



School Based Mental Health Professionals in Wisconsin

March 2023

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

School Based Mental Health Professionals in Wisconsin

Developed by

Andréa Donegan

School Counseling Consultant
Student Services Prevention and Wellness

Julie Incitti

School Social Work Consultant
Student Services Prevention and Wellness

Tim Peerenboom

School Psychology Consultant
Student Services Prevention and Wellness

Louise Wilson

School Nursing Consultant
Student Services Prevention and Wellness



Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Jill K. Underly, PhD, State Superintendent

Madison, Wisconsin

This report is available from:

Student Services Prevention and Wellness
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster Street
Madison, WI 53703

<https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw>

March 2023

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, creed, age, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, marital status or parental status, sexual orientation, or ability and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
School Counselors	2
Overview	
Knowledge and Skills	
Tier 2 Provisional License	
Tier 1: One Year License with Stipulations	
Role in Schools	
Recommended Ratio	
School Nurses	5
Overview	
Knowledge and Skills	
Tier 2 Provisional License	
Role in Schools	
Recommended Ratio	
School Social Workers	7
Overview	
Knowledge and Skills	
Tier 2 Provisional License	
Tier 1 One Year License with Stipulations	
Role in Schools	
Recommended Ratio	
School Psychologists	10
Overview	
Knowledge and Skills	
Tier 2 Provisional License	
Tier 1: One Year License with Stipulations	
Role in Schools	
Recommended Ratio	
Credentialed Mental Health Providers	12
Overview	
Knowledge and Skills	
Tier 2 Provisional License	
Tier 1: One Year License with Stipulations	
Role in Schools	
Recommended Ratio	
General Informaiton on Licensing	14
References	15
Additional Resources	17

Introduction

School-Based Mental Health Professionals assist and strengthen schools and districts by providing comprehensive supports. These professionals work collaboratively to meet the many needs of students and staff with their unique skills, training, and expertise through a **team-based approach**. Collaboration, consultation, and direct services are provided within multi-level systems of support, which emphasize evidence-based interventions, data-based problem-solving practices, connecting families with resources, and equitable mental health services access and outcomes.

Education Requirements for School-Based Mental Health Professionals

School Counselors	School Nurses	School Social Workers	School Psychologists	Credentialed Mental Health Providers
Master's degree, with specialized coursework and practicum/ internship experience in school counseling.	Registered Nurse licensed by the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS)	Master's degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) approved program, with specific coursework and training in school social work practice.	Advanced graduate coursework and practical experiences relevant to both psychology and education. School psychologists typically complete either a specialist-level graduate degree program (at least sixty graduate semester hours) or a doctoral degree (at least ninety graduate semester hours), both of which include a year-long 1200 hour supervised internship.	Must follow a planned, sequenced mental health program, complete an internship or practicum, and pass all required state/national board exams.

School Counselors

Overview

Comprehensive school counselors serve as school based mental health professional leaders, advocates, and collaborators to help all students apply academic achievement strategies, regulate emotions, develop interpersonal skills, foster career readiness, and plan for postsecondary options and careers.

School counselors advocate for and deliver proactive and preventive programs, services, interventions and supports to meet the needs of students. Providing universal and targeted support is critical to meet the psychoeducational needs of students through classroom lessons and small group instruction on mental health and wellbeing, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, coping skills, college and career readiness and life skills necessary for academic, social emotional, and career success.

Serving as vital members of the education team, school counselors use data to design school counseling programs to improve student outcomes including increased student achievement, improved graduation rates, better attendance, reduced disciplinary referrals, completed individual learning plans, and increased student participation in the community (ASCA 2019).

School counselors recognize and remove systemic barriers to student success and promote equity and access for all students.

Collaboration and consultation with staff, families, community agencies and organizations are integral to school counselors' work in helping to create the environment, culture, opportunities, and resources that ensure all students succeed.

Knowledge and Skills

School counselors hold a master's degree, with specialized coursework and practicum/ internship experience in school counseling. School counselors demonstrate knowledge and skills in areas such as:

- knowledge of the history of school counseling, the American education system, and understanding the development trajectories of diverse learners;
- knowledge of established and emerging counseling and educational theories and methods and evidence-based techniques;
- assessing students' needs and identifying a range of school counseling techniques to meet those needs;

- utilizing digital literacy and technology tools to support the school counseling program and to track the academic, college/career, and social emotional development of all students;
- creating and implementing data-informed school counseling programs that positively impact student outcomes and promote educational equity and access;
- using pedagogical skills, collaborative strategies, and referral systems to support student learning;
- evaluating areas of strength and needed improvement for program activities and intervention;
- the role as a leader, collaborator, advocate, and agent for systemic change; and
- ethical and culturally responsive behavior and maintaining the highest standard of professionalism and legal obligation (ASCA 2022).

How to earn a...

Tier 2 Provisional License

- Complete an [approved program in Wisconsin](#) or a comparable state-approved program in another state.

Tier 1: One Year License with Stipulations

- If hired prior to completing an approved program, individuals may be hired while holding the [One Year License With Stipulations](#)
- The [DPI \(Department of Public Instruction\) licensing page for pupil services](#) provides information on the steps to becoming licensed as a school counselor in Wisconsin.

Role in Schools

Wisconsin school counselors provide direct and indirect services to support student academic, career, and social-emotional development based on Wisconsin's adopted Comprehensive School Counseling Model - the [ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs](#).

Direct student services include:

- School-wide school counseling classroom lessons based on the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success related to academic, social-emotional, and career development;
- Small group counseling;

- Conflict resolution;
- Individual student academic appraisal, planning and goal setting; and

Short-term counseling to students.

Indirect student services include consultation, collaboration, and referral:

- Referrals for long-term support;
 - Collaboration with families, educators, administrators, and community providers and agencies;
 - Advocacy for students at student-focused meetings, and school/district systems level;
 - Advocacy for systemic change when formal or informal policies and procedures negatively impact student success;
 - Leadership through crisis prevention and intervention services, school and district level committee participation and professional development training for staff and stakeholders on school counseling related topics; and
 - Data analysis to identify student issues, needs, and challenges. (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.)
- [The Role of the School Counselor](#)

Recommended Ratio

The national recommended ratio is 1:250 at all levels.

School Nurses

Overview

School nurses support the physical and mental health and educational success of children and youth by providing the link between health and learning. This document addresses the role of school nurses in students' mental health. All registered nurses receive training in mental health including the grief process. Nursing promotes wellness and does not separate mental health from physical health. School nurses are often the initial access point to identify concerns, determine interventions, and link students and families to school and/or community resources (NASN 2021a).

The school nurse is the bridge between health and education in the school setting, promoting positive behavioral health and using assessment skills to identify children at risk for behavioral health needs. School nurses, in collaboration with the interdisciplinary education team, provide critical links to prevention, early identification, intervention, and referral for behavioral/mental health concerns.

The school nurse is especially qualified to assess a student's health status and how it might be impacting mental health and ability to learn in the classroom. Some physical health conditions mimic the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions. Parents and medical providers may ask school nurses to monitor responses to pharmacotherapy.

Knowledge and Skills

School nurses are required to be a registered nurse licensed by the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) to practice professional nursing in Wisconsin. School nursing is a specialty, but specific training is not statutorily required other than a course in Public/Community Health.

How to earn a Tier 2 Provisional License

- Complete an [approved program in Wisconsin](#) or a comparable state-approved program in another state; OR
- Hold a [valid national certification](#) as a school nurse by the National Board for Certification of School Nurses.
- School nurses in Wisconsin are not required to hold a DPI School Nurse license. See: [School Nurse Definition, Licensure, and Certification](#)

Role in Schools

School nurses advance the well-being, academic success, and lifelong achievement and health of students. School nurses lead in the development of policies, programs, and procedures for the provision of school health services at an individual or district level. The school nurse supports student success by providing health care through assessment, intervention, and follow-up for all children within the school setting. The school nurse addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and social health needs of students and supports their achievement in the learning process.

Recommended Ratio

There is no evidenced based recommended ratio. To optimize student health, safety, and learning, it is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that every school-age child should have access to a registered professional school nurse all day, every day (NASN 2022). In addition to the number of students covered, staffing for school nursing coverage must include acuity, social needs of students, community/school infrastructure, and characteristics of nursing staff (NASN 2020).

School Social Workers

Overview

School social workers are trained mental health professionals who provide leadership and services to schools on multiple systems levels, including individual and group supports, policy and system improvements, and collaborations across systems (NASW 2012; Frey et al. 2013; SSWAA n.d.). School social workers engage an ecological framework to remove barriers and improve the fit between a student and their many environments, both supporting environmental conditions that foster growth and development and expanding individual strengths (NASW 2012). With a focus on relationship and community building, school social workers help students, families, colleagues, and systems leverage strengths, build resilience, and thrive (Frey et al. 2013).

School social workers take action to promote social justice and employ a trauma sensitive, culturally responsive lens to the work (SSWAA n.d.). Leaders in advocacy, ethical practice, collaboration, and innovation, school social workers maximize resources and create new coalitions (NASW 2012). School social workers support the learning and growth of colleagues through training facilitation, coaching, and consultation (Frey et al. 2013; SSWAA n.d.). School social work interventions reduce barriers to learning, especially those that stem from outside the school building, enabling students to be physically, mentally, and emotionally present and ready to learn in the classroom (NASW 2012; Frey et al. 2013; SSWAA n.d.).

Knowledge and Skills

School social workers receive a master's degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) approved program, with specific coursework and training in school social work practice. School social workers complete a practicum, or paid work experience, with a field supervisor to demonstrate competency in various areas of practice.

In addition to generalist social work coursework including psychopathology, social work theory and practice, human development, social policy, organizational leadership, and statistics, school social work graduate students demonstrate knowledge and skill in the school-setting specific to:

- social welfare and educational policy,
- social work values and ethics,
- social and economic justice and populations at risk,
- systematic assessment of individuals, families, schools, and community and their interactions,

- effective prevention and intervention with individuals, families, schools, and communities,
- human behavior and the social environment,
- diversity, and
- research (DPI 2006)
- [NASW Standards for School Social Work Services](#) describes National Practice Standards.

How to earn a...

Tier 2 Provisional License

- Complete an [approved program in Wisconsin](#) or a comparable state-approved program in another state; OR
- An applicant with a credential in social work from the Department of Safety and Professional Services, an MSW, and specific training (as outlined in [administrative rule PI34.040\(2\)\(k\)](#)) can [obtain a school social work license](#).

Tier 1: One Year License with Stipulations

If hired prior to completing one of the options above, individuals may be hired while holding the [One Year License With Stipulations](#)

- The [DPI licensing page for pupil services](#) provides information on the steps to becoming licensed as a school social worker in Wisconsin, including this [information bulletin on school social worker licensure](#).

Role in Schools

School social workers are a link between the home, school, and community in providing direct as well as indirect services to students, families, and school systems to promote and support students' academic and social success (NASW 2012; Frey et al. 2013; SSWAA n.d.). They help students assess strengths and needs to problem solve and remove barriers to learning, especially those that stem from outside of the school or arise from mental health challenges (NASW 2012; Frey et al. 2013; SSWAA n.d.). School social workers have a specific ethical obligation to serve students from the most vulnerable and marginalized groups (NASW 2012). In addition to supporting all students with barriers to learning or wellbeing, their work includes providing related services for students with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), conducting social developmental histories, and engaging families through home visits (SSWAA n.d.). School social workers act within and between multiple systems levels to provide a continuum of supports to students and systems with a focus on prevention and wellness promotion (NASW 2012).

Some examples include;

- Individual - support, resource connection and referral related to mental health challenges, truancy, pregnancy, disabilities, identity, suicidal ideation and self-harm, racism and oppression, out-of-home care, drug or alcohol use, family challenges, poverty and homelessness, delinquency, trauma, child abuse, human trafficking, crisis, advocacy, special education related services
- Group - grief and loss, trauma impacts, empowerment, leadership, students living with parental substance use or mental health challenges
- System - leaders, coaches, and advocates of school mental health system work, trauma sensitive schools including culturally responsive practices, compassion resilience for staff and organizations, whole-school attendance, behavior, and disciplinary practices, community collaborations, family engagement, pupil records and confidentiality, ethics and boundaries, and liaisons with professionals in child welfare and youth justice

Recommended Ratio

The national recommended ratio is 1:250 if working with general education students; if serving students with more intensive needs, a ratio of 1:50 is recommended (Frey et al. 2013).

School Psychologists

Overview

School psychologists are uniquely qualified members of school teams that support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. School psychologists apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior, to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They collaborate with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community (NASP 2021). This includes working directly with students, collaborating with teachers, families, administrators, and other mental health professionals to develop and provide supports and interventions at the individual, small group, classroom, school, and district levels.

Knowledge and Skills

School psychologists receive specialized advanced graduate coursework and practical experiences relevant to both psychology and education. School psychologists typically complete either a specialist-level degree program (at least sixty graduate semester hours) or a doctoral degree (at least ninety graduate semester hours), both of which include a year-long 1200 hour supervised internship (NASP 2021).

The National Association of School Psychologists provides national training standards organized within ten domains of school psychology practice (NASP 2020). Within these domains, school psychology graduate programs provide training including but not limited to:

- Data collection and analysis
- Assessment
- Progress monitoring
- School-wide practices to promote learning
- Resilience and risk factors
- Consultation and collaboration
- Academic/learning interventions
- Mental health interventions
- Behavioral interventions
- Instructional support
- Prevention and intervention services
- Special education services

- Crisis preparedness, response, and recovery
- Family-school-community collaboration
- Diversity in development and learning
- Research and program evaluation
- Professional ethics, school law, and systems (NASP 2021)

How to earn a...

Tier 2 Provisional License

- Complete an approved program in Wisconsin or a comparable state-approved program in another state; OR
- Hold a valid credential as a [Nationally Certified School Psychologist \(NCSP\)](#)

Tier 1: One Year License with Stipulations

- If hired prior to completing one of the options above, individuals may be hired while holding the [One Year License With Stipulations](#) , but only if the master's degree is school psychology is already earned and there is verification of enrollment in an approved program.
- The [DPI licensing page for pupil services](#) provides information on the steps to becoming licensed as a school social worker in Wisconsin.

Role in Schools

School psychologists provide direct support and interventions to students, consult with teachers, families, and other stakeholders to improve support strategies, work with school administrators to improve school-wide practices and policies, and collaborate with community providers to coordinate needed services. They help schools successfully:

- Improve Academic Achievement
- Promote Positive Behavior and Mental Health
- Support Diverse Learners
- Create Safe, Positive School Climates
- Strengthen Family-School Partnerships
- Improve School-Wide Assessment and Accountability
- Monitor individual student progress in academics and behavior (NASP 2021)

Recommended Ratio

The national recommended ratio is 1:500 (NASP 2020).

Credentialed Mental Health Providers

Overview

Credentialed mental health providers are professionals who engage in clinical or therapeutic services to individuals, families, and groups. While schools may contract with providers to engage in mental health services and consultation, mental health providers may not fulfill the responsibilities and job description for which a DPI license exists; for example, a licensed clinical social worker may not perform the role of a school social worker without a DPI school social work license.

Mental health providers work in collaboration with school staff and may or may not have an office on-site. Providers may collaborate with pupil service staff to run clinical groups, to consult with staff, ensure high quality care coordination, and to work with families.

Credentialed mental health providers include licensed psychologists, licensed professional counselors, licensed clinical and advance practice social workers, licensed substance abuse counselor, licensed marriage and family therapists, certified psychiatric clinical nurse specialists, qualified treatment trainees.

Knowledge and Skills

Mental health providers must follow a planned, sequenced mental health program, complete an internship or practicum, and pass all required state/national board exams. Providers must remain in good standing with the board, maintain continuing education, and maintain yearly credential renewal requirements. Most mental health programs are centered around core content areas:

- Human growth/development
- Human behavior
- Appraisal/assessment
- Counseling theories/methods
- Professional orientation/ethics
- Research and evaluation

Elective content areas come from the following: group dynamics, lifestyle and career development, social and cultural foundations, addiction, rehabilitation, children and adolescent, gerontology, human sexuality, crisis intervention,

marriage and family, clinical supervision, personality theories, consultation, physical and emotional health, grief, psychopharmacology.

Credential Training

Mental health providers in Wisconsin are credentialed through the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS). Information on each specific credential, training, and experience can be found at the [DSPS Website](#).

Role in Schools

Mental health providers work with students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members to enhance student mental health support. The mental health provider can be used within school settings in multiple ways; they can ensure high quality care coordination, conduct individual therapeutic interventions, small group psychotherapy interventions, and serve as members of mental health intervention teams within school settings to provide mental health knowledge and support. They serve on crisis prevention and intervention teams. They can provide professional development, coaching, and technical assistance to educators, families, and community stakeholders centered around prevention, mental health, and wellness. Mental health providers can also conduct clinical services with students in virtual or face-to-face settings.

Recommended Ratio

There is currently not a recommended ratio.

General Information on Licensing

A note about mental health navigators

Mental health navigators may or may not hold a DPI license, and they do not work directly with students.

General information about school employees and licenses

Local attorneys should be consulted on hiring licensed school staff and related policies.

- Each school district board shall certify annually that every teacher, supervisor, administrator, and other professional staff member has been issued a valid certificate, license or permit by the department for the position for which they are employed before entering on duties for such position and that a copy of the valid certificate, license, or permit is on file in the district. The board must also ensure that all instructional staff of charter schools located in the school district hold a department issued license or permit to teach at the level and in the subject of their assignments according to [WI Stats §118.19\(1\)](#) and [121.02\(1\)\(a\)](#), and administrative code [PI 8.01\(2\)\(a\)](#) and [PI 34](#).
- School counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers have different training, theoretical background, practice frameworks, and skill sets. To practice as any of these roles, an individual must have the appropriate license.

The Department of Safety and Professional Services should be contacted regarding questions about scope of practice related to any credentials issued through their agency.

- While private schools are not required to employ DPI licensed professional staff, no individual in the state of Wisconsin may use the title “social worker” unless they hold either a DPI school social work license or a credential in social work from the marriage and family therapy, professional counseling, and social work examining board ([Wis. Stat. § 457.04\[1\]](#)).
- A DPI license is not required to serve as a school nurse in Wisconsin. No registered nurse may use the title “school nurse” unless they hold a bachelor’s degree in nursing or have completed required coursework in public/community health ([Wis. Stats 115.001\[11\]](#)).

References

American School Counselor Association (ASCA). 2022. ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/573d7c2c-1622-4d25-a5ac-ac74d2e614ca/ASCA-Standards-for-School-Counselor-Preparation-Programs.pdf>

American School Counselor Association. 2019. The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs (4th ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Frey, Andy.J., Michelle E. Alvarez, David R. Dupper, Christine A. Sabatino, Brenda C. Lindsey, Jim C. Raines, Frederick Streeck, Anne McInerney, Molly A. Norris. 2013. School Social Work Practice Model. School Social Work Association of America. https://www.sswaa.org/files/ugd/486e55_47e9e7e084a84e5cbd7287e681f91961.pdf.

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). 2020. The Professional Standards of the National Association of School Psychologists. <https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/about-the-nasp-practice-model>.

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). 2021. "Who are School Psychologists?" <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/who-are-school-psychologists>.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW). 2012. "NASW Standards for School Social Work Services." <https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Practice-Standards-Guidelines>.

National Association of School Nurses. 2022. *Student access to school nursing services*. (Position Statement). Author. <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-access-to-services>

National Association of School Nurses. 2020. *School Nurse Workload* (Position Statement). Author. <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-workload>.

National Association of School Nurses. 2021a. *The Behavioral Health and Wellness of Students* (Position Statement). Author. <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-behavioral-health>.

Oklahoma State Department of Education (n.d.). "School-Based Mental Health Professionals in Oklahoma." Accessed February 21, 2022. <https://sde.ok.gov/documents/2021-06-28/school-based-mental-health-professionals-oklahoma>.

School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA). n.d. "Role of School Social Worker." Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://www.sswaa.org/school-social-work>.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). 2006. "Wisconsin Content Guidelines for School Social Worker (50) Licensure Programs Pupil Services Category". https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/tepd/tpdf/lpg_ps_50.pdf.

Additional Resources

National Association of School Nurses. 2021b. *Education, licensure, and certification of school nurses (Position Statement)*. Author.

<https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-education>