

2/19/24

ICPE Day of Action

INSSWA Statement

Good Morning everyone,

My name is Meaghan Chien, and I am serving as President Elect for the Indiana School Social Work Association. We are an organization made up of school social workers across the state and we are passionate about advocating for the students and families we work with.

Many of our students in Indiana are facing significant barriers affecting their education such as housing, food insecurity, and limited access to transportation among other basic needs. According to the Indiana Youth Institute, in 2023, 16,427 total students in the state experienced homelessness. In 2021, the same source identified 59 counties that had a 10% rate of child food insecurity or higher, with 19 of those counties with a rate of 15% or more.

Since COVID, we have seen a large increase in mental health related needs as well with students that include substance use and suicidal ideation. According to the 2023 Indiana Kids Count Data Book, high school student suicidal ideations percentages raised from 18.9% in 2011 to 27.7% in 2021. While we do not know the numbers for the past 2 years, school social workers around the state have experienced an increase in mental health crisis intervention support for students.

School social workers serve as a vital link between families and education. We work alongside students providing wraparound services to reduce barriers that are affecting their education and link them to necessary school and community resources. As trained mental health professionals we address mental health and school safety concerns with crisis intervention, risk assessments, and connecting youth and their families with school and community supports for mental health. We collaborate with our school administration and student support services team to best meet the needs of our students.

We want to see our students succeed, and in order to achieve success for our students and families, we see the need for more available community resources to meet basic needs, those that are accessible to especially marginalized communities. We also want to advocate for more school social workers to be present in Indiana schools to serve as a link for those resources. HB 1243 has a current amendment to include school social workers in the budget for schools, which will greatly improve the ability of schools to hire more social workers. We thank you Senator DeLaney for your support of the amendment to include school social workers in this bill.

Thank you to the Indiana Coalition for Public Education for inviting us here today and for working together to improve the lives of students in Indiana.