

International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

Contact mhuxtable@olympus.net

Electronic Newsletter November 2011

Editor: Marion Huxtable

New Initiatives for International Collaboration in School Social Work

Michelle Alvarez, Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU, M)

<mailto:michelle.alvarez@mnsu.edu>

As a former school social worker in Florida, school social work supervisor in Indiana, professor of social work at the University of Southern Indiana, and now on the faculty at Minnesota State University, I have come to appreciate numerous opportunities to advance the specialty of school social work. My experience in each state was very different. In Florida my school system had about 50 school social workers and the State had over 1,000. In Indiana there were approximately 300 school social workers across the state and only 10 within my school district. I found that, despite many differences between the school systems, the required skills and knowledge were the same.

I first began teaching school social work in 2000 in a school social work specialization at the University of Southern Indiana. Students completed a series of courses that included:

- An overview of school social work services
- Special education laws
- Social work with children and youth
- Administrative skills and
- 500 hours of internship in a school.

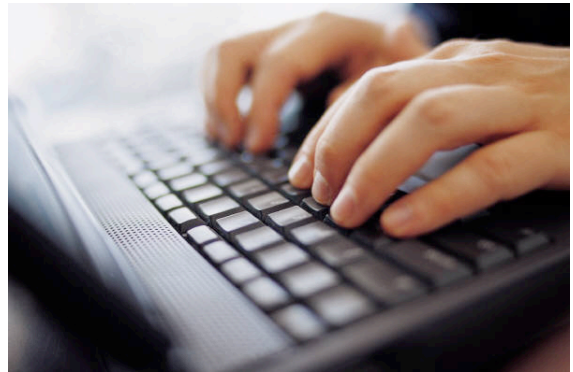
Not all schools of social work have such a specialization in school social work. For example at Minnesota State University (MSU, M) there was only a single elective school social work course available to students when I first arrived and this is more typical of universities. However, MSU, M has given me the latitude to develop more courses in school social work. I am in the process of developing an online certificate program in school social work with colleagues from universities across the United States. The specialization is being developed for students who are enrolled in a social work degree program at universities that do not offer school social work courses. This program, however, may not meet the need of school social workers working outside the United States.

While some countries such as the United States have a long history of school social work in schools, other countries have a more recent history of school social work services and they may lack training for the specialty. Despite many variations in the field of school social work, we have much that we can learn from each other. For example, these newsletters from the *International Network*

for *School Social Work* are one method of sharing information. I am always grateful for those of you who volunteer to share information about school social work in your country. The international conferences are another method of exchanging information about school social work, with the 5th International Conference being held April 10-13, 2012 in Ghana (<http://www.sswaghana.org/>).

I have tried to contribute as much to the interchange of information as I can. Over the past two years I have worked on the development of an International Journal of School Social Work (<http://www.ijssw.com/>). The process has been slow and we are hoping to have the first published articles in 2012. Please consider submitting an article for consideration. Both the submission process and the publication of the journal are electronic and we have a diverse panel of reviewers very willing to provide feedback on your submissions.

Over the past 2 years I have also been exploring the potential to develop some international online courses that would promote learning in the field of school social work and allow for the exchange of information regarding the field and the knowledge base across the world. It will be important that the course content not be based solely on what works in the US. Course content would need to vary to accommodate differences in culture, educational systems, welfare systems, and varied roles of the school social worker. The coursework would address the needs of school social workers from countries that have a long history of school social work and those just starting to provide school social work services. Content would address some common concerns to be addressed by school social workers such as school attendance, early school leaving, working with children with disabilities and crisis interventions. The benefit of an international online course is the opportunity to learn from participants from other cultures and countries, while all the course materials are at your fingertips in your computer. There are many creative options for ensuring development of a high quality course. One example is the potential for team-teaching by a professor from the US and one from another country. In order to begin the process of creating some online course opportunities, I am asking newsletter readers outside the United States to complete a survey so that I can gather information about your continuing education needs.



SURVEY

To complete an online survey about your interest in school social work courses please click on <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/schoolsocialwork> to complete the survey. The results of this survey are for informational purposes only and will not be published.

Looking beyond providing such a course, I also dream of an International Center for School Social Work that facilitates the exchange of information and support for all countries in the development and sustainability of school social work services. I will keep you updated on any progress towards my dream, but in the meantime, we all need to continue to seek methods of information exchange on behalf of students and families that we serve. I hope you will complete the survey if you have any interest in participating in promoting this international learning opportunity.