

State of Minnesota
Board of Social Work
2829 University Ave SE, Ste 340
Minneapolis, MN 55414-3239

Telephone 612.617.2100
social.work@state.mn.us
www.socialwork.state.mn.us
Fax 612-617-2103
Toll Free 888-234-1320
TTY 800-627-3529



Summary of Reports and Recommendations To the Legislature From the Minnesota Board of Social Work December 15, 2008

Contact Information:

Kate Zacher-Pate, LSW
Executive Director
2829 University Avenue SE #340
Minneapolis MN 55414
612.717.2110
kate.zacher-pate@state.mn.us

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2007 Legislative Mandate and Board Study Process

The 2007 Legislature required the Board to ***“study and make recommendations to the legislature by December 15, 2008, on how to increase the numbers of licensed social workers serving underserved communities and culturally and ethnically diverse communities. The study shall also explore alternative paths to licensure that does not include a standardized examination.”*** (Minnesota Session Laws 2007 – Chapter 123 Statute 2007)

The study was occasioned by the perception that there are populations in Minnesota that receive less social worker service than needed. A reason some populations are underserved is that there are too few same-demographic social workers and the licensing process, particularly the national licensing examination, may be contributing to the lack of service.

A Board committee comprised of Board members, Board staff, and representatives from social work associations and the community began working on the mandate in September 2007, meeting monthly over the past 14 months. The Board took final action to approve the reports, executive summaries, and committee recommendations at its November 21, 2008 meeting, and respectfully submits these documents to the Legislature. Please refer to the attached reports and executive summaries for complete information.

The Board wishes to extend its sincere appreciation to the volunteer committee members and researchers who provided insight and expertise in the development and execution of the research, study, and recommendations.

First Report: “Identification of the Numbers of Persons Licensed as Social Workers Serving Underserved Communities and Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Communities”

The research and report named above, addressing the first portion of the mandate was completed pro bono by Dr. Christine Black-Hughes, Ph.D., LICSW, and assisted by graduate student, Yong-Seuk Park. *

*Dr. Christine Black-Hughes, Associate Professor, Social Work Department, Minnesota State University-Mankato, and Yong-Seuk Park, Minnesota State University-Mankato, Geography Graduate Student

Methodology:

The definition of “underserved” for the purpose of this report was defined as geographical communities, ethnic populations, aging populations, low income populations, and homeless populations.

The methodology used in this study was an analysis of archived records and data, geographical methodology, and statistical methodology. The information gathered includes the number of county social workers (licensed and non-licensed county workers); U.S. Census Bureau 2000 data, including population, ethnicity, household income, and the aging population; Minnesota Demographics’ data; Minnesota Department of Education data, specifically languages spoken by district; public information from the Board’s licensee database (including employment addresses of LSW, LGSW, LISW, and LICSW licensees); Minnesota Merit System’s employment database; Minnesota Non-Merit counties’ employee databases; and Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) client database. These databases were then compared to the Minnesota State Demographic Center’s population, racial, and income databases and the Minnesota School Association language database.

The geographical methodology involved analysis employing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) by first identifying the number of licensees by county. This study established a baseline of practicing licensees in relation to specific population groups or geographical areas in order to discover the locations of the social work underserved populations and geographical areas. A comparison was then made of distribution of social workers to recommended caseload ratios.

Key Findings:

Distribution of Licensees per 87 Minnesota Counties: As of 2007, the total number of licensees (LSW, LGSW, LISW and LICSW) is 10,068. Of this total:

- 5% of counties in the state have 100 or more persons licensed as social workers.
- 95% of counties have fewer than 49 graduate degreed licensed social workers.
- 24% of counties have fewer than 25 graduate degreed licensed social workers.
- 72% of counties have zero graduate degreed licensed social workers.
- 60% of counties have fewer than 49 bachelor degreed licensed social workers.
- 100% of counties have bachelor degreed licensed social workers.

Ethnicity and Shortage of Licensees: As of 2007, of the total number of licensees:

- Less than 5% of licensees report as members of an ethnic group.
- 83% of all licensees reporting as members of an ethnic group are in the 11 County Metro area.
- 17% of all licensees reporting as members of an ethnic group are in Greater and Rural Minnesota.
- 86% of licensees report as Caucasian.
- 9.4% of applicants and licensees do not report ethnicity.

Child Safety and Permanency Shortages: While a reduction in caseloads has occurred in all of the 87 counties:

- 14 counties in Greater and Rural Minnesota still have higher caseload sizes than recommended by the Child Welfare League.

- Of these 14, the largest ratios are in 4 counties, with ratios above 45 clients to 1 licensee, or non-licensed county worker.

Licensed School Social Work Shortage: According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2007):

- A total of 828,241 students were registered in the 505 school districts.
- 154,676 students in 246 school districts, or 19%, did not have access to an on-site licensed school social worker.
- The shortage is larger in public schools in Greater and Rural Minnesota.
- In the 11 Metro counties the need appears to be more significant in private and charter schools.

Other Fields of Practice: The shortage of licensees working with people with physical or cognitive impairments, with mental illness, aged 65 and older, living in poverty, or homeless are also areas of concern. It is not possible to provide a recommended caseload ratio regarding these populations; however, the Department of Human Services (2007) stated that the overall ratio should be 30 clients to 1 licensee, or 15 families to 1 licensee.

- Minnesota caseload sizes are at a ratio greater than the national average and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' recommendations.
- It is estimated that the state has 98,000 adults and 75,000 children who suffer from mental illness (1 out of every 29 residents). There are 69 counties with a ratio of 1,000 mentally ill residents to 1 licensee, with 61 of these counties in Greater and Rural Minnesota.
- In 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau identified 594,266 individuals aged 65 or older, and this number is estimated to be 677,270 in 2010. There are 52 counties in Greater and Rural Minnesota that have a ratio of 100 or more people aged 65 or older to 1 licensee.
- There are reported to be 380,476 people who live in poverty, 2,726 children who are homeless with their parents, and 1,951 children who are affected by a parent's homelessness in Minnesota.

Second Report: "Final Report on Alternative Paths to Licensure for the Minnesota Board of Social Work"

The research and report named above, addressing the second portion of the mandate, was completed by Lindsey Alexander, MPP, and William Johnston, MA.* The Board engaged in a Request for Proposal (RFP) process and awarded the contract, not to exceed \$10,000, to Lindsey Alexander Consulting.

Methodology:

The researchers conducted a review of the landscape, which entailed a literature review and interviews with professionals in programs or organizations of interest.

In addition, two surveys were developed. The first electronic survey was sent to Association of Social Work Board (ASWB) members. The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) is the association of boards that regulate social work. ASWB develops and maintains the social

*Lindsey Alexander, MPP, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; William Johnston, MA, PhD Candidate

work licensing examinations used across the country and in several Canadian provinces, and is a central resource for information on the legal regulation of social work. The survey to ASWB members was conducted to determine how various agencies manage social work licensing and what potential licensing alternatives were being implemented.

The second electronic survey gathered qualitative data regarding social work competencies and asked potential respondents to think of three social workers who, in their opinion, have the requisite social work knowledge, skills, and values to be an effective social worker. In addition, competency standards identified in the following sources were analyzed: College of St. Catherine and University of St. Thomas evaluation of MSW student foundation and clinical practicum; *Professional Development and Practice Competencies in Clinical Social Work*, by the American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work; and the Council on Social Work Education, *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*.

Key Findings:

Need to Better Define the Problem: The problem of under-representation of underserved populations of both the workforce and clients is a perceived, but not well-documented problem. The concerns have spawned not only two previous studies in the state of Minnesota, but were also stated as concerns by 9 of 14 agencies responding to the survey on the ASWB listserv. Further documentation and definition of the problem itself will help to illuminate and refocus the solutions.

Possible Solutions: If the problem is correctly defined, then two paths to a solution can be considered. One solution is to give candidates more support in using traditional licensing procedures. The other solution is to develop alternative procedures.

Existing Alternatives to Demonstrate Licensing Competence:

- **Texas:** For ten years the state of Texas has used a portfolio assessment process and on-site supervision as an alternative path to licensure for applicants who come very close to passing the ASWB exam, but are unable to achieve a passing score.
- **NCLEX:** NCLEX is the licensing examination administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). In April 2003 NCSBN added alternative items to their computer administered test. These alternative items are “examination items, or questions that use a format other than standard, four-option, multiple-choice items to assess candidate ability.”
- **Alberta, Canada:** Alberta may have the most aggressive program for supporting candidates in earning their licenses through traditional paths. The province has allocated \$1.4 million to establish additional support systems in the medical professions for immigrants or others with qualifying degrees who lack the requisite test-taking skills in English. The program is new as of July 2008 and has 100 foreign-trained professionals enrolled.
- **Minnesota Department of Education:** Education is another field with experience in provisional licensing. Certified school districts are required to demonstrate that “reasonable efforts have been made to assign existing staff to fill the position with a fully-licensed teacher” and that no other fully-licensed teachers are available. Provisional licenses are granted for a period of one academic year and are renewable on a year-to-year basis, pending need for specific positions. Experienced professionals in the St. Paul

Public Schools Resource Department note that teachers with alternative licenses require strong peer support systems in their first two years of teaching; it is a highly supervisor-intensive process. No research on the effectiveness of provisionally-licensed teachers compared to traditionally-licensed teachers was found to have been published.

- **Licensing Does Make a Difference:** Professional literature reviews indicate licensing makes a difference for groups and institutions. If an institution is licensed, the public is usually guaranteed better access to ancillary services which are correlated with long-term successful outcomes. For individuals, licensing tends to reveal knowledge and academic background. Licensed individuals are also more likely to be involved in ongoing professional development. No research was found addressing whether academic background and ongoing professional development were correlated with successful case outcomes. However, some studies have shown that licensed professionals may develop longer lasting relationships with their clients. Another area in which licensing has been demonstrated to show differences is in cultural sensitivity. Licensing examinations with appropriate multicultural measures do effectively predict who will show more cultural sensitivity in the workplace.

Board of Social Work Recommendations

Development of Recommendations: Recommendations were compiled based on key points and common themes taken from:

- Discussion at Board Licensing Study Committee (LSC) meetings;
- Proposals by researchers, Christine Black-Hughes, PhD, LICSW, and Lindsey Alexander Consulting; and
- Proposals from a sub-committee of the LSC, called by the Chair.

The committee recognized very quickly that the Board's charge was very complex, such that proposed solutions may be outside of the Board's mission and authority, or even involve groups and agencies at the local, state, and national level. The proposed recommendations include action items to be conducted by the Board within its mission and authority, increased collaboration and education with stakeholder groups, and further study.

Recommendation #1: Introduce Legislative Proposal to Reduce Licensing Fees

1. The Board will propose a fee reduction in its FY 2010 and FY 2011 biennial budget to help reduce potential financial barriers to licensing and increase the social work workforce statewide. The Board is taking this initiative to reduce potential barriers to applicants and licensees, while being fiscally responsible. The Board will continue to fulfill its mission of ensuring public protection to the residents of Minnesota.

Recommendation #2: Implement Increased Data Collection Efforts

1. The Board will implement the following improved data collection procedures:
 - a. Collect data on licensee employment sector and setting.
 - b. Provide an easy access survey to all applicants to obtain feedback regarding the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) examination experience. This survey

would be sent at the time the notice of pass/fail examination results are sent from the Board and should include an incentive.

- c. Provide information in the application for licensure materials to encourage applicants to report ethnicity, which is optional. This data will aid in better identification of our workforce, including the development of a more diverse workforce and improved services to underserved populations.
 - d. Conduct further analysis of ASWB pass/fail data and collaborate with other social work regulatory agencies, ASWB, and American College Test (ACT) to obtain and analyze pass/fail data.
2. The Board will work collaboratively with ASWB to develop a system to gather and report enhanced data on race/ethnic heritage of candidates from Minnesota and other jurisdictions who register for, and either pass or fail, the examination; including exploring ASWB contractual obligations to provide the Board with increased demographic data for applicants.
 3. The Board shall initiate a second phase of data collection and research to be conducted by either a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited MSW program or student, or by an independent researcher, if funding is available. This second phase of study will allow the Board to compare new findings with the baseline data set forth in this study, and to identify and measure changes.
 4. The Board will explore the effects of under-representation from underserved populations on both the workforce and clients.

Recommendation #3: Address Statewide Licensing Barriers and Increase Representation from Persons from Ethnically, Racially, and Culturally Diverse Groups

1. The Board shall maintain the current Provisional License provision, for applicants who are foreign-born and speak English as a second or learned language. These applicants must meet licensing requirements, but are unable to obtain a passing score on the ASWB examination. Onsite licensing supervision and evaluations by the supervisor are required while practicing under the Provisional License.
2. The Board will maintain efforts to increase representation on the Board and its committees of persons from ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse communities statewide.
3. The Board will receive trainings related to cultural competence and emerging issues for residents of Minnesota from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural communities.
4. The Board will continue to study, research, and consider policy issues within its public protection mission, based on the following issues:
 - a. Under-representation of professionals from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural groups, in particular those professionals who speak English as a second language;
 - b. Disproportionate examination failure rates for applicants from communities of color; and
 - c. Difficulties experienced by immigrants and persons from diverse ethnic, racial, or cultural communities when taking standardized examinations.

Recommendation #4: Introduce Legislative Proposal for Limited Practice License

1. The Board will explore the development of a legislative proposal to allow licensees who are retired, or are willing to provide volunteer social work services, to practice at a reduced licensing fee, provided they meet requirements.
2. This license is intended for licensees willing to offer their professional services a) to disaster victims in the event of an emergency, b) to underserved communities statewide, including culturally and ethnically diverse communities, or c) to social work licensees who need supervision to meet licensing requirements.

Recommendation #5: Continue Efforts to Modify Minnesota Public Sector Exemption for Social Workers

1. To increase its mission of public protection, the Board shall continue its efforts to work with stakeholder groups to develop a plan to modify the licensing exemption for Minnesota city, county, and state social workers to ensure that vulnerable populations are provided services by licensed professionals who have demonstrated minimum competencies.
2. This initiative would provide access for all public and private agency consumers, with redress to the Board's compliance process, when they have received incompetent or unethical services from providers.

Recommendation #6: Develop and Implement Increased Public Education Outreach Efforts

1. The Board shall develop a plan to distribute this report to other interested stakeholder groups at the local, state, and national level, including social work educators, social work professional associations, consumer groups, and Minnesota State Councils representing communities of color.
2. Board staff and Board members shall continue and broaden their statewide public education efforts to the general public, consumer advocacy groups, social work students and professionals, and other stakeholder groups.
3. Both Greater Minnesota and Metro areas will be included in these initiatives.

Recommendation #7: Develop and Implement Increased Collaboration with Stakeholder Groups

1. The Board will engage in a dialogue with the Minnesota Council of Social Work Educators (MCSWE) to encourage MCSWE to develop a statewide strategic plan to address the shortage of ethnic minority populations entering into social work educational programs, including an assessment of the admissions process.
2. The Board will develop a dialogue with stakeholder groups to address the need to increase the number of graduates who are eligible to sit for the license examination.

Recommendation #8: Reduce Barriers to Licensing

1. The Board will promote and support the development of mentorship programs provided by academic programs, professional associations, and individuals to better prepare applicants to meet licensing standards.
2. The Board will continue to collaborate with other social work regulatory agencies, ASWB, and ACT to identify factors that may impact a candidate's performance on the ASWB examinations.
3. The Board will continue to advocate with other social work regulatory agencies and ASWB to explore alternatives to a standardized examination that can be created at a national level, to ensure a cost-effective, reliable, defensible alternative that meets industry standards. It does not appear to be financially viable to develop and maintain a state examination, nor does it appear viable to abandon the ASWB exam at this time.

Recommendation #9: Address Issues and Barriers Experienced by Underserved Communities in Greater Minnesota, including Rural Minnesota

1. Due to workforce shortages, decreasing population growth, and geographical issues, the Board will explore the possibility of utilizing technology to provide services statewide, with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, county human services agencies, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, and other stakeholder groups.
2. The Board shall establish a plan to meet with under-represented statewide stakeholder groups to provide education on the Board's primary goal to protect the public. Board members and Board staff will meet with cultural communities and cultural advocates, consumer advocates, policy makers, and legislators.

Recommendation #10: Provide Incentives for Persons Licensed as Social Workers

1. The Board is not authorized to provide non-regulatory incentives for social work professionals. However, it is clear that the general public and the profession at large would benefit if incentives were available to social workers, as they are to other professionals who serve the public welfare.
2. The Board may support efforts of other entities, including state and federal government and human social service organizations, as they explore their responsibilities in the development of plans to address incentives for persons licensed as social workers, including:
 - a. Full or partial forgiveness of educational student loans;
 - b. Reimbursement of qualified licensing practice supervision;
 - c. Tuition reimbursement policies and programs;
 - d. Increased salaries and performance bonuses; and
 - e. Financial incentives for specialized training or education.
3. The Board will encourage the professional associations to explore with public and private sector employer groups the need to make social work salaries commensurate with education, experience, and position responsibilities.
4. The Board will encourage outreach programs to secondary education to promote and provide information regarding the social work profession.