

# Research on the Participation of School Social Work in Campus Governance and the Path of Student Assistance

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**Abstract:** School social work plays an increasingly important role in school governance and student support by addressing the interconnected needs of students, families, schools, and communities. Through services such as needs assessment, case management, crisis intervention, family engagement, and resource coordination, school social workers promote inclusive, preventive, and student-centered governance. Despite challenges including unclear professional roles, limited institutional support, and weak interprofessional collaboration, school social work can strengthen student wellbeing and educational equity through early identification, tiered intervention, community partnerships, and continuous outcome evaluation. It should be recognized as a key professional resource in modern school governance rather than merely a crisis-response service.

**Keywords:** School social work; school governance; student support; multi-tiered systems of support; student wellbeing; family-school collaboration

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## Introduction

Modern schools face increasingly complex challenges related to student wellbeing, family circumstances, mental health, and social inequality, making traditional administrative approaches insufficient for effective school governance. School social work offers a holistic and student-centered response by addressing the connections among students, families, schools, and communities. Grounded in ecological and strengths-based perspectives, school social workers help remove barriers to learning through assessment, intervention, resource coordination, and collaboration with educators and community agencies. This review examines the governance functions of school social work, the barriers limiting its effectiveness, and the development of practical student support pathways, highlighting its role as an essential component of inclusive and supportive school governance.

## 1. Functional Positioning of School Social Work in School Governance

School social work should first be positioned as a bridge between student needs and school governance. Traditional school governance often identifies student problems through academic results, attendance records, disciplinary cases, or teacher reports. These indicators are important, but they may not reveal the deeper causes of student difficulties. School social workers can conduct ecological assessment by examining the relationship among students, families, classrooms, peer networks, neighborhoods, and public services. Through home visits, interviews, case records, group work, and community resource mapping, school social workers help schools understand students as whole persons rather than as isolated academic performers.

School social work contributes to school governance by promoting preventive and tiered support. Many schools respond to students only after problems become serious, but school social workers can help build early-warning and early-intervention systems. In a multi-tiered systems of support framework, universal services may include social-emotional learning, anti-bullying education, school-climate activities, and family education; targeted services may include group counseling, attendance intervention, peer relationship support, and parent consultation; intensive services may include case management, crisis intervention, referral to mental-health services, and coordinated family support. Such a tiered model allows schools to allocate support according to student needs rather than using one-size-fits-all management.

School social work strengthens collaborative governance. Schools often involve multiple professionals, including principals, teachers, counselors, psychologists, nurses, special educators, and community workers. Without

coordination, these actors may work separately and fail to form a coherent support network. School social workers can function as case coordinators and resource brokers by organizing student support teams, facilitating family–school communication, connecting community agencies, and ensuring follow-up. Research on school social work integration highlights the importance of interprofessional relationships among school staff, students, families, and communities for improving student and school outcomes.

Table 1. Functions of School Social Work in School Governance

Governance Function	Main School Social Work Activities	Expected Governance Value	Student Support Outcome
Needs assessment	Ecological assessment, interviews, home visits, case records	Better understanding of student difficulties	More accurate support planning
Early warning	Attendance monitoring, teacher consultation, risk screening	Earlier identification of problems	Reduced crisis escalation
Tiered intervention	Universal prevention, group work, case management	More efficient allocation of support	Matched services for different needs
Family engagement	Parent consultation, family education, home–school communication	Stronger family–school trust	Improved support continuity
Community linkage	Referral, resource mapping, agency collaboration	Expanded service capacity	Access to external support
School climate improvement	Anti-bullying work, inclusion programs, conflict mediation	Safer and more caring school environment	Stronger belonging and wellbeing
Equity advocacy	Support for vulnerable and marginalized students	Fairer school governance	Reduced barriers to learning

## 2. Practical Challenges in School Social Work Participation

The first challenge is unclear role boundaries. In many schools, social workers may be expected to handle all “difficult students,” discipline problems, family conflicts, crisis events, and administrative tasks. This broad expectation can weaken professional identity and turn school social work into a miscellaneous support role. At the same time, role overlap with school counselors, psychologists, attendance officers, and behavior specialists may create confusion. If the school does not clearly define the functions of school social work, social workers may either be underused in governance decision-making or overburdened by crisis cases and paperwork.

The second challenge is insufficient institutional integration. School social workers may provide valuable case services, but they are sometimes excluded from school leadership discussions, policy design, curriculum planning, discipline reform, or school-climate decision-making. When social work is treated only as a referral service, its preventive and governance functions are weakened. School social workers need access to relevant student data, participation in student support teams, communication channels with administrators, and authority to coordinate external resources. Without institutional recognition, social work participation may remain fragmented and reactive rather than systematic and strategic.

The third challenge concerns resource inequality and ethical complexity. Some students need mental-health treatment, child protection services, disability support, housing assistance, food security, legal aid, or family counseling, but schools may be located in communities with limited service resources. Even when resources exist, referral pathways may be slow, fragmented, or difficult for families to navigate. In addition, school social workers must balance confidentiality, student safety, family rights, mandatory reporting, school accountability, and data-sharing requirements. During emergencies or online learning disruptions, school social workers may need to adapt rapidly to changing family and community needs, as shown in pandemic-era school social work practice.

### 3. Student Support Pathways and Governance Optimization

The first pathway is to establish an early identification and tiered intervention system. Schools should use attendance data, academic performance, behavioral records, teacher observations, student self-reports, peer feedback, and family communication to identify students who may need support. However, data should not be used to label students; it should guide supportive action. School social workers can help design screening procedures, assess student strengths and risks, and match students with universal, targeted, or intensive interventions. This pathway shifts student support from passive crisis response to proactive prevention.

The second pathway is to strengthen family–school–community collaboration. Many student problems cannot be solved only inside the classroom. School social workers should develop structured family engagement mechanisms, including parent consultation, home visits, family education workshops, resource navigation, and culturally responsive communication. Community collaboration can connect schools with mental-health agencies, youth services, social welfare organizations, legal aid, health providers, and local nonprofit groups. Evidence on community collaboration models suggests that school-community partnerships can improve access to mental-health services, school climate, and disciplinary outcomes.

The third pathway is to build a professional governance mechanism for school social work. Schools should clarify job responsibilities, establish referral and case-management procedures, include social workers in student support teams, create ethical data-sharing protocols, and evaluate outcomes through both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Evaluation should not only count the number of cases served, but should also examine attendance improvement, student wellbeing, family engagement, reduced disciplinary incidents, improved school climate, and student sense of belonging. School social work should be embedded in school governance as a professional system that links prevention, intervention, advocacy, and continuous improvement.

### 4. Conclusion

School social work plays a vital role in modern school governance by addressing the social, emotional, behavioral, and environmental factors that affect student development. Through ecological assessment, family engagement, resource coordination, crisis intervention, and preventive support, school social workers help create more inclusive and student-centered schools. Although challenges such as unclear professional roles, limited institutional support, and unequal resource distribution remain, integrating school social work into decision-making, multi-tiered support systems, and community partnerships can strengthen student wellbeing and improve governance effectiveness. As a result, school social work should be recognized as a core component of sustainable and responsive school support systems.

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