

Achievement of Learning Standards as Outcomes of Services

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In the book *Future Edge: Discovering The New Paradigms of Success*, author Joel Arthur Barker defines a paradigm as a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things; it establishes or defines boundaries, and tells you how to behave within the boundaries in order to be successful. (1) The paradigm of school social work standards and practices is under review by two independent committees made up of nationally recognized school social work colleagues. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) School Social Work Section Steering Committee (SSWSSC) selected eleven NASW members to revise the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services. As reported in *The Section Connection* (2001), the group consensus was that the standards need a “tweaking” rather than a major renovation. (2) As comprehensive as the current standards package may seem, the group’s conclusion about reforms needed are questionable in view of reforms occurring in the field of education. The updated NASW Standards for School Social Work Services were approved by the NASW Board of Directors, June 2002. (3) These standards guide the means or “how to’s” of the profession.

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) also selected a committee in 2001 to review its standards and practices. The SSWAA committee has two objectives: 1) to address mental health issues in schools related to standards and practices (which will be formalized), and 2) to address the linkage between school social work and student achievement and learning. Mental health issues are included in this linkage. The work of this committee continues to evolve.

This article was prepared to bring attention to terms being used to describe the paradigm within school social work services and to address the unwritten relevance of learning standards to the profession. Learning standards govern much of the direction instructional programs take in classrooms today. They describe the outcomes or “what to’s” of student achievement. Teachers are held accountable for the scores students achieve resulting from classroom instruction provided in the content areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and other academic areas. Learning standards are also relevant to school social work practice. Recognizing this connection serves to directly link services from home, school and the community together in support of student learning. Learning standards can serve as a medium or focal point that can define the linkage to support student learning. Recognizing the connection between school social work services and student learning can broaden the paradigm that underlies the rules and boundaries for the school social work profession.

Definition of Learning Standards

The emphasis on learning standards varies by school district across the country. In 1999 the Green Bay Area Public School District adopted learning standards as part of the district’s curriculum. A **standard** is defined as an expectation that indicates what students should be able to understand or do. **Standards** include **content standards** and **process or life-long learning standards**. A **content standard** refers to expectations in a specific subject area. **Process or life-long learning standards** are defined as content-free standards that apply across subject areas. **Process or life-long learning standards** include **complex thinking standards** (e.g.,

reasoning), **communication standards** (e.g., expressing ideas), **group-related standards** (e.g., group dynamics), and **self-directed learning standards** (e.g., restraining impulsivity).

A **benchmark** breaks a standard down into appropriate grade level competencies or steps. **Performance assessment tasks** include experiential or realistic application of knowledge and skills. **Rubrics** describe various levels of performance or expectations (e.g., as measured by a Likert scale of 1 = excellent to 4 = needs remedial assistance). (4)

Learning standards define the desired **outcome** levels that students should achieve from participating in the classroom instruction. These standards, especially the process standards, can also be thought of as outcomes for students resulting from the collaborative services provided by school social workers in conjunction with other school colleagues. A student who learned relaxation strategies through role playing in a meeting with a school social worker is likely to concentrate better in academically challenging situations. School social workers have a wide range of methods to measure such outcomes and accountability in practice. For this discussion it is sufficient to define **standards** or expectations as starting points for beginning to address how school social work services can support student learning. Extending school social work standards and practices to include learning standards will make more apparent the relevance of our services to enhancing student performance. The increased visibility of our services and direct planning with school staff enhances the efficiency of team efforts.

Linking Practice and Learning Standards Together

In 1978 the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) published a set of standards publicly for the emerging specialty area known as School Social Work. Those standards were critical to this author's acceptance into a new academic program offered by the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay: The Accomplished Educator Professional Development Certificate (PDC) program. The PDC is a standards-based, job-embedded professional development program designed to meet a demand from educators and school district personnel for a responsive and practical structure for continuing professional growth and improving student learning.

As a participant in the PDC program, the author was required to review professional standards in place for school social workers. The *NASW Standards for School Work Services* were determined to be consistent with core propositions that guide the PDC program, which originated from standards defined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The PDC core propositions also included education standards established by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The attached chart compares standards for teachers (NBPTS and Wisconsin's state education standards), school social workers (NASW Standards for School Social Work Services), and students (Green Bay Area School District Learning Standards) and demonstrates consistency across these areas. For example:

- NBPTS Standard #1.A states: Teachers recognize individual differences in their students and adjust their practices accordingly.
- Wisconsin's Standard #2 states: The teacher understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.

- NASW's Standard #5 states: School social work services shall be extended to students in ways that build students' individual strengths and offer students maximum opportunity to participate in the planning and direction of their own learning experiences.

The language describing each of these standards speaks to educators from different disciplines whose work focuses on helping achieve successful outcomes for students. Teachers operate within the classroom, whereas most school social work services are provided outside the classroom environment. Teachers use lesson plans to guide classroom instruction; school social workers use case planning to guide their implementation of services. Members of both professions use assessment, consultation, and referral directed at assisting students and families to become more self-sufficient. Both professions rely on the artful practice known as "Use of Self" to model and communicate ideas for making progress collaboratively with students and their families. Teachers recognize "teachable moments" as times to reinforce lessons students have "heard." School social workers focus on the positive aspects during a time of crisis to communicate that tragedy, while painful, offers an opportunity for healing and growth. The efforts of both professions seek to assist students to develop their capabilities to become self-directed learners. The professional efforts of both are conducted under the common umbrella of the educational paradigm. Learning standards define the ends to the means each profession has taken in promoting positive outcomes for students.

School social work services can be presented in ways that support and enhance student achievement. The services provided often have a direct impact on the process learning standards in the Green Bay School District Learning Standards (see attachment). For example, if a school social worker helps a student better express their feelings to others about teasing he or she may be experiencing, the school social worker has contributed to the self-directed learning standard by helping the student achieve a critical thinking skill, i.e., Takes a position when the situation warrants it.

Outcomes of school social work services can be recorded and demonstrated through utilizing outcome measurement strategies described by Nic Dibble (1999)(5). In some action research group work projects, student's progress can be reported as rubric scores just as teachers assess students in the classroom in content areas. The key is to focus on the definition of expectations and terminology within the framework of district guidelines. When conducting casework services like consultation, the implementation must include the functional facts of how, when, where, what, and who. Presenting the child-focused social work services as parallel to instructional strategies is also essential. A focus on the differences in orientations will produce conflict and impede collaborative efforts to connect personalities from home, school, and the community relationship systems.

Conclusion

Use of terminology like learning standards may be new to school social workers, but our services have contributed to the achievement of process learning standards throughout the evolution of the profession. This internal model of practice is unique to the specialty of school social work. The connection may be overlooked by social work educators who have not practiced in school settings for some time and by colleagues in community agencies. Including learning standards as part of school social work practice can add to productivity and yield measurable outcomes in terms of student achievement. These connections can be referenced through case lists and other documentation that are part of education management procedures.

Addressing learning standards as part of the school social work services can illustrate the consultative and collaborative processes school social workers offer within buildings.

Programs such as the Professional Development Certificate at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay can help educators anchor their work in the context of national, state, professional association, and local school district standards. School social workers have a viable contribution to make during this time of education reform and perhaps a leadership role to assume when connecting the school, home, and community together in support of student achievement.

References

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COMPARING STANDARDS FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS (NBPTS-2002)	WISCONSIN STATE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS (2002)	NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (NASW) STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS (2002)	GREEN BAY AREA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT LEARNING STANDARDS (1999)
<p># 1 Teachers are committed to students and their learning</p> <p>A. Teachers recognize individual differences in their students and adjust their practices accordingly.</p> <p>B. Teachers have an understanding of how students develop and learn.</p> <p>C. Teachers treat students equitably.</p> <p>D. Teacher’s mission extends beyond the cognitive capacity of their students.</p> <hr/> <p># 2 Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.</p> <p>A. Teachers appreciate how knowledge in their subjects is created, organized, and linked to other disciplines.</p> <p>B. Educators command specialized knowledge of how to convey a subject to students.</p> <p>C. Teachers generate multiple paths to knowledge.</p>	<p># 2: The teacher understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.</p> <hr/> <p># 1. The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the matter meaningful for students.</p> <p>#4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students’ development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.</p> <p># 5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self motivation.</p> <p># 6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.</p>	<p># 5: School social work services shall be extended to students in ways that build students’ individual strengths and offer students maximum opportunity to participate in the planning and direction of their own learning experience.</p> <hr/> <p>#13. School social workers shall incorporate assessments in developing and implementing intervention and evaluation plans that enhance student’s abilities to benefit from educational experiences.</p> <p># 18. School social workers shall understand the backgrounds and broad range of experiences that shape students’ approaches to learning.</p> <p>#20. School social workers shall possess knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community.</p> <p># 4. School social workers shall ensure that students and their families are provided services within the context of multicultural understanding and competence that enhance families support of students’ learning experiences.</p> <p>#5. School social work services shall be extended to students and their families that build students’ individual strengths and offer students maximum opportunity to participate in the planning and direction of their own learning experiences.</p>	<p>SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING STANDARDS</p> <p>Self-Regulated Thinking</p> <p>Is aware of own thinking Makes effective plans Is aware of and uses necessary resources Is responsive to feedback Evaluates the effectiveness of own actions</p> <p>Critical Thinking</p> <p>Is accurate and seeks accuracy Is clear and seeks clarity Is open-minded Restraints impulsivity Takes a position when the situation the situation warrants it Is sensitive to the feelings and level of knowledge of others</p> <p>Creative Thinking</p> <p>Engages intensely in tasks even when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent Pushes the limits of own knowledge and abilities Generates, trusts, and maintains own standards of evaluation Generates new ways of viewing a situation</p> <p>GROUP LEARNING RELATED STANDARDS</p> <p>Works toward the achievement of group goals for the purposes of</p>

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			learning effectively uses interpersonal skills while learning. Contributes to group dynamics for purposes of learning. Effectively performs a variety of roles while learning.
<p># 3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.</p> <p>A. Teachers call on multiple methods to meet their goals.</p> <p>B. Teachers orchestrate learning in group settings.</p> <p>C. Teachers place a premium on student engagement.</p> <p>D. Teachers regularly assess student progress, helping students to learn to evaluate their own progress and make improvements in how they learn.</p> <hr/> <p># 4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.</p> <p>A. Teachers systematically record and construct meaning of their teaching experiences for the purpose of developing good judgment.</p> <p>B. Teachers seek and reflect upon the advice of others.</p> <p>C. Teachers draw on educational research and scholarship to improve their practice.</p>	<p># 7. The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge, subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.</p> <p># 8. The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner.</p> <hr/> <p># 9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others, (parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.</p>	<p>#2. School social workers shall organize their time, energies, and workloads to fulfill their responsibilities and complete assignments of their position with due consideration of the priorities among their various responsibilities.</p> <p># 23. School social workers shall be able to select and apply empirically validated or promising prevention and intervention methods to enhance students' educational experiences.</p> <hr/> <p># 3. School social workers shall provide consultation to the local education personnel, school board members, and community representatives to promote understanding and effective utilization of school social work services.</p> <p># 24. School social workers shall be able to evaluate their practice and disseminate the findings to consumers, the local education agency, and the profession.</p>	<p>SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING STANDARDS</p> <p>Self-Regulated Thinking</p> <p>Is aware of own thinking Makes effective plans Is aware of and uses necessary resources Is responsive to feedback Evaluates the effectiveness of own actions</p> <p>Critical Thinking</p> <p>Is accurate and seeks accuracy Is clear and seeks clarity Is open-minded Restrains impulsivity Takes a position when the situation the situation warrants it Is sensitive to the feelings and level of knowledge of others</p> <p>Creative Thinking</p> <p>Engages intensely in tasks even when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent Pushes the limits of own knowledge and abilities Generates, trusts, and maintains own standards of evaluation Generates new ways of viewing a</p>

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<p>D. Teachers refine and expand their vision and mission for teaching based on reflections about their practice, their collaboration with colleagues, and results demonstrated in their students' learning performance.</p>			<p>situation</p> <p>GROUP LEARNING RELATED STANDARDS</p> <p>Works toward the achievement of group goals for the purposes of learning Effectively uses interpersonal skills while learning Contributes to group dynamics for purposes of learning Effectively performs a variety of roles while leaning</p>
<p># 5: Teachers are members of learning communities.</p> <p>A. Teachers contribute to school effectiveness by collaboration with other professionals.</p> <p>B. Teachers work collaboratively with parents.</p> <p>C. Teachers take advantage of community resources.</p> <p>D. Teachers seek to create learning communities within their classrooms.</p> <p>E. Teachers help develop a self -renewing school culture with shared decision making and a dedication to continuous improvements.</p>	<p># 10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support student learning and well-being.</p>	<p>#14. School social workers, as systems change agents, shall identify areas of need that are not being addressed by the local education agency and community and shall work to create services that address these needs.</p> <p># 25. School social workers shall possess skills in developing coalitions at the local, state, and national levels that promote student success.</p> <p>#26. School social workers shall be able to promote collaboration among community health and mental health services providers and facilitate student success to these services.</p>	

