. Some use of distance supervision for rural areas or group supervision (up to four participants) may be provided as necessary.

Ideally, supervisors will have had some training or professional development in the practice of supervision.

This supervisor should regularly conduct both formative and evaluative reviews of school social workers related to professional practice. Formative reviews should focus on additional study, training, or professional development of the professional. Evaluative reviews should measure professional performance against specific professional standards. Annual performance tools based on the SSWAA National Model are available from [www.sswaa.org](http://www.sswaa.org).

Individuals who are NOT school social workers should only provide administrative supervision.

**References**


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