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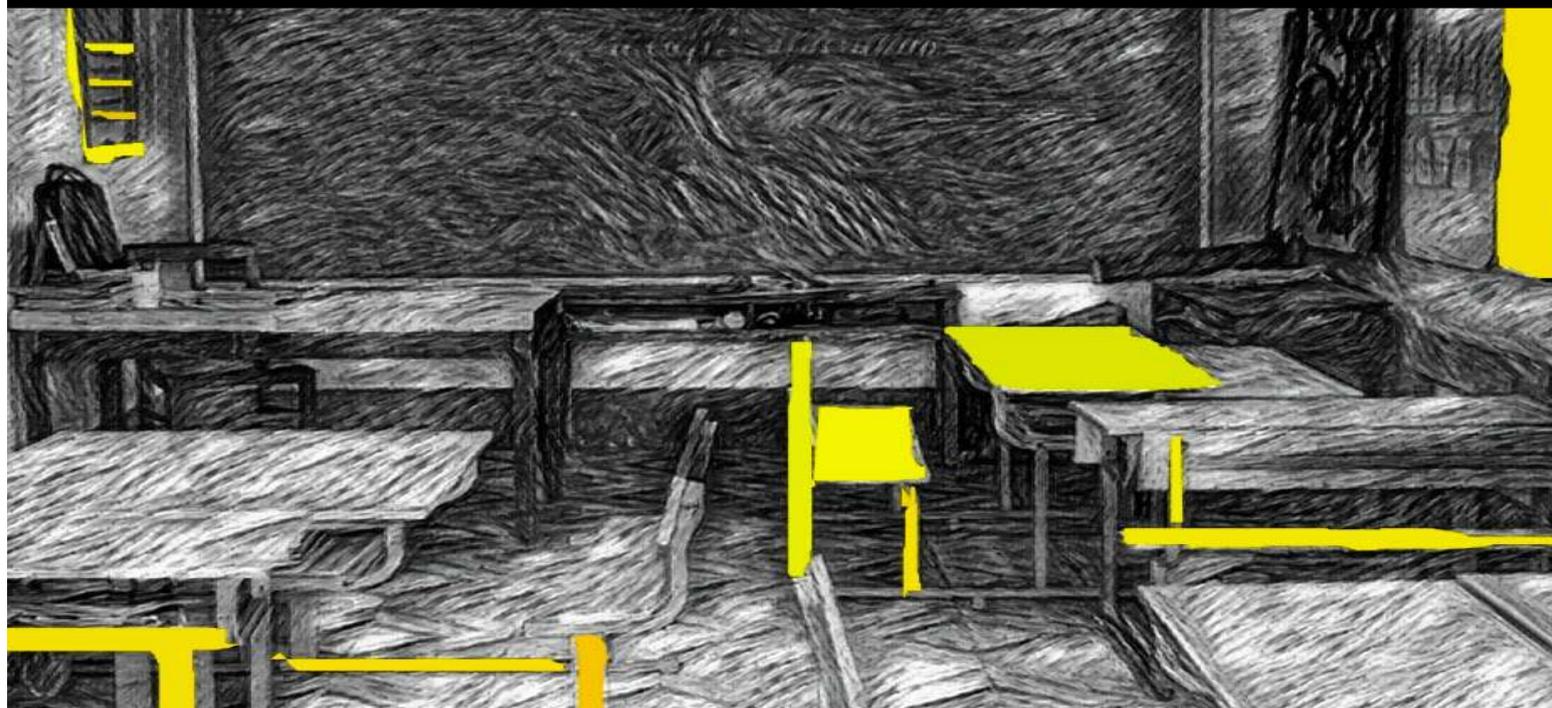
Opening Schools Safely in the COVID-19 Era: School Social Workers' Experiences and Recommendations Technical Report

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Executive Summary

As American PreK-12 schools shut down and moved into online learning as a response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, there was little information about how school social workers (SSWs or SSW) were responding to the crisis. This was particularly concerning given the fact that SSWs serve some of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations within PreK-12 schools, and do so in ways that typically involve hands-on, in-person approaches.

This report summarizes initial findings from a national survey of SSWs (n=1,275) practicing across the United States. Findings highlight serious challenges facing schools, school staff, and students. Some of these challenges are specifically related to educational goals, but many are related to basic needs that are a prerequisite to academic and social emotional learning.

- For example, many SSWs reported having limited to no contact with some of their students because they couldn't establish a connection with them during the shutdown.
- They also expressed significant concerns about the motivation and engagement of the 81% of students with whom they did work.
- Additionally, SSWs reported that a majority of their students and families had profound, immediate, and urgent needs related to food insufficiency (62.4%), housing instability (42.8), health issues (61.6%), individualized student tutoring (62.3%), and mental health services (75.7%) that indicate the need for a coordinated and comprehensive response from federal and state policymakers, as well as national educational leaders.

Recommendations and implications from these initial findings are shared here, including a call to action for the various school social work organizations to join together in this crisis moment to help SSWs and their school communities respond effectively as the pandemic continues to rage across the country and threaten the safe re-opening of American schools.

The findings indicate significant strengths in the approach of SSWs, providing possible foundations for increased capacity and effectiveness. While findings speak to the dynamism and creativity of SSWs in this pandemic, findings also revealed many troubling and serious issues that need immediate attention as schools plan how to re-open in the fall.

- Many SSWs were able to adapt to the remote learning context and deliver their services during the pandemic (even as 68% of them questioned the efficacy of remote SSW services as an ongoing mode of service delivery).
- They also reported strongly positive views about their school's performance during the crisis (81.6% were overall satisfied), citing strong school leadership and fellow educators' responsiveness to the crisis, even as they dealt directly with the pandemic's impact on their own families (roughly 25% of the SSWs shared that they had family or close friends who had either tested positive for COVID-19 or knew someone personally who had died from the disease).

Implications for professional development, district supports, university training, and a national effort to reconnect a potential "lost generation of students" are discussed and outlined.

Introduction

Our nation, and the world, is in the midst of a global pandemic that has affected more than one billion students in pre-K through 12th-grade settings. Poverty and historic inequality in school-related funding have exacerbated the effects of the pandemic for millions of students and their families. As our country creates a master plan for the upcoming school year, the voices, experiences, and recommendations of school social workers are critical.

The findings from our study indicate that this pandemic has revealed deep structural needs for our school communities and the youth and families they serve. We need significant and sustained reinvestment in schools to better serve our nation's students, provide more supports to students and school staff, and reach out to reengage the sizable proportion of students who got lost and never participated in remote instruction during the pandemic, which may be up to one-third of all students (Blume & Kohli, 2020; Toness, 2020).

This technical report presents data from a national survey of SSWs that was hosted on schoolsocialwork.net (SSWN) and co-sponsored by the School Social Work Network (SSWNetwork), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), the American Council for School Social Work (ACSSW), and the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) School Special Interest Group (SIG). We intend for this data to inform professional practices and responses by major professional organizations, by state-level legislative branches, and by federal policy makers. As such there is a policy brief with recommendations that accompanies this more comprehensive technical report (see Kelly et al., 2020b).

Methods

Population and sample. The study sample (N=1,275) was taken from a population of SSWs in the United States who are members of the SSWNetwork, SSWAA, ACSSW, NASW, SSWR, and state-level professional organizations. The sample was a convenience sample. We partnered with several professional organizations who distributed a link to the online survey created by researchers and practice professionals at Loyola University of Chicago, UCLA, California State University, Fullerton, and Hebrew University. The survey was administered during the month of June 2020. Analyses presented are based on responses fully completed by July 2020. The report is designed to offer a rapid response to a national and global emergency, and thus is being produced quickly so it can inform master plans, practice, supports, reinvestments of stimulus funds, and policy.

Instrument. The questions in the online survey were designed by our research team to address the issues that we think are essential to understanding the challenges that SSWs

and their clients face during the pandemic, their practice modes, and needs. Questions were also taken from surveys the authors are conducting in schools and higher-education settings in multiple places around the world. Survey questions were designed with an eye toward the future. Specifically, we sought to understand the needs of schools, students, families, and communities during the pandemic and what types of supports are needed for the upcoming school year and possible reopening of schools as school leaders consider re-opening fully online, in-person, and in a hybrid of online and in-person. SSWs work in many settings and are often concentrated in high-poverty settings that also have been targets of systemic racism due to persistent low funding, poor investment in community resources, and a paucity of basic community supports. As such, it is essential to understand what SSWs need to support our nation's schools most impacted by the pandemic and systemic inequality.

Analytic Plan. We conducted descriptive analyses and then examined bi-variate associations between select variables, mostly with schools' socio-demographic and academic indicators, and with the participant's years of experience. In the survey responses, there were many open-ended comments. More than 40 percent of respondents provided rich, substantive, and emotional comments, suggestions, and ideas that go beyond the statistical and numerical findings reported in tables and charts. These comments are presented in italics throughout this report and in the accompanying policy brief (Kelly et al., 2020b).

Ethics. The online survey questionnaire was anonymous. Study authors received ethics approval from their respective universities and each of the organizations that partnered went through their own ethics process independently.

Findings

Participants

We received 1,275 usable surveys. The majority of participants (87.9%) self-identified as females, 5.5% as males, five (0.4%) as gender non-conforming, and others did not identify their gender.

Participants could select more than one racial affiliation. The majority of participants were White (73.9%), Black (10.7%), and Hispanic/Latinx (8.7%). These demographics reflect what we know about SSWs and are similar to prior national surveys conducted (Arrington & Whitaker, 2008; Kelly et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2015; Salsberg et al., 2017).

Table 1

Participants' Race

Race	N	%
White/Caucasian	942	73.9
Black/ African-American	137	10.7
Hispanic/Latinx	111	8.7
Asian American	21	1.6
Native American/Alaska Native	21	1.6
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	2	0.2
Other	16	1.3
No response	82	6.4

Note: Participants could select more than one option.

We asked participants to indicate their years of experience as school social workers.

Table 2

Participant's Years of Experience as Social Workers

Years of Experience	N	%	Cumulative
Less than a year	30	2.5	2.5
1-2 years	109	9.1	11.6
3-5	203	17.0	28.6
6-10	208	17.4	45.9
11-15	186	15.5	61.5
16-20	178	14.9	76.4
More than 20 years	283	23.6	100.0
Total	1197	100	

In terms of their experience, 28.6% had five or fewer years of experience and 71.4% had six or more. About a quarter had more than 20 years. Overall, this was a very experienced

sample, similar to other recent national surveys of SSW (Kelly et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2015), but a third of respondents had less than 5 years' experience. This variability may be relevant to understanding variations in responses to questions in this survey. For example:

> *"Being a bit older, I lack the proficiency related to online and virtual connecting with my students. I've relied on the building of relationships and find 'distance' to be a barrier to building and maintaining the therapeutic relationship. It's been okay, but not as effective as I know I could be."*

Participants belonged to a number of professional organizations. Many SSWs belong to more than one organization. Respondents were allowed to select any and all school social work affiliations.

Table 3

Participants' Organizational Affiliation

Organization	N	%
NASW	524	41.5
SSWAA	385	30.5
SSWN	202	16.0
ACSSW	102	8.1
IASSW	54	4.3
MASSW	41	3.2
SSWR	15	1.2
Other organization(s)	256	18.3

Note: Participants could select more than one organization

Characteristics of Schools Served by SSWs

Most schools were reported to be in the process of planning when and how to reopen (71.5%) for fall 2020, 14.4% were closed with no plans to open, and only 2.7% of respondents said their school was open or planning to reopen. The rest (11.7%) had other responses or did not respond. These figures were quite similar across the various grade levels served by the schools. In the qualitative responses, many school social workers felt that, although they would be involved and responsible for many of the reopening and service

plans, they were not included or consulted on how to engage the school and community. They felt this was especially important because so many of their schools were in high poverty communities with long histories of racial injustice. They further indicated that school social work services and voices should be included formally in the planning and reopening process.

> *"My school district has a committee, which I am part of, to plan for the reopening of our school. The committee is comprised of a variety of staff and administration in the district. I think this is a smart idea because I don't think reopening can be only top down, as staff we're the ones delivering the remote learning and seeing firsthand what students and families are going through. We are trying to carefully consider and construct schedules, SEL considerations and strategies for parents and students, and what the curriculum should look like."*

> *"I am on a committee in my district to plan for all contingencies (no pressure!) Mental health should be our priority as a district, however, we seem to always default back to academics and have minimal effective tier 1, tier 2 universal supports at the high school level."*

> *"At an administrative level, having social work input 'at the table' as decisions are being made for students, staff and families [is needed, as well as] increased training on a systemic level to administrators and staff about the mental health effects of this pandemic/trauma on students academically, behaviorally and emotionally. State and federal funding for public schools [is also essential] as our district is in a huge financial crisis now with aggressive legislators who are looking to destroy public education. While these are individual resources needed, they all significantly impact my role and position. If there's not enough funding to support our positions then talking about what we need is a [moot] point."*

We also asked participants to describe their schools. SSWs in this sample were in Pre-K to high school settings. It is worthy of note that there were a sizable number of SSWs working in more than one school or setting. This includes Pre-K/child care and alternative schools. Being spread too thin, across multiple schools, could impact the amount and quality of services SSWs can provide to students, teachers, and parents in each setting.

Table 4

Grades Served by Participants' Schools

School level	N	%
Preschool / Child care	476	37.7
Elementary	869	68.9
Middle school	696	55.2
Junior high School	204	16.2
High school	611	48.4
Alternative school	306	24.2

Note: Participants could select more than one grade level.

Table 5

Socioeconomic and Academic Indicators of Participants' Schools

% of students	N	Mean	SD	25%	Median	75%
Free/reduced lunch	1245	61.39	29.97	36.00	66.00	90.00
Minority	1245	50.72	31.37	21.00	50.00	80.00
Drop out	944	15.65	16.34	5.00	10.00	20.00
Enter college	1009	56.90	24.95	40.00	60.00	76.00

Overall, findings indicated that participants work in schools with a lower socioeconomic status (SES). In half of schools where respondents work, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch was more than 60% and, in a quarter of the schools, the percent of eligible students was 90 or above. In 25% of the schools, there were at least 80% minority students. As could be expected, these estimates are intercorrelated. For instance, the correlation between the percentage of minority students and students eligible for free or reduced lunch was $r = .72$, $p < 0.001$.

It is also important to note that there were associations between the race/ethnicity of the SSW and the school characteristics. As can be seen in the next table, participants who

self-identified as African American or Hispanic/Latinx described their schools as having more students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch, are minority, and drop out. Fewer students in these schools entered college. For instance, while in schools served by White SSWs, the mean drop-out rate is 13.4%, it is 23.2% in schools served by Hispanic/Latinx SSWs.

Table 6

Means (%) and SDs of School Socioeconomic and Academic Indicators by SSW Race

	Free/reduced lunch		Minority		Drop out		Enter college	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
White	56.9%	30.14	44.1%	30.11	13.4%	14.42	57.8%	25.51
African American	78.7%	24.09	73.0%	27.23	22.8%	19.16	53.2%	22.77
Hispanic	74.1%	24.60	70.9%	25.16	23.2%	23.02	52.6%	24.13

Years of experience are also associated with school characteristics. Novice SSWs who were in the field up to two years tended to be in schools with lower socio-economic status compared with more experienced social workers. For instance, while the percent of minority students in schools served by novice social workers with 1-2 years of experience was 62%, these figures go down to 45% in schools served by the most experienced workers (with more than 20 years of experience).

Family Needs

SSWs were asked to estimate how many of the families and students they serve have a real need in several areas.

> *"Better funding is needed to address the REAL needs of the students and their families. Ask families and students what they need, don't assume you know what funding is most beneficial to them!"*

Table 7

The Needs of Families Served by SSWs

	A few if any		Less than half		About half		More than half		All, or almost all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental health services	12	1.0	282	23.4	306	25.4	411	34.1	195	16.2
Food	99	8.2	354	29.4	272	22.6	356	29.6	123	10.2
Health services	116	9.6	347	28.8	280	23.2	349	29.0	113	9.4
Tutoring	83	6.9	370	30.8	313	26.0	338	28.1	99	8.2
Crisis intervention	139	11.5	550	45.6	239	19.8	202	16.7	77	6.4
Housing support	188	15.6	502	41.6	244	20.2	215	17.8	58	4.8
Disability support	163	13.5	627	52.1	214	17.8	127	10.6	72	6.0
Shopping help	471	39.5	484	40.6	158	13.2	66	5.5	14	1.2
Other	20	15.3	31	23.7	28	21.4	30	22.9	22	16.8

We highlighted in green the categories that were most striking. Participants estimated that the most common needs were mental health services (75.7% of schools with half or more than half of students having this need), food (62.4%), health services (61.6%), housing support (42.8%), crisis intervention (42.9%), disability support (34.4%) and tutoring (62.3%). Other needs suggested by multiple qualitative responses included employment services, transportation support, and technology access. It should be noted that the schools with the highest needs for basics such as food, housing, health, and mental health supports were in low-income communities and serve predominantly minority populations. These schools should be very high priorities in any fall master plan or reopening strategy.

Table 8

Correlations Between Family Needs and the School's Characteristics (% of Students in School)

	Free/Reduced lunch	Minority	Drop-out	Enter college
Food	.590**	.453**	.302**	-.360**
Health services	.564**	.443**	.336**	-.374**
Housing support	.539**	.447**	.352**	-.312**
Mental health services	.270**	.218**	.253**	-.205**
Shopping help	.433**	.365**	.320**	-.225**
Tutoring	.451**	.455**	.370**	-.247**
Disability support	.217**	.139**	.231**	-.227**
Crisis intervention	.309**	.254**	.311**	-.225**

In general, the needs identified by SSWs were associated with poverty and racial/ethnic background of the students attending the schools. This finding reinforces the conclusions of Table 7. Any stimulus plan or master plan for reopening should include specific supports for high poverty schools that serve children of color. These are the highest need schools, and the most basic of human needs should be addressed first. For instance, the correlation between percent of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch and how many families in the school have a need for food, now that most schools are closed, was r= .59 (p < .001). In terms of proportions, 62.1% of participants in schools with above-the-median number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (66%) reported that more than half of families have a need for food, compared with 17% in schools where the percent of eligible students was below the median. As the number of eligible students rose, so did the number of families with multiple needs. Additionally, most of these needs were associated to a large degree and significantly (p < .001) with the percent of minority students in school, especially food (r = .45), tutoring (r = .45), housing support (r = .45), and health services (r = .44. We did not find strong associations between needs and the grade level (i.e., elementary, middle school, etc.).

We also asked the participants whether they thought certain circumstances compounded the pandemic situation.

Table 9

Circumstances that Compound the Pandemic Situation

	Not at all		To a small extent		Moderately		To a large extent		To a very large extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Poverty	27	2.2	165	13.2	244	19.6	391	31.4	419	33.6
Mental health	9	0.7	97	7.8	388	31.0	497	39.8	259	20.7
Lack of community services	47	3.8	266	21.4	401	32.2	327	26.3	204	16.4
Family discord	15	1.2	267	21.5	512	41.3	343	27.6	104	8.4
Poor housing conditions	77	6.2	401	32.2	376	30.2	270	21.7	123	9.9
Discrimination due to minority status	148	11.9	436	35.0	327	26.2	212	17.0	123	9.9
Physical health	39	3.1	447	36.0	426	34.3	237	19.1	93	7.5
Exposure to family/domestic violence	42	3.4	436	35.1	439	35.3	237	19.1	89	7.2
Exposure to child abuse and neglect	51	4.1	463	37.1	431	34.5	234	18.8	69	5.5
Language difficulties	166	13.3	454	36.5	329	26.4	184	14.8	112	9.0
Discrimination due to undocumented status	272	21.8	428	34.3	267	21.4	167	13.4	114	9.1
Community violence	281	22.6	427	34.4	262	21.1	161	13.0	112	9.0
Concerns about potential deportation	310	24.9	468	37.7	239	19.2	126	10.1	100	8.0
Other	18	16.5	4	3.7	36	33.0	28	25.7	23	21.1

We highlighted categories we felt were most important in green. As could be expected, some of these compounding circumstances were associated with the social-ecological issues impacting the families and community that the school serves.

Table 10

*Correlations Between the Compounding Circumstances and the School's Characteristics (%
of Students in School)*

	Free/ reduced lunch	Minority	Drop-out	Enter college
Poverty	.508**	.434**	.264**	-.317**
Physical health	.363**	.372**	.255**	-.186**
Mental health	.190**	.142**	.197**	-.165**
Lack of services in the community	.398**	.330**	.229**	-.274**
Discrimination due to minority status	.415**	.516**	.288**	-.214**
Discrimination due to undocumented status	.327**	.455**	.206**	-.085**
Concerns about potential deportation	.321**	.428**	.222**	-.085**
Language difficulties	.308**	.428**	.203**	-.074*
Poor housing conditions	.513**	.448**	.301**	-.318**
Community violence	.550**	.603**	.362**	-.301**
Exposure to family /domestic violence	.442**	.374**	.330**	-.267**
Exposure to child abuse and neglect	.418**	.329**	.306**	-.262**
Family discord	.303**	.266**	.252**	-.234**

First, it is clear that poverty was a compounding circumstance ($r = 0.51$, $p < .001$).
Community violence and housing conditions were highly correlated with the percent of
free/reduced lunch in the school ($r = 0.55$ and 0.51, respectively). The needs of schools with a high
proportion of minority students were very likely to be compounded by community violence ($r = 0.60$, $p < .001$). As expected, the situation of these families was also compounded by discrimination
due to their minority status or their undocumented status, and concerns about potential deportation
($r = 0.52$, $r = 0.45$, and $r = 0.43$, respectively, all $p < .001$). In these schools, poverty and poor
housing conditions were also compounding factors. *These schools should be high priority for local,
state and federal policy when considering reopening for the new academic year, regardless if the
plan is to open fully, in a hybrid fashion, or with an online program.*

The highest correlations with the percent of students that drop out of school was community violence (r = 0.36, p < .001), and with exposure to domestic violence and child abuse and neglect as compounding circumstances (r = 0.33 and r = 0.31, respectively, both p < .001). Mental health had small, statistically significant associations with poverty and minority status (r = .19 and r = .14, respectively, p < .001).

School Staff Performance

Participants were asked to pick a school which is typical of their caseload and assess collaboration and performance of staff members. Overall, school social workers strongly felt that school staff were working hard, collaboratively, and supportively to manage and get through the current COVID-19 crisis.

> *"I am quite concerned about our small school which has done without in many areas due to a lack of funding for regional schools in a mostly economically depressed area. There is a significant split between Administration and the rest of the school staff, as Administration is not particularly transparent. We are facing major layoffs and furloughs and I am unsure how the school will provide for student needs given the current economic status of the country and a government that supports only big business. The staff members provide an abundance of support in our school district which has a disproportionate amount of significant social/emotional needs due to alcoholism, substance abuse, and domestic violence. These are our daily struggles. On the other hand, we have a committed staff (teachers, paras, secretaries & maintenance...) who love our students from the first day they walk into the school as young children until the day they graduate. The pay sucks but we are a dedicated group. That's what keeps me in the district."*

Table 11

Assessments of School Staff Collaboration and Performance

	Not at all		To a small extent		Moderately		To a large extent		To a very large extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Staff members are doing their best	1	0.2	8	1.4	77	13.2	276	47.2	223	38.1
The school is showing care for students	1	0.2	13	2.2	102	17.5	285	48.8	183	31.3
The principal is working to understand and address needs of school staff	12	2.1	54	9.2	114	19.5	224	38.4	180	30.8
We are working together to deal with the challenges of the pandemic	9	1.5	52	8.9	145	24.9	250	42.9	127	21.8
Staff are finding ways to work together and provide support for each other	11	1.9	47	8.0	165	28.3	240	41.1	121	20.7
Parents appreciate my efforts	2	0.3	55	9.4	167	28.6	247	42.3	113	19.3
My colleagues are a source of emotional support	28	4.8	82	14.1	141	24.2	194	33.3	138	23.7
The school is showing care for teachers	7	1.2	64	11.0	189	32.4	229	39.2	95	16.3
I feel that if I need help doing my work online I have someone to turn to	24	4.1	99	17.0	137	23.5	226	38.7	98	16.8
Principal and/or teachers are a source of support for each other	15	2.6	76	13.0	183	31.3	213	36.4	98	16.8
The school is organized in its responses to the situation	17	2.9	87	15.0	188	32.4	217	37.3	72	12.4
The school is providing good solutions to a difficult situation	9	1.5	65	11.1	221	37.8	220	37.6	70	12.0
We are engaging in professional development to meet these new challenges	63	10.8	123	21.1	148	25.4	168	28.8	81	13.9
The PTA is doing its best to support teachers and families	140	25.1	155	27.8	131	23.5	88	15.8	44	7.9
Overall, I'm satisfied with the school performance these days	19	3.3	88	15.1	222	38.0	187	32.0	68	11.6

SSWs had a high assessment that staff are doing their best (98.5% thought so, at least moderately) and the school is showing care for students (97.6%). A large number also thought that the principal is working to understand and address needs of school staff (88.7%), that the school staff are working together to deal with the challenges of the pandemic (89.6%), and that staff are finding ways to work together and provide support for each other (90.1% thought so, at least moderately). Despite these relatively high figures, it should be noted that only about 43.7% of respondents said that they were satisfied to a large or to a very large extent with the school performance overall. Clearly, a good proportion feels that, despite strong efforts, more can be done.

Not surprisingly, given the stresses on the families in their schools, many SSWs did not see the PTA as a significant source of support for teachers and families during this time. In many schools, the PTA is an instrumental mechanism of support for teachers and families. This may reflect that the demands and stress surrounding basic needs like food, housing, and health care are draining the ability of non-professional organizations to meet complex needs. Well-organized and funded outside support is needed to bolster school staff—support that goes beyond just the families in the community.

> *"The pandemic has shown a spotlight on the areas of strain for families: social, emotional, financial. Work is needed to strengthen the social safety net, services and resources for poor and immigrant families as well as those with mental illness or significant special needs."*

We examined whether these performance assessments were associated with the school characteristics.

Table 12

Correlations between Performance Assessments and Socioeconomic and Academic Indicators

	Free/reduced lunch	Minority	Drop out	Enter college
The school is showing care for students	0.014	-0.026	-0.035	0.077
The school is showing care for teachers	-0.043	-.105[*]	-.094[*]	.104[*]
The school is providing good solutions to a difficult situation	-.099[*]	-.123[**]	-0.066	.099[*]
Staff members are doing their best	-0.035	-.088[*]	-0.076	0.090
The principal is working to understand and address needs of school staff	-.253[**]	-.214[**]	-.111[*]	.227[**]
The PTA is doing its best to support teachers and families	-.098[*]	-.115[**]	-.164[**]	.147[**]
The school is organized in its responses to the situation	-0.030	-0.076	-0.049	.134[**]
Staff are finding ways to work together and provide support for each other	-0.073	-0.065	-0.083	.116[*]
My colleagues are a source of emotional support	-0.052	-.098[*]	-.142[**]	.101[*]
Principal and/or teachers are a source of support for each other	-0.062	-.085[*]	-0.074	0.083
We are working together to deal with the challenges of the pandemic	0.038	0.027	0.018	0.063
We are engaging in professional development to meet these new challenges	0.014	0.047	.098[*]	0.084
Parents appreciate my efforts	-0.010	-0.063	-0.065	.112[*]
I feel that, if I need help doing my work online, I have someone to turn to	-0.072	-.116[**]	-.131[**]	.128[**]
Overall, I'm satisfied with the school performance these days	0.014	-0.026	-0.035	0.077

Table 12 indicates that, in general, SSWs' assessments of school staff performance were not

associated much with school socioeconomic and academic indicators. During the current pandemic,

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school staff across all SES contexts were seen as doing their best to manage and provide supports. Only one of the assessments had a correlation higher than r = 0.2 with school characteristics: "The principal is working to understand and address needs of school staff" was assessed as higher in schools with fewer students eligible for free/reduced lunch (r =-0.25, p < .001), fewer minority students (r = -.214, p < .001), and a higher percent of students going to college (r = .23, p < .001). Additional analyses (not presented here) indicated that there were no appreciable consistent differences in assessments of performance between the different grade levels (i.e., elementary, middle, etc.).

Service Delivery

"'Do the best you can' was the philosophy to finish this school year."

Most participants (84.2%) indicated that they were delivering direct services to clients. They reported using a variety of means to get consent for services during the pandemic. This information becomes critical to the delivery of services for the most difficult to reach families and schools.

Table 13

Means of Getting Consent during the Pandemic

Means	N	%
No new consent process; we're using the same consents we already had in place before the crisis	503	39.9
New consents based on telehealth guidance documents	352	27.9
Passive consent	277	21.9
Other	163	12.9

Note: Participants could select more than one option

The most common way of getting consent was to use the consent that was already on file (39.9%), more than a quarter (27.9%) reported using new consents based on telehealth procedures, and 21.9% indicated that they were using passive consent. Other means included electronic consents, including via text or email, verbal assents, or a combination of the abovementioned strategies.

Modes of service delivery varied. The most common modes were email contact, phone, and direct messages by text and Whatsapp (79.6%, 74.2%, 53.2%, respectively). About a third used

asynchronous online contact (providing modular SSW lessons and content for students to view and complete). Only 16.5% reported conducting home visits.

> *"My district and building administrators were adamant that myself and the other [SSWs] not do home visits or put ourselves at risk. The use of email, phone (text and direct calls), social media, etc., was a very useful and reliable tool during the pandemic to connect with the families. The families I connected to were very appreciative of the weekly wellness checks."*

Table 14

Modes of Service Delivery

Mode	N	%
E-mail contact with students, parents, and staff	1004	79.6
Phone	937	74.2
Virtual SSW contact (using tools like Zoom, Google Hangouts to have synchronous face-to-face meetings)	871	69.0
Text, WhatsApp, or other direct messages	671	53.2
Asynchronous online contact (providing modular SSW lessons and content for students to view and complete)	405	32.1
Home visits that maintain social distancing	208	16.5
Other mode(s)	53	4.2

Note: Participants could select more than one option

We asked SSWs whether their services were defined by their districts as telehealth. Of the 80% who responded, 56.1% answered positively. In their open-ended follow-up comments, many respondents described confusion and lack of guidance as to what could be considered telehealth requirements. In some cases, respondents said that their district started training on this issue.

> *"A document has been developed regarding how to get consent for telehealth services and vague expectations as to what telehealth services should look like. Basically, we have been encouraged to keep reaching out and keep lines of communication open and continue reaching out if there is some response. A document was also developed to respond to parent 'no response' in which we*

document our efforts and send the parent the letter stating if they would like to resume remote learning services, they may do so and methods to reach out to the team."

We examined whether these modes of delivering services were different for schools that serve different grade levels. We found only a small number of significant differences (given the large sample, we considered significant only $p < .001$):

- Practitioners in middle school used more text outreach compared with others (55.2% vs. 46.4%).
- In high schools, asynchronous online contact was used less (22.9% vs. 38.2%).
- In alternative schools, asynchronous online services were also less frequent (23.9% vs. 33.1%). So were virtual contacts (57% vs. 69.1% in non-alternative schools).
- Home visits were slightly more frequent in elementary schools than in other schools (18% vs. 11.3%).

In terms of scheduling, the majority of respondents reported following school hours as assigned by the district (54.2%), and 42.2% said they maintained an open-ended schedule so that families could contact them when needed. About 30.2% said that they have created additional office hours to be responsive to their clients' needs.

Table 15

Scheduling Services During the Pandemic

	N	%
Following school hours as assigned by the district	687	54.4
Maintaining an open-ended schedule where students and families can contact me when they need me	533	42.2
Creating additional "SSW Office Hours" in response to my families' needs	381	30.2
Other	81	6.4

Note: Participants could select more than one scheduling option

"Having students and families set up in a routine, specifically as it pertains to the flexibility to select their own appointments for a time they feel works best for them, has been incredibly helpful. There is not time or space for rigidity right now. The

relationships I have established with the students and many of their families was an asset that really helped motivate more consistent participation, so they are generally more willing to come to the table because of it. I document everything, including attempts at reaching out to parents if the student is a no show, if the student misses the appointment, I will send them the Google Form again to select another time from what is available, but if they miss that, I document and continue to alert the family, but do not feel pressed to attempt a 3rd time as I have MANY reschedules to juggle and also need time for PD and to meet with colleagues. Having my administration be supportive of this, has been great, though there has been generally very little oversight, we are trusted to 'do what we have to do to make it work'."

Participants compared the levels of student participation to the period before the pandemic.

Table 16

Levels of Students' Participation in Services Compared with Before the Pandemic

Participation compared to previous	N	%
Much less than before	449	43.2
Less	394	37.9
About the same as before	129	12.4
More	51	4.9
Much more than before	16	1.5
Total	1039	100.0

Levels of participation were clearly lower than before the pandemic. Despite the higher needs at a time of such distress, only 6.4% of respondents indicated higher participation, and more than 80% reported lower levels of participation. We could not find any school or participant characteristics that were associated with changes in levels of participation. It is also worth noting that the above reports only pertain to students who occasionally, partially, or fully participated in services before the pandemic. Researchers did not ask how many students never participated. There are estimates that as many as one-third of students in some communities never showed up to online learning (Blume & Kohli, 2020; Toness, 2020). In some areas, due to the stress of such basic issues as food, housing, technology gaps, and finances, the percent of students not having any form of engagement may be much higher.

"Don't give up on kids and families. When on a video call with teachers, administrators and others, and the student/family doesn't show up for the call...CALL them on their phone immediately and invite them to join. It has worked greater than 80% of the time."

To our knowledge, school social workers have not yet been strategically deployed to engage and reconnect with these lost students. In addition to low and poor engagement among those students who appeared online, a national outreach to those who never appeared is warranted.

Low levels of participation were related to how the practitioners saw the students' responses to remote SSW services. More than 35% of participants thought that students were having difficulties taking part in the program due to many pressing material needs such as for food or access to technology, to a large or very large extent. Only 11%-13% of the students were judged to enjoy online services or engage with them intentionally, and 4.1% were believed to have increased engagement to a large or very large extent. No wonder only 5.4% of practitioners thought that their students were able to make progress toward their goals. This pattern of disengagement is especially concerning given that almost 30% of SSWs thought that students experienced increases in the severity of their mental health issues due to the crisis to a large or very large extent.

Table 17

Students' Responses to Remote School Social Work Services

Responses	Not at all N	%	To a small extent N	%	Moderately N	%	To a large extent N	%	To a very large extent N	%
Students have difficulties taking part in the program due to the many pressing material needs they're facing (e.g. food)	61	5.9	311	30.1	297	28.8	247	23.9	116	11.2
I have found new ways of delivering some SSW services	61	5.9	322	31.2	316	30.6	236	22.9	97	9.4
Students have experienced an increase in the severity of mental health issues due to the crisis	37	3.6	281	27.5	406	39.7	251	24.5	48	4.7
Students enjoy receiving online services	110	10.7	397	38.7	387	37.7	116	11.3	17	1.7

	Not at all		To a small extent		Moderately		To a large extent		To a very large extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students are engaging intentionally with online services	71	6.9	467	45.2	380	36.8	105	10.2	10	1.0
Despite the current situation, students are still able to make progress towards their SSW goals	171	16.6	523	50.8	280	27.2	53	5.1	3	0.3
Students are actually showing increased engagement in online services	424	41.4	424	41.4	133	13.0	40	3.9	2	0.2

As can be seen in Table 17, two-thirds of SSWs delivering direct practices said that they had found new ways to deliver services, at least to a moderate degree.

> *"I found that initially my role was helping families get the technical support they needed and remind[ing] them of the community supports for basic needs. Our district also made the commitment to reach out to students who were not engaging at all to check on their basic safety and well-being and let them know their school cared for them. Parents and extended family were overwhelming[ly] very grateful for this outreach. To prepare for the fall, I am personally doing the following: Participating in trauma-informed trainings, setting up a virtual Google Classroom to have materials ready made for students to 'drop in' whenever needed, meeting with colleagues to stay abreast of state, county and district plans and plan for the return, [and] advocating for public education at the local, state, and federal level."*

We asked the participants for their experiences and challenges delivering remote SSW services.

Table 18

Challenges and Experiences in Delivering Remote School Social Work Services

	Not at all		To a small extent		Moderately		To a large extent		To a very large extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I find it hard to motivate	54	5.2	192	18.6	244	23.6	311	30.1	232	22.5

students to engage in remote SSW services (lots of no-shows and/or low-motivation students)										
I cannot assess students' needs or progress towards their goals adequately	82	7.9	257	24.7	259	24.9	285	27.4	158	15.2
I don't think this is an effective form of social work practice	109	10.5	224	21.6	281	27.0	261	25.1	164	15.8
I'm very stressed, more so than when I'm delivering SSW services at school	198	18.9	282	27.0	250	23.9	196	18.8	119	11.4
It is difficult to work from home because of caregiving responsibilities	450	43.1	222	21.3	138	13.2	115	11.0	119	11.4
I need more time to do my job effectively	342	32.9	278	26.7	195	18.7	125	12.0	101	9.7
I have difficulty maintaining boundaries between home and work	276	26.4	346	33.1	230	22.0	121	11.6	71	6.8
I am spread too thin – too many schools and/or students	448	43.1	269	25.9	152	14.6	98	9.4	73	7.0
I lack a quiet workspace in my home	502	48.1	230	22.1	153	14.7	95	9.1	63	6.0
I'm overwhelmed by the difficulties of students and their families	267	25.6	384	36.9	248	23.8	107	10.3	35	3.4
I feel it is unfair to ask me to provide my services this way	598	57.5	218	21.0	147	14.1	57	5.5	20	1.9
I don't have the knowledge and skills for using the software (e.g. Zoom)	525	50.5	338	32.5	127	12.2	41	3.9	9	0.9
I lack good Internet	758	72.9	183	17.6	50	4.8	32	3.1	17	1.6
I lack access to computer, tablet, phone (Hardware)	949	91.1	45	4.3	25	2.4	9	0.9	14	1.3

As could be expected, the challenges associated with providing remote social work services reflected the difficulties in engaging the students. The number one challenge was that they found it hard to motivate students to engage in remote SSW services (lots of no-shows and/or low-motivation students): 30.1% thought this was a challenge to a large extent and an additional 22.5%, to a very large extent. Lack of motivation was closely followed by not being able to assess students' needs and progress (67.5% total, including responses indicating moderately, a large or very large extent). It is thus not surprising that 67.9% of participants felt that providing remote SSW services is not an effective mode of service (at least moderately).

Many participants reported that they felt very stressed, more so than when they were delivering SSW services at school and that they needed more time to do their work than they had (54.1% and 40.4%, respectively). These later challenges may be compounded by the difficulties of working from home because of caregiving responsibilities and maintaining boundaries between work and home (35.6% and 40.4%, respectively, rated this as a challenge to a large or very large extent).

The numbers of participants that found technical problems challenging were not as high as other challenges. For instance, only 17.0% said they did not have the knowledge and skills for using relevant software, 9.5% said they lacked good internet, and 4.6% that they lacked access to hardware (at least moderately so). Among the small number of practitioners that had technical challenges, there was a disproportionate number of more experienced (and older) practitioners.

> *"As a school social worker for many years, the COVID virus brought into perspective how important our position is to be in-person. Although being online simplified my role in that I wasn't being called away for behavioral issues, parents dropping in to talk, students needing to talk, I missed all of these interactions. It was sad and frustrating not to be able to speak with a student at the time of their need, having the privacy of my office, materials available and tangibly to be able to support the student. In many ways I felt like a first-year school social worker trying to find my way around the system, researching for a new curriculum, no real guidance from principals and district personnel, not knowing who to turn to to collaborate and brainstorm. There was no directive from the principal to have teachers collaborate with me. Therefore, I faithfully attended the online grade level classes and watched. For my advantage, I was able to look at faces and observe how the students seemed. If I had concerns I would use the chat box in Google*

> *Classroom to ask the teacher to ask a particular student to stay after class. This would enable me to do a check in with the student along with his/her teacher."*

Professional Needs

Following the questions about their practice and challenges, we asked SSWs about their professional needs. SSWs and other school staff have not been defined or seen as essential workers or critical crisis supporters. However, in many ways our quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that SSWs and other school staff are serving our nation's families in vital ways to ensure basic survival needs are met. As with health, emergency providers, and law enforcement, job stress takes a toll on the workers themselves. Mental health and other resources are critical so that school social workers can continue the work they are doing to support our nation's schools, families, and students.

> *"I strongly believe that as school social workers we need to remain ESSENTIAL. We are employed by an education system that will have to make cuts of staff in the future. Our skills allow us to know how to function during a crisis. My role may have shifted from direct care to more basic needs outreach (food insecurity, device distribution, housing support, home visits) but there [were] still enough mental health/crisis concerns to allow for continued direct care."*

> *"My work has shifted from largely supporting students in person with collateral family support to almost entirely supporting parents remotely & in person in navigating this pandemic. Because our students are young and our families are struggling, my access to the kids is minimal. It feels like this pandemic has uncovered the large amount of social service support that schools provide directly to students and families. It is very challenging to provide these services with no resources and remotely. We had to add in-person SW, nursing, and educational services to our meal distribution because families really needed it. People need intensive basic needs services right now. We need more funding, social service support, staffing and in person services to succeed in this work."*

Table 19

Professional Needs of School Social Workers

	Not at all		To a small extent		Moderately		To a large extent		To a very large extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Access to more mental health resources for my clients	65	5.3	219	17.9	357	29.1	362	29.5	223	18.2
Access to knowledge about effective practices during this crisis	88	7.2	254	20.7	377	30.7	323	26.3	186	15.1
Some time off, 'a breather'	177	14.5	284	23.3	266	21.8	243	19.9	251	20.6
Access to more financial resources for my clients	126	10.3	321	26.2	350	28.5	262	21.4	167	13.6
Support to deal with technical challenges	253	20.6	397	32.3	301	24.5	179	14.6	99	8.1
Emotional support	204	16.6	412	33.5	369	30.0	171	13.9	75	6.1
Enhanced supervision for me to help deal with the situation	349	28.4	403	32.8	263	21.4	139	11.3	75	6.1
Other	24	25.5	6	6.4	6	6.4	18	19.1	40	42.6

In general, many practitioners expressed that they have a variety of professional needs at least moderately. The most frequently mentioned needs were: Access to more mental health resources for their clients, access to knowledge about effective practices during this crisis, and access to more financial resources (76.8%, 72.1%, and 63.5%, respectively). Professionals also had personal needs: 62.3% said that they need some time off, 'a breather,' which may be related to the need of 50% of participants for emotional support.

> *"My district has me spread thin overseeing 750+ students at the HS level.*
> *Our district was already reeling from 8 losses (majority suicides of students)*
> *in the past 2 years right before the shutdown. We just don't have enough*
> *social emotional support personnel to address all the needs between staff and*
> *students in our building."*

Interestingly, although the number of participants expressing technical challenges is low, 47.3% expressed at least moderately a need for support to deal with technical challenges. Some of the need for technical support comes from social workers who have practiced for many years.

> *"I'm 55 years old. I regret not diving in there when tech support was offered in the past. I figure it was fine the way I was doing things. I was wrong."*

We examined the predictors of respondents' professional needs and found no significant predictors except for two findings. The need for more access to financial resources for clients was associated with the percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch and minority students ($r = 0.34$ and $r = 0.31$, respectively $p < .001$), and the need for supervision was correlated negatively with years of experience ($r = -.20$, $p < .001$).

Participants' Experiences with COVID-19

A small number (3.5%) of respondents were instructed to self-isolate, and 11 (0.9%) said that they were diagnosed with COVID-19. About one quarter (24.7%) said that at least one close friend or family member was diagnosed with the Coronavirus, and a similar number (24.9%) said they knew at least one person who passed away because of COVID-19. Asked about their worries these days, it was clear that school social workers focused first on their students, then on their family, and last on themselves.

> *"The need for more mental health support outside of the schools is a continuous problem. During the pandemic our only option has been to send kids to the ER and that is only with the consent of their parents when worried about suicidality. We really need more innovative supports to help families during this time and to help individuals access social networks that promote greater mental health resources."*

> *"Some of my students on my caseload I have not been able to connect with since the school closure and I am very worried, but I have exhausted all modes of communication and feel stuck about how to reach or support them. I am worried that students are not accessing the mental health services that we are making available, but am unsure of how to make them more accessible to*

families. It has been a huge struggle for me to feel effective in this role during

this time."

Table 20

Current Worries of School Social Workers

	Not at all		To a small extent		Moderately		To a large extent		To a very large extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Your students' emotional well-being	3	0.3	28	2.3	176	14.7	402	33.6	588	49.1
Your students' family's economic hardship	7	0.6	78	6.5	245	20.5	360	30.1	507	42.4
Your students' academic situation	15	1.3	81	6.8	250	20.9	393	32.8	459	38.3
Your parents' health	86	7.7	113	10.1	285	25.6	287	25.7	344	30.9
Your kids' emotional health	99	10.5	197	20.9	270	28.6	199	21.1	179	19.0
Your kids' health	110	11.7	249	26.5	251	26.7	165	17.6	165	17.6
That one of your students may try to commit suicide	185	15.4	366	30.4	269	22.4	178	14.8	204	17.0
That you get infected by one of your clients (students or parents)	253	21.4	310	26.2	265	22.4	163	13.8	194	16.4
Your partner's health	157	14.4	323	29.7	331	30.4	148	13.6	129	11.9
Your personal health	184	15.0	436	35.4	367	29.8	145	11.8	98	8.0
Your job security	352	28.7	362	29.6	279	22.8	116	9.5	116	9.5
Your financial condition	302	24.6	409	33.3	313	25.5	114	9.3	90	7.3

Most participants worried at least moderately about their students' emotional well-being and academic situation (97.4% and 92.0%) and their students' families' economic hardship (93.0%). They were also concerned with their own parents' physical health, their children's emotional and physical health, and their partner's health (82.2%, 68.7%, 61.9%, 55.9%). Fewer expressed concern about their own health (49.6%). Participants also expressed worry about their job security (41.8%) and financial condition (42.1%, at least moderately).

"The experience of dealing with this situation has a negative impact on my overall well-being for it has increased my anxiety level, raised my blood pressure/sugar on a daily basis... I am worried about whether or not I am going to have a job next school year."

It is important to note that almost a third of the practitioners (52.6%) expressed a moderate to very large concern that they would get infected by one of their clients. This needs to be considered when schools re-open.

As expected, professionals who worked with schools that have many students eligible for free/reduced lunch expressed more worries about the families' financial needs (r = 0.34, p < .001). We did not find demographic characteristics of the practitioners to be associated with their worries. Further, participants' experiences with Coronavirus were not associated with their worries. Their health was the only predictor of their worries: Respondents with lower self-reported quality of health were worried more about their health, and the health of their children and partners (r = -0.29, r = -0.22, r = - 0.21, respectively, all p < .001). Worries about job security were also associated with self-reported health (r = -0.20, p < .001).

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

The U.S. education system is in a state of transition as school systems are planning their next steps. Given the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, it seems that the confusion and need for planning is even greater than it was just a few months ago. These findings could contribute to the ongoing planning processes and aid decision-making. Please see the accompanying policy brief for more detail (Kelly et al., 2020b).

Supporting the Basic Needs of Families: Schools Can Only Reopen with Comprehensive and Sustained Support

SSWs report that families in their schools have needs in multiple areas. For instance, 75% of SSWs said that half or more of their families have mental health needs and about 62% reported that half or more of their families have food and health services needs. Many social workers reported that a large proportion of their families have needs in additional areas such as housing support, crisis intervention, and tutoring. These needs are intercorrelated to a large extent such that families in the same schools experience multiple basic needs—such as food and housing. *We see great needs in food, housing, physical health and mental health. We do not think these students and families will be supported if schools and communities don't reorganize to provide these basic human needs. Creating strategies in the new academic year that only focus on academics and social-emotional needs when there are*

large numbers of students and families that do not have food or fear loss of housing, misses the mark.

National Plan that Addresses Structural Inequities as a Precondition for Reopening Safely

The large number of families in need, and the fact that there are many families that have multiple needs in many areas calls for large-scale national and regional efforts to provide resources to support these families in these times of heightened need. Furthermore, it is clear that no one profession or stakeholder, particularly at the local level or even at state levels, can address all of these needs. For example, to address food insecurity, we need a federal and state-level commitment to fund structural change initiatives. It is imperative that all relevant professions collaborate and coordinate their responses to our school communities, rather than the typical discipline-specific and siloed approaches we often engage in as we serve our school communities. There is a need for shared dialogue, thinking, and decision making among educators, helping professions (e.g., social workers, psychologists, counselors, pediatricians), public health experts, and community stakeholders and leadership. Discussions regarding re-opening and re-investment cannot take place without extensive interdisciplinary collaborations to leverage these groups' collective power to advocate and pressure federal and state policymakers to take the bold steps that our data indicates they need to take. Today, there are no many examples of large-scale collaborations. These are unprecedented times that call for unprecedented coalitions.

This study shows what school social workers have known for many years: Needs are not distributed evenly among schools. While this has arguably been an unpleasant facet of American inequality for decades, the pandemic has brought to the forefront the deep damage unmet needs cause to poor and minority populations in our country. It is evident that schools that serve poor and minority populations have many more families with significant basic needs. Our findings show that almost all needs are associated with the number of poor and minority students in a school, and schools with more such students have higher needs overall. Moreover, circumstances that compound these needs are closely associated with school characteristics. For instance, compounding circumstances such as discrimination due to minority status and undocumented status, and concerns about potential deportation, are much more prevalent in schools with high numbers of minorities. *Findings suggest strongly that support efforts should be directed to schools with higher numbers of minority and poor students; these schools have the highest levels of needs in many areas.*

Building on Strengths

In terms of the performance of schools and their educational teams, the current study provides some encouraging indications. Despite the difficulties posed by the unprecedented crisis, SSWs had high assessments that staff are doing their best and the school is showing care for students. A large number also think that the principal is working to understand and address needs of school staff, that the school staff are working together to deal with the challenges of the pandemic, and that staff are finding ways to work together and provide support for each other. In contrast to so many of our other findings, the school's socioeconomic and academic indicators were not associated with school performance. This indicates that most schools have a good and dedicated team that can provide a strong basis for dealing with the current challenges. However, they need supports and resources to help them cope with these challenges.

Global Pandemic Requires System-Level Responses at Scale

In terms of service delivery, the findings indicate that SSWs are struggling in the face of significant challenges and many ambiguities about service provision. Only about 16% were able to conduct home visits when schools were closed; the majority used electronic means such as email, phone, virtual meetings, and direct messages to connect with students. Only about a third were able to use asynchronous online contact, providing modular SSW lessons and content for students to view and complete. Additionally, there seem to be many differences in how districts define and support telehealth.

National Coordinated Campaign to Reach and Reengage Missing Students

One of the most important shortcomings of relying mostly on remote services is low student participation and engagement. About 80% of respondents indicated that student participation was lower than before the pandemic shutdowns, and at least some of this was due to students being preoccupied with the material needs they are facing. Lower levels of engagement were associated with very few students making progress toward their goals while simultaneously their needs have grown and their difficulties (such as mental health issues) worsened during the pandemic.

SSWs are aware of the limitations of their remote service provision. While many have invented new ways of addressing their clients' needs, many others are stressed and overwhelmed by their clients' difficulties and feel that remote practice is not an effective form of service provision. They also had limited time to improvise these new ways of serving students and families. As schools look to reopen, the need for SSWs to be as prepared as possible to deliver their services fully in-person, online, or in some combination will be a

crucial area for policymakers, social work organizations, and university pre-service training programs to partner together on to support SSWs in the 2020-21 school year and beyond.

A minority group of practitioners, less than one fifth, also experienced challenges in balancing their practice and their home environment. It should be noted that only a few (less than five percent) felt that they were challenged by technical issues.

Need for Interdisciplinary Master Plan that Addresses All Aspects of the Social Ecology and All School Professionals

While confusion and ambiguity can be understood given the pace of the pandemic during the last academic year, there is a clear need to organize professionally before embarking upon the next academic year. What is needed is a collaborative process to help design effective means of providing services during the pandemic. There is a need for guidelines and identification of best practices for various scenarios and for the possibility that these scenarios may shift rapidly. Hence, it is important to have professional guidelines for a situation in which all schools open and services are provided face-to-face, for the possibility of ongoing physical shut-down and remote services only, and for any combination thereof. National school social work and other school mental health professional organizations need to come together to support the development of professional guidelines in this new moment that are both specific to the relevant discipline but that also reflect some of the core competencies that all good school mental health practitioners demonstrate in their school practices.

Organized and Coordinated Response within Social Work

New guidelines and service provision modes will probably require changes in current regulations. It may be necessary to relax or change demands for face-to-face training and synchronous telehealth service delivery. Furthermore, it would be important to help frontline social workers through coordinated efforts to create materials and modules that could be disseminated to the field so that individual practitioners need not invent all wheels by themselves. Efforts should include university training programs and professional development.

Recruitment and Training of School Social Workers

Changes in providing support, supervision, and professional guidance are especially necessary to recruit more SSWs. More SSWs are required in schools to address school and community needs related to COVID-19. Even more importantly, although not part of this survey, we are fully aware of many schools which do not even have SSWs. The range of intertwined needs revealed by this study, and needs of students, families, and communities all

call for adding professionals with an ecological perspective and a wide range of skills in individual and group therapy, family interventions, community engagement, and advocacy on behalf of their clients.

Increasing Social Work Capacity

As more school social workers need to be recruited and placed urgently, many changes in current regulations related to training, qualifications, and supervision are required. This calls for a much stronger and coordinated collaboration between legislators, professional organizations, and universities to reinvent some of the current methods of preparing professionals, providing qualifications, and regulating practice. For example, in schools that currently do not have social workers, states and regulatory agencies may need to consider alternative forms of supervision so that new practitioners can practice legally.

All policy changes need to consider the characteristics of the workforce. Novice practitioners need more supervision and professional guidelines than more experienced ones. Novice practitioners that are also younger may have different concerns regarding their health compared with more experienced practitioners, and professionals who have been working in the field for more than 20 years may have different demands at home compared with younger workers. It is essential to take all of these workers into consideration when planning for the coming year. While many young workers may be willing to engage in face-to-face meetings with clients and colleagues, others may have grave and justified concerns about returning to school.

Social Work Must Contribute their Expertise to Plans for Reopening Schools

While our shared concern for children may lead to a recommendation to reopen schools (cf. pediatricians), our social work ethics must consider the needs and concerns of others in the school community, including teachers and pupil personnel. Even if the decision is made to open schools and require the physical presence of all school staff, professional organizations need to ensure that their members' rights and concerns are taken into account. This does not mean necessarily that physical presence would be automatically ruled out, but there need to be many adjustments and additional supports to minimize risk to the well-being of the adults in school.

We cannot comfortably determine that our sample represents the whole population of SSWs. We think, however, that there are indications that the gender and racial composition of our sample represents active SSWs in our country. As such, we think it is important to draw attention to the skewed distribution in terms of gender and race. There is a need to examine to what extent recruitment efforts should increase the proportion of males and practitioners of

color. The racial composition may be especially relevant in view of our finding that African American and Latinx practitioners tend to work in low-resourced schools and communities.

Another important worker characteristic highlighted by our study are the years of experience in the profession. Our sample is very diverse in this respect and includes practitioners in their first year and others with many years of experience. We found that more experienced practitioners are working in schools with higher resources. If this finding reflects the situation in the field, it should be a matter of concern. Experienced social workers are needed more by schools that are struggling with poverty and discrimination, not less.

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