


Chapter 11


School Social Workers, Trauma-Informed Care, and Posttraumatic Growth: A Winning Combination in Education

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, schools provide services far beyond education. Schools commonly serve as social service and mental health hubs, creating burdens beyond the scope of teachers and administrators. School social workers (SSWs) are uniquely trained to be key staff members to ensure students and their families receive needed

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services; however, barriers to hiring SSWs commonly exist. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), trauma, toxic stress, and repercussions of COVID-19 have resulted in a significant increase in negative behavioral presentations in classrooms, causing more schools to adopt trauma-informed care (TIC) initiatives. Coupling posttraumatic growth philosophies with on-campus social work services enhances the overall well-being of the student body and educational efficacy, as well as teacher satisfaction, resulting in longevity in their positions. Research indicates that SSWs and on-campus social services in educational settings are highly beneficial, with implications for students, families, and school staff alike.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions, specifically in the United States, are being called upon to provide far more than educational services to their students. Today's schools have become community social service agencies for students and their loved ones (Rojas-Andrade & Prosser, 2022). K – 12 education commonly provide the bulk of students' nutritional needs through free and reduced breakfast and lunch; backpack programs offer students and families struggling with food securities additional items for evening and weekend meals, and over school breaks; back-to-school fairs offer students an opportunity to obtain school supplies, needed immunizations and sports physicals, haircuts, dress-code appropriate clothing, shoes, sports equipment, specialized class fees and items, and generous food supply to take home free of charge; on-site clothing closets provide needed items throughout the school year, including school formal attire and accessories; community service networking to assist with utility bills, rent, and acquiring needed medications; and mental health, behavioral modification, and therapeutic services provision (Branson & Koth, 2023; Heller, 2022). Schools strive to provide these services to students and loved ones based on empirical and anecdotal research indicating that students learn better when their needs are being met, including their physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and familial needs (Agaskar et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2020; Prothero, 2020; Rishel et al., 2019; Schwartz & Rothbart, 2020; Shultz, 2020).

Though there is considerable agreement that to be effective, schools need to also address students' needs, the burden of providing and sustaining these services is a source of concern. Schools delight in student efficacy and achievement, but teachers and educational staff are being asked to engage in activities outside their job duties and expertise. Additionally, there is a dearth of time that can be provided by school staff due to their primary job duties (Branson & Koth, 2023). Auxiliary school staff, such as school guidance counselors and school nurses, have been called upon to provide these services, but they too struggle with having remnant time after their

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