

Social Workers Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why Does a School Need a School Social Worker/Visiting Teacher?

School social workers/visiting teachers are knowledgeable individuals who are trained to assess the needs of students/families and remove barriers to academic success. Possessing an awareness of social, emotional, cultural and economic differences, school social workers work hard to empower students and their families and collaborate with community agencies for support. School social workers/visiting teachers employ preventative measures such as home visits, phone calls, collaboration with school staff and community services to promote a positive school environment for all students. These unique practice specialties are essential to upholding and enhancing Augusta County School District's academic mission and strategic plan particularly when home, school and community collaboration is necessary.

2. How Does a School Social Worker Differ From A Department of Social Services Social Worker (DSS)?

School social workers/visiting teachers are directly employed by Augusta County School District. Every School Social Worker is required to be certified by the Virginia Department of Education and must have a Master's degree in Social Work. Visiting teachers are also required to be certified by the Virginia Department of Education and hold a Master's degree in Education. At times, a school social worker/visiting teacher may communicate with a DSS social worker or case manager. This may occur if a student is in foster care or when a report of neglect or abuse has been made by the school.

3. What Type of Students Does a Social Worker Work With?

School social workers/visiting teachers in Augusta County work with all students K-12 who are in need. Each of our four school social workers and our visiting teacher manage four or five schools depending on their vertical team. The general populations we work with include at-risk, homeless, special education and students with attendance concerns.

4. How Do Social Workers Determine What Students Receive Services?

School social workers/visiting teachers serve all students attending Augusta County Schools. Most of the referrals received come from a school counselor, teacher, administrator, or directly from a concerned parent. A school social worker's/visiting teacher's day is largely driven by the type of referrals received, and no two days are ever the same. Their response to a referral could be as simple as a telephone call, while some follow-ups require more intensive intervention such as immediate referral to community agencies or visits in the home or school environment with the student and/or family.

5. School Social Workers/Visiting Teachers are Mandated Reporters; How does this relate to confidentiality?

Confidentiality is an essential piece to developing and maintaining relationships with our students and families. However, school social workers/visiting teachers cannot offer absolute confidentiality because they are mandated reporters. School personnel/administration, teachers (Pre-K-12), nurses, law enforcement officers, and athletic coaches are all mandated reporters within the school setting. For a full list of mandated reporters, please see the document titled "Mandated Reporters." A mandated reporter must report any suspicion of child abuse and neglect to their local child protection agency or police. Mandated reporters must also share information if a student discloses intent to harm himself/herself or other individual(s).

6. How Is a School Social Worker/Visiting Teacher Involved In The Truancy Process?

School social workers/visiting teachers play an important role in reducing school dropouts and decreasing truancy rates. School social workers/visiting teachers monitor the attendance of students at the elementary and middle school levels. When a student has missed 3 days or more the school social worker makes contact with the parent(s) to discuss the student's absenteeism and its impact on their academic success, remind them of the policy and offers suggestions to encourage more consistent attendance. After a student has missed 5 unexcused days or 10 total absences (including excused and unexcused) a meeting is held with the designated school attendance personnel and the school social worker. If a student misses another unexcused absence, then a referral to the truancy process is made to the truancy officer. Another meeting is held, with the school social worker/visiting teacher and parents, to address the continued non-attendance and discuss any additional supports. If the student misses another unexcused absence, then a referral to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court is made due to a violation of Virginia's Compulsory Attendance Law.

7. What are the Sociocultural assessments School Social Workers/Visiting Teachers complete and why are they important?

A sociocultural assessment is a series of questions that addresses environment factors that could possibly affect a student's ability to learn. This component is required for an initial special education eligibility or when it is requested by the special education eligibility team. The assessment helps us get to know about the child's home life and thus giving us the full picture of the student. The school social worker meets with the parent(s)/guardian either in their home or at an agreed upon alternate location. The sociocultural assessment can include both an interview portion as well as an adaptive measure, if necessary. The assessment lasts between 1-3 hours, depending on the amount of information shared. This component is very important because it helps us get to know the child from the people who know him/her best and determine areas of need. Lastly, the information collected can assist in the IEP development, if the student is found eligible.