

Senate Committee on Education
April 21, 2010

Testimony Related to Charge #2: Review the state's education policy and initiatives regarding middle grades. Make recommendations to ensure a comprehensive state strategy for preparing students at the middle grades for high school retention and success. This review should include an examination of school-based strategies and best practices that encourage at-risk youth to finish school and that deter delinquency, drug abuse and violence.

Chairwoman Shapiro, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding school-based strategies and best practices that encourage at-risk youth to finish school and that deter delinquency, drug abuse and violence.

My name is Sue Milam, and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the Texas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. I am here to call attention to the fact that the presence of School Social Workers can assist schools by addressing the family and community issues that often prevent a child from attending school or performing well.

According to the Texas Education Agency, there are approximately 4.7 million students throughout the state in 2009. Over 56 percent of these children are considered to be economically disadvantaged. The Texas Education Agency also reported that the 2008 high school drop-out rate stood at approximately 10.5 percent.

Those statistics alone point to the need to address additional factors beyond the school day. Social workers in school settings can help these students through early identification, prevention, counseling and support. They can determine if a child is inattentive because of family stress, or missing school because of lack of consistent transportation. A social worker can find out if neighborhood gang activities serve as a deterrent for youth who might otherwise come to school and graduate.

Social workers are uniquely positioned to fill that role by the fact that they receive training in the profession's comprehensive assessment framework and the flexible range of interventions to deal with complex biological, social, and psychological barriers. Moreover, social workers understand the value of and the necessity for evidence based practice, while struggling to maintain the creative, clinical judgment deemed necessary for individual situations.

We need to fill our Texas Schools of Social Work with highly qualified, committed students to address the needs of the new delivery models. To recruit more school social workers, Texas should do 3 things: **raise salaries** for state-employed social workers, **raise reimbursement rates** for social services, and **offer loan repayment programs** for people serving in rural and border areas or practicing in high demand service areas. Please **support appropriations** for school social work salaries and fair reimbursement for social workers and allow the use of tobacco tax revenue to create a loan repayment program for Texas social workers.

Thank you.

Susan Milam, Ph.D., LMSW
Director of Government Relations
Texas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers
810 W. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
512-474-1454