

2014-2015 MSSWA
Board Members*Christy McCoy*
President*Nancy Van Horne*
President Elect*Kathy Lombardi*
Kimani
Secretary*Susanne Schroeder*
Treasurer*Kim Anderson &
Annette Kleinschrodt*
Region 1 Reps.*Jen Koep & Paige*
Thompson
Region 2A Reps.*Molly Fox*
Region 2B Rep*Heidi Smith & Tara*
Prom
Region 3 Reps.*Stephanie Ochocki*
Region 4A Rep.*Vicki Schaefer*
Region 4B Rep*Cathy Dalnes &
Jennifer Frisbie*
Region 5 Reps.*Julie Baum*
& *Renette McParland*
Region 6 Reps.*Rita Krisak*
Region 7 Rep.*Jeri Nomeland &
Sherry Murphy*
Region 8 Reps.*Laura Kiser*
Region 9 Rep*Dan Porter & Jennifer*
Bulmer
Region 10 Reps.*Liz Kruger-*
Hommerding &
Tammie Knick
Region 11 Reps.*Courtney Stenseth &
Jenny Andersen*
Region 12 Reps~ www.msswa.org ~

1110 Northwood Drive, Apt. 214, Eagan, MN. 55121

Dear Governor Dayton and Child Protection Task Force Members:

Thank you for creating this Task Force to review best practice and strategies for strengthening Minnesota's Child Welfare system. As President of the Minnesota School Social Work Association and a Licensed Clinical School Social Worker, I am writing on behalf of all Minnesota Licensed School Social Workers. School Social Workers are on the front lines every day providing crisis intervention and prevention to the students we serve. Because of our intersection with the Child Welfare System, MSSWA felt it was essential to provide information from our perspective to guide the recommendations being developed by the Task Force for your consideration.

The Minnesota School Social Workers' Association (MSSWA) has been serving children in their schools, homes and communities for over 45 years. We are an association of school social workers throughout Minnesota who work with students and their families to provide mental health related services and support within the school system. School social workers have the unique training, knowledge and expertise to address the mental health needs of children within the school environment, and they are the vital link between the school, home and community. School social workers are educated to understand the interplay of systems and the impact those systems have on academic achievement. In times of crisis, school social workers provide support and crisis intervention services in collaboration with other specialized instructional support personnel to ensure students' physical safety, and efficient school-wide immediate responses. As direct practitioners, school social workers also provide follow up services to students who are impacted by trauma and who may experience symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

MSSWA supports measures to broad based efforts to reduce exposure of children and youth to violence and/or neglect in the environments in which they live. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2012), "child welfare systems cannot be expected to bear the sole responsibility for a child's well-being". "Child welfare is designed to protect children from harm, ensure their well-being, help them to achieve permanency, and strengthen families" (NASW, 2013). However according to the National Association for Social Work (NASW) Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare (2013), "an increasing number of communities are engaged in partnerships and collaborations with child welfare agencies focused on preventing child abuse and neglect and other public and private agencies committed to providing family support services". Collaboration across these systems is essential to effectively serve vulnerable children, youth and their families. **MSSWA is requesting enhanced communication and collaboration with our County Child Welfare Agencies.** As direct practitioners, we have observed inconsistencies from county to county and from worker to worker in regards to establishing partnerships between the school and child welfare.

MSSWA has concerns regarding the education and training of child protection workers. **In many counties, child protection workers are using the title "social worker" but do not have the educational background or license to practice social work.** At the same time historically, social workers have played critical roles in these systems (NASW, 2005). Studies indicate that social work degrees are the most appropriate degrees for this field of practice (Child Welfare League of America, 2002) and have been directly linked to better outcomes for children and families and retention of staff (Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining & Lane, 2005). In addition, licensed social workers must adhere to the ethical responsibilities defined in the NASW Code of Ethics. "The NASW Code of Ethics establishes the ethical responsibilities of all social workers with respect to themselves, clients, colleagues, employees and employing organizations, the social work profession, and society. Acceptance of these responsibilities guides and fosters competent social work practice in child welfare." (NASW, 2013)

The NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare also outline the need for cultural competency amongst staff when "addressing the particular needs of children of color, who are overrepresented in the child welfare system". For example, "if children are placed with foster parents of a different race, ethnicity, or culture, foster parents and staff should receive ongoing cultural sensitivity training. In addition, should a child or youth self-identify or question his or her sexual orientation, the

foster parents and the child or youth should receive training and support to address the issue, as appropriate. Another component that adds for the need for cultural competency is the fact that Minnesota has seen an increase in the number of immigrant families coming to the state. As a result, this necessitates the need for increased training of child welfare workers in the area of immigrant cultural norms and values; immigrant needs and support networks as well as concerns associated with adjusting to a new country. Understanding immigration laws and to need to consult with appropriate immigration experts to identify options on how to obtain legal status for children is also recommended.

Finally there are areas within the Family Assessment and Screening Guidelines that we believe require modification. First, a screener should take into consideration the mandated reporter's profession and experience with the child and family when making the decision whether to accept a report. Second, we recommend the establishment of an oversight committee that would review the rationale for cases that were not accepted or have been pending to ensure consistency in following appropriate protocol. Due to inadequate distribution of resources and supports across the state, we recommend that funding being analyzed to ensure that resources and supports are equitable. This would include reviewing the needs for adequate staffing to decrease the high caseloads found in some counties which has a direct impact on the quality of case management services that are delivered.

We appreciate your dedication and willingness to strive to improve the effectiveness of Minnesota Child Welfare Systems. Thank you for taking our recommendations into consideration. If you have questions or would like further input please feel free to contact me at 651-890-9988 or christymccoy07@comcast.net.

Sincerely,

Christy McCoy MSW LICSW
MSSWA President
School Social Worker