



WSW

Workforce for Student Well-Being



Workforce for Student Well-Being in Washington State

School Mental Health Service Professionals (WA-SMHSP) Project Funded by the U.S. Department of Education

Eric Bruns, Ph.D. | Rachel Barrett, MSW
Vaughnetta J. Barton, MSW | Maddie Freeman, BA

Tuesday, December 5th, 2023 – Presentation to the 2023 Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health





Today's Agenda

Overview of the Workforce for Student Well-Being Project

- Problem definition
- WSW as a potential solution
- WSW goals

The WSW Mechanisms for change:

- Conditional scholarships and partnering with IHEs
- Overview of WSW Community of Practice
- Early data from inaugural cohort

WSW linked to broader initiatives:

- Comprehensive school mental health workforce strategy





Eric Bruns (*he/him*)

Associate Director, SMART Center
Professor, UW School of Medicine,
Dept. of Psychiatry and Behavioral
Sciences

INTRODUCING:

Eric Bruns PhD
ebruns@uw.edu

- Clinical Psychologist (Univ of Vermont, 1997)
- Former youth residential counselor, school MH therapist, and Wraparound care coordinator
- Now mostly a children's MH services researcher
- Leads SMART's Training and Technical Assistance Core
- Has helped develop and test multiple interventions in community and school settings
- Main professional goal: Assure children and youth have access to effective supports wherever they need them through research, training, workforce development, and policy



Vaughnetta J. Barton (she/her)

Assistant Director, Washington
State Behavioral Health Workforce
Development Initiative, University
of Washington School of Social Work

INTRODUCING:

Vaughnetta J. Barton, MSW
vjbarton@uw.edu

- Manages privately funded \$25m statewide initiative
- Administers publicly funded \$6m conditional scholarship program
- Specializes in administration and resource development
- Clinical assistant professor appointment
- Express Credit Union board director



Rachel Barrett (*she/her*)
Project Manager Workforce
for Student Well-Being Initiative,
University of Washington
SMART Center

INTRODUCING:

Rachel Barrett, LICSW
rbarrett@uw.edu

- Specializes in the treatment of externalizing behavior
- Served as agency leadership and Clinical Director for community mental health organizations
- Practicing therapist in schools for children with complex-psychiatric diagnosis
- Consultant with school districts on tier three mental health supports
- Affiliate professor at the UW School of Social Work, 2023 MSW Student's Choice Teaching Award



Maddie Freeman (*she/her*)
Graduate Research Assistant,
University of Washington School
of Social Work

INTRODUCING:

Maddie Freeman, BA
madfree@uw.edu

- Masters of Social Work and Public Health student at the University of Washington
- BAs in Psychology and Law & Justice from Central Washington University
- Works in inpatient and emergency child psychiatry and behavioral medicine
- Professional interests: Supporting the mental and behavioral health of students through policy development and program evaluation and implementation



WSW Overview

Washington ranks in the **lowest tier** among states for youth mental health.

“

A higher prevalence of mental illness...
And lower rates of access to care...

—Mental Health America, 2022

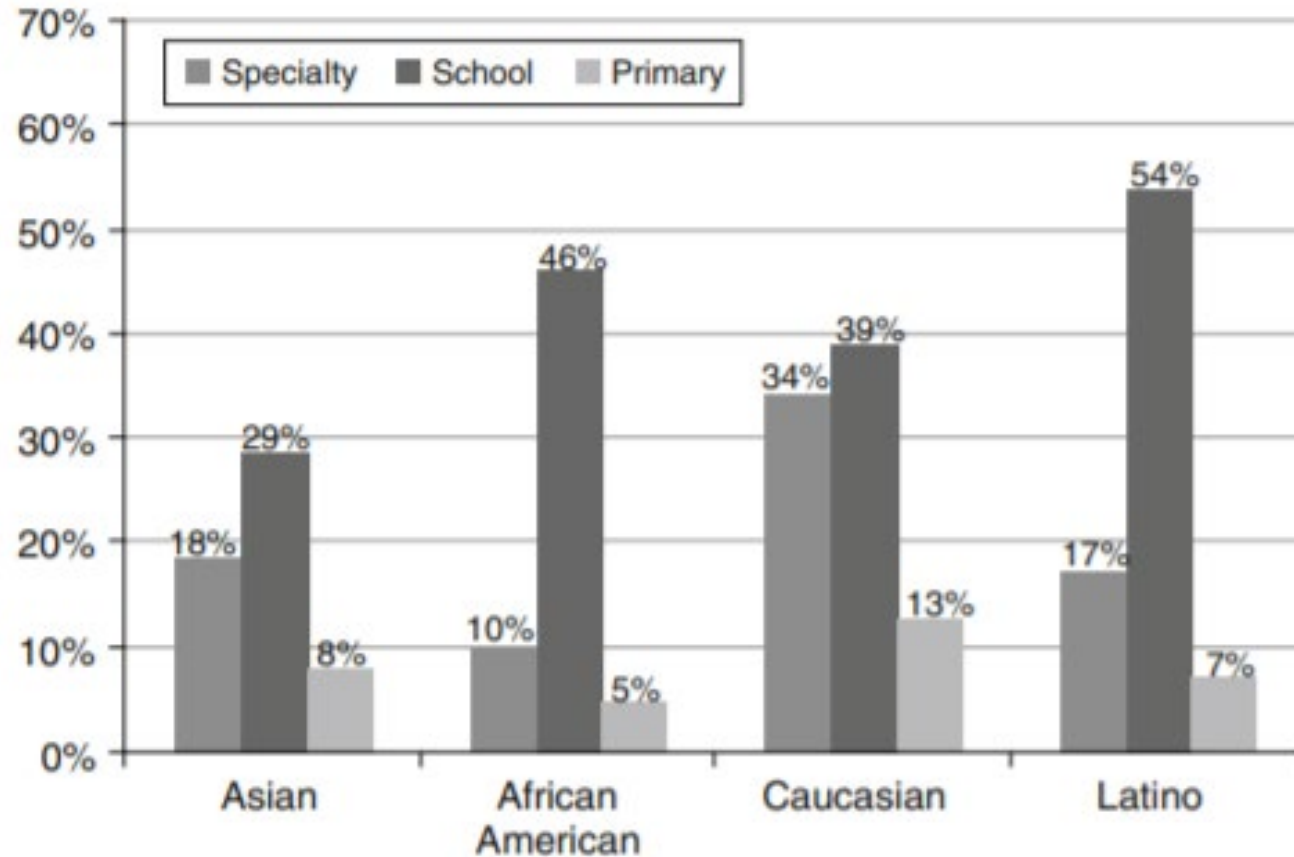


Schools Hold the Greatest Potential to Address the Youth Mental Health Crisis.



- Youth spend the majority of their awake hours in school
- Schools are the most common place where mental health care is delivered
- School staff connect with youth, notice when they are struggling, and do something about it
- They can also teach skills such as positive relationships, coping with difficult emotions, social media use
- We have effective strategies and programs across all the Tiers of support

Parent Reported Youth Access to Mental Health Services by Setting and Race



Lack of trained professionals is a barrier to the promise of school mental health.

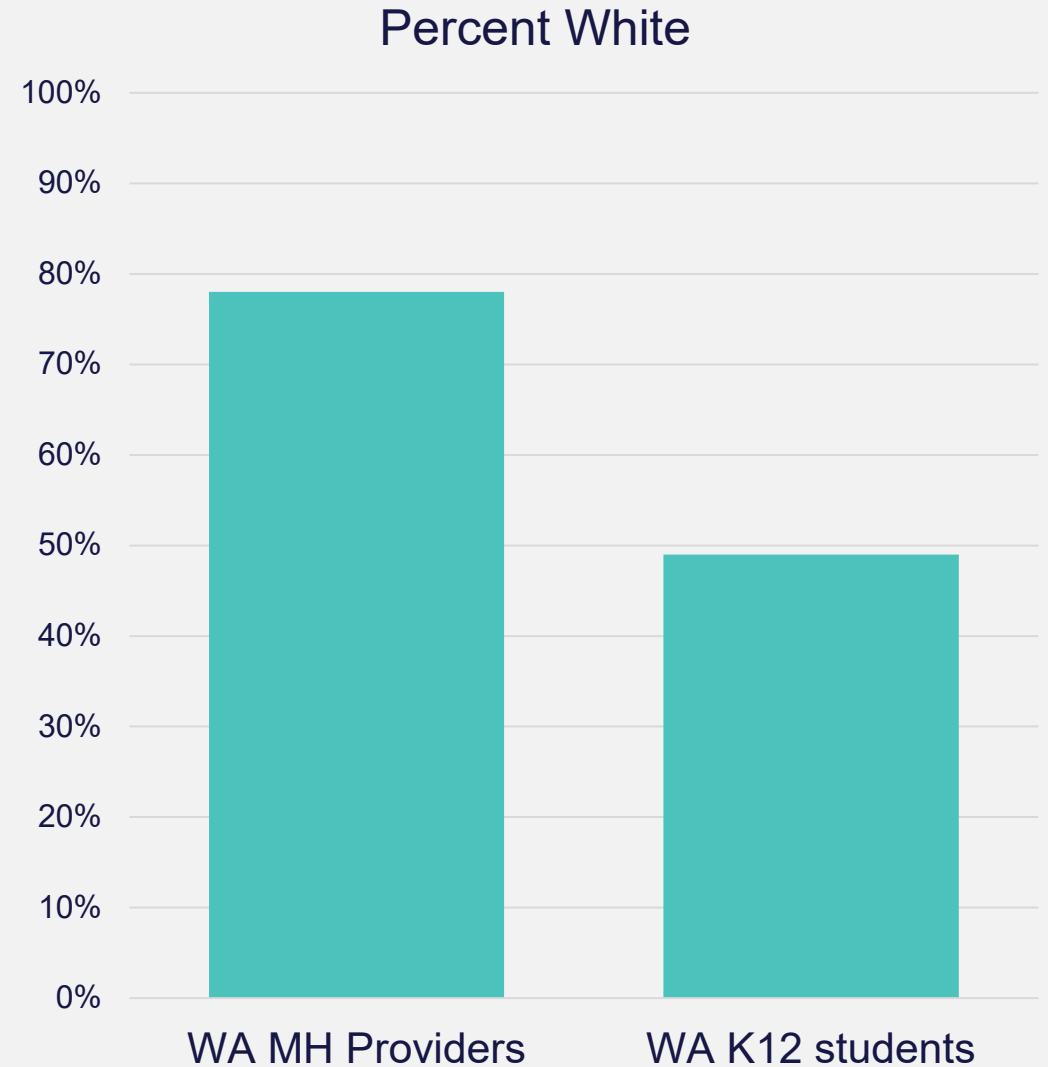
- Ratios of students to school mental health (SMH) professionals is far below recommended ratios
 - *WA State School Social Worker ratio is approx. 1 for every 12,000 students (less than 1/50th recommended level)*
- State legislation (HB1664) increased allocations to districts to hire school nurses, social workers, and psychologists
- ESSER has provided some funds to districts to supplement school MH
 - *Approaching a funding cliff*

There are language/cultural barriers to school mental Health.

Results of the state audit's survey of school representatives also identified "language and cultural barriers to seeking or using behavioral health services."

78% *of all Washington state mental health providers are white, compared to*

49% *of all Washington K-12 students*



WA State Behavioral Health Workforce Audit summarizes the problem...

Washington's mental health workforce is:

- Burdened by an unfavorable “student debt-to-salary” ratio that creates barriers to recruiting and retaining the best and brightest students, especially those with financial need
- Underprepared to work in schools in terms of their education, experience, and mentorship
- Difficult to recruit and retain in school districts where they are most needed most



School workforce needs more preparation. A comprehensive school MH plan provides:

- Behavioral health supports that cover the full continuum of intensities and needs
- From universal prevention through intensive interventions
- Screens students to identify those who need behavioral health supports and inform tier 1/prevention efforts
- Uses effective, efficient strategies & interventions
- Implements collaborative team approach that works across school, family and community organizations
- Facilitates data-driven decision-making



“

Scholars have concluded, and local and national survey data have validated, that over time SSW practitioners have routinely made practice choices that appear counter to what the evidence base indicates is sound practice.

– (Phillippo et al, 2017)

The need for more training and preparation for school social workers is well documented.

[We only had] two social work classes, and that was it. I would like some focus on school social work throughout....So it's not like, here is all the general stuff, then let's throw you to the school.

”

– Representative quote from study of School Social Worker preparation (Phillippo et al., 2017)



WSW is creating a pipeline for diverse, skilled school MH professionals using conditional scholarships.

We are currently focused on school social work.

We seek to expand to other school roles as well.

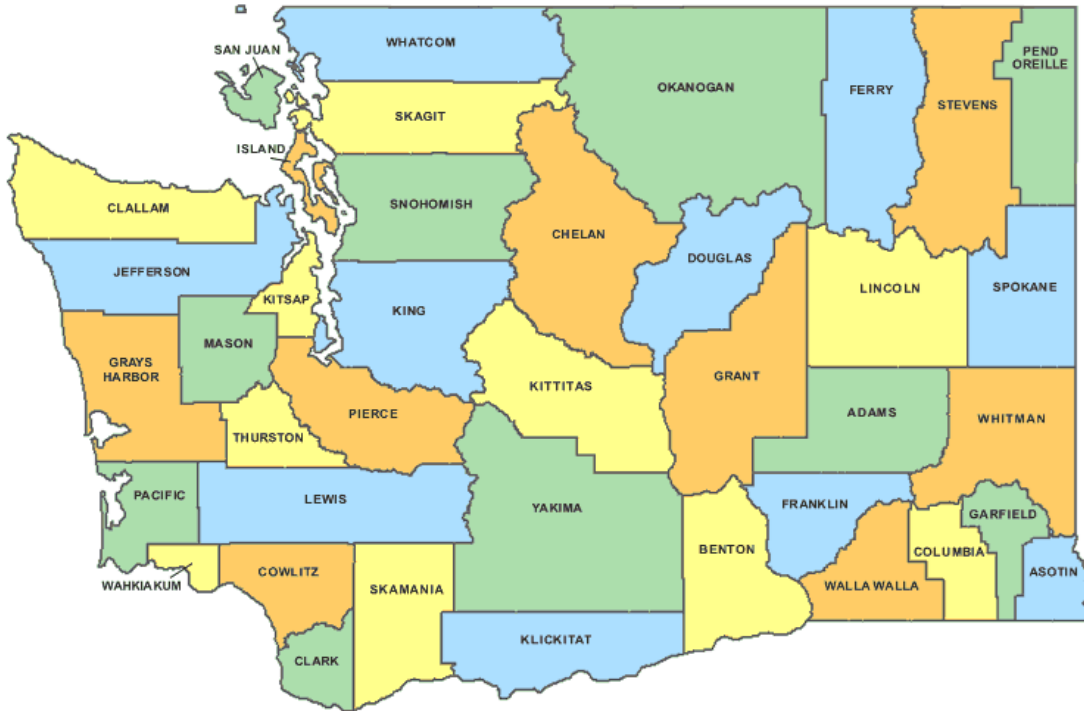


\$30,000 in conditional scholarships for 100 MSW students who have a declared passion for mental health.

Students with financial need (based on FAFSA), first-generation college, speak more than one language in the home. Criteria:

- In good standing at **one of the five schools of social work in Washington State**
- Participate in **50 hours of training**– called the Community of Practice (COP)
 - Twenty 90-minute sessions weekly between Oct-May
 - 12-hour State Educational Staff Associate(ESA) certificate
 - Networking opportunity at an annual WSW conference
 - Second-year practicum in a high-need school district
- **Commitment to 2 years** of employment in a high-need school district





The majority of WA School districts are “High Need.”

Criteria as per US Department of Education:

- *% of low-income students*
- *Data demonstrating need for mental health supports (e.g., climate, discipline, mental health screening, attendance)*

WSW is prioritizing districts and schools with Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) plans that include defined role(s) for School SWs and additional school mental health professionals.



The Main Problems

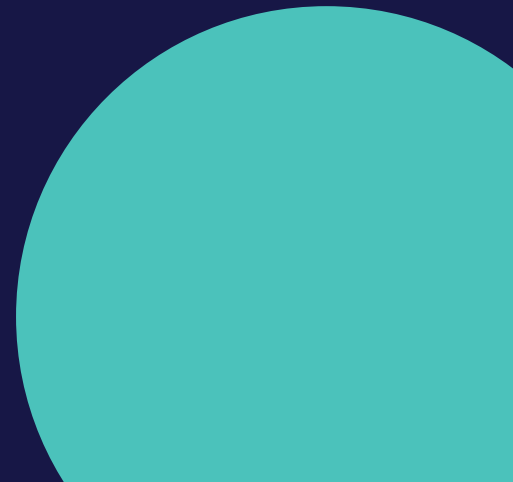
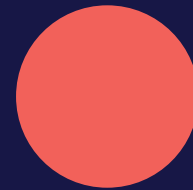
- Too few school mental health (SMH) providers
- Few schools adopt effective SMH practices
- Few SMHPs of color; language/cultural barriers to mental health services



Problem	WSW Initiative
Too few SMH providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 conditional scholarships • Practicum + 2 yrs. employ in high-need school
Few schools adopt effective SMH practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized training and a Community of Practice on effective SMH that complements SSW curriculum • Specialized practicum in high-need school district • Training/consult. for practicum sites • Stipends for field-based mentors
Few SMHPs of color; language/cultural barriers to MH services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize MSW students with financial need, first generation, and culturally diverse students for conditional scholarships

5

**What's happening each
year for the next five years?**





- Recruit and select Workforce for Student Well-Being students
- Develop WSW community of practice based shaped by currently practicing school mental health professionals



- Train students and support participating high-need school districts.
- Host annual retreat – students, faculty, collaborators, partners.



- Assure students are qualified, supported, and certified
- Conduct evaluation and ongoing continuous improvements.



- Integrate this project into a comprehensive WA State School Mental Health workforce strategy.





Conditional Scholarships

Conditional Scholarships



- Financial aid awarded in conjunction with a student's commitment to participating in training activities then two-years of post-graduation employment in a high-need school district to reduce students' debt-to-salary ratio
- *Child Welfare Training & Advancement Program*
- *Washington State Behavioral Health Workforce Development Initiative*



Diversify & Strengthen the Workforce



- Allows for strategic student-employee recruitment
- Reduces or eliminates student debt
- Creates closer alignment between student-training and employment
- Provides critical longitudinal workforce data
- Increases employee retention





Sole Wanderer Photography

Our University Partners

- Schools of Social Work across Washington
- Geographically diverse institutions
- Deans, directors, faculty, and staff
- Focused on student-diversity
- Innovative partners





Student Criteria



- 2nd Year/Advanced Standing Master of Social Work students
- Demonstrate a passion for school mental health
- Have a financial need and commitment to diversity
- Willing to actively participate in professional development activities
- Commit to training and working in a high-need K-12 public or tribal school





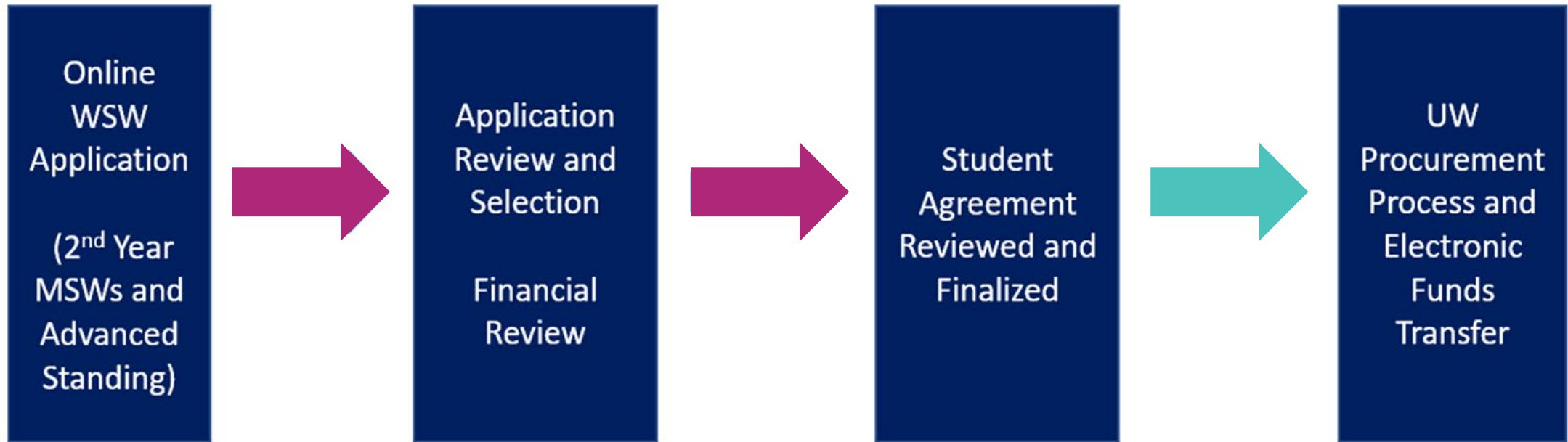
Key Program Elements



- Competitive application process
- Maximum \$30,000
- Final year of MSW program
- Contractual agreement
- 2-years post-graduation employment



Our Application Process





Community of Practice

A community of support
for practitioners who may
otherwise be isolated.

“

*Sometimes we just need reassurance
that we're doing okay. Am I doing the
right thing? Am I missing something?*

*—Representative quote from School SW
workforce study (Phillippo et al., 2017)*



WSW Community of Practice has Three Aims:

AIM #1:

Grow and expand on School Social Workers' knowledge base through 50 hours of training on effective school mental health systems and culturally relevant evidence-supported practices across the MTSS continuum to ensure all students can thrive.



WSW Community of Practice has Three Aims:

AIM #2:

Reduce School Social Workers' sense of isolation and improve retention by facilitating community-building, camaraderie and consultation/supports to enrolled graduate students and practicum/field instructors.



WSW Community of Practice has Three Aims:

AIM #3:

Support and invest in building a Washington State school social work labor force that reflects the communities they serve by centering and uplifting voices from historically marginalized communities, ensuring COP scholarship recipients receive targeted/ specific supports relative to their positionality and experiences (caucusing, mentorship opportunities)





WSW Community of Practice will further develop the workforce.

- Role definition and cross-discipline collaboration
- Creating a shared understanding of MH and inclusive practices within MTSS
- Assessment of district capacity and fidelity and action planning
- Selecting universal screening tools and overseeing their implementation
- Reviewing and selecting effective practices
- Suicide prevention, assessment, and safety planning



The WSW COP brings together practicum/field instructors and students in a COP with opportunities for students to practice and reflect on what they are learning. It combines didactic presentations from leaders in the field with experiential exercises.

WSW Community of Practice

The COP aims to be a place where students from across the state can build community and connections as they enter the field, culminating in an in-person retreat in May of 2024.



COP Content:

SESSION 1-10

School Social Work Frameworks and Systems: Assessment, Implementation and Monitoring for School and Student Change

Sessions 1-10 focus on examining the current state of school-based behavioral healthcare in Washington as well as the role of social workers.

Field instructors and students will receive didactic presentations from local/national experts on systems-level models for addressing school-based behavioral healthcare needs in a social work context.

Participants will learn skills in analyzing environments to determine needed supports and building/implementing requisite Washington MTSS systems and strategies.



COP Content:

SESSIONS 11-20

Innovations in Interventions across Tiers: Presenting Issues and Potential Solutions in School Social Work Practice

Sessions 11-20 focus on innovations and interventions related to common topics in school social work practice including small group and individual counseling interventions. All systems-level and individual/group models are grounded in evidence-based practices and viewed through a lens of race and equity. Participants will have access to training and implementation support from leaders in the field.



Who is the Community of Practice?

Practicum Field Instructors

- 13 Masters level field instructors
- School Social Workers, Counselors, Coordinators, and Therapists
- Graduated from 8 universities
- Varying lengths of time supervising MSW students (1- 23 years)
- No school social work scholarships were available to them



“

I want to support the learning in their classroom and integration in practice to see growth of their personal and professional identity. I want to challenge candidates with situations and conversations to work through potential barriers leading up to their completion of graduate school.

- Practicum Field Instructor, 2023-2024

Students

- 13 Masters students from 4 Institutes of Higher Education
- Average age is 28 years old (ranging from 21-40yo.)
- 30% BIPOC
- All identify as Women
- 46% low income/economically disadvantaged
- 1 Veteran and 1 single parent
- 30% first generation college students
- 53% have worked in schools before
- Average expected amount of debt from MSW degree: \$49,000



WSW Institutes of Higher Education and Local Education Agencies



Who is being served?

- 158,211 students
- 10 districts
- Primary, middle, and high schools
- Public and private
- Rural, suburban, and urban





Broader Initiatives



Comprehensive School Mental Health Workforce Strategy.

Federal Grants and Private Philanthropy demonstrate proof of concept and may catalyze state investment.

- Increase the number of school mental health professionals employed by districts and, in some cases employed, by ESDs/ CBHAs
- Increase the skills and diversity of these professionals
- Incentivize practicum instruction and clinical supervision
- Increase understanding of employment trends and retention needs



Washington School Mental Health Workforce Strategy

Recruit

Conditional scholarships for a diverse cohort of school ESAs-- double the size of the Department of Education grant (DOE).

100 additional ESAs from diverse backgrounds bringing the total to 200 ESAs recruited and placed in high-need school districts in the next five years.

Support IHEs in recruitment efforts with stipends.

Train

ESA certification is good, but not sufficient to train the next generation of school ESAs.

DOE is funding the development of a school mental health Community of Practice (COP) and annual conference.

Expand COP to include additional MSW students and practicum instructors who want to participate- develop certification on "best practices in school mental health.

Place

Employ MSW students in schools or, in school mental health agencies that place social workers in schools.

Conditional scholarship recipients must work for two years in high-need school districts.

License

Support ESDs in providing funding for clinical supervision for licensure for school social workers.

Develop high-need EBPs for use in school settings.

Retain

Ensure school-based social workers are compensated well for their work in schools both by community mental health agencies and by school districts

Loan forgiveness

Ensure there are opportunities for ongoing professional development and networking.

Implement EBPs in school settings, but must be based on a strong foundation of district-wide MTSS implementation.

State policy efforts need to be multi-pronged

- Establish a WA State definition of school social work (as done for school counselors via 5030)
- Expand Medicaid state plan to provide more flexible funds, adequate rates, and salaries for school mental health
- Increase number of conditional scholarships available
- Establish statewide BIPOC professional affinity groups
- Fund Districts to provide training and supervision of students in pipeline
- Fully fund legislation (HB1724) seeking to defray costs of supervision toward licensure
- Fund higher education programs to provide training in school mental health
- Set benchmarks and evaluate progress towards specific goals





Q&A

+Discussion