



School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

Guidance for Supporting Students, Families, and Staff Post Election

While our nation continues to navigate the ongoing anxiety and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also facing increased political and social unrest in response to racial violence which is exacerbating underlying angst and suffering. Our communities have become more and more polarized during this time. The vital role school social workers play in creating safe spaces where diverse perspectives are valued, encouraged and respected is crucial in mitigating the effects of this divisiveness. With the impending Presidential election this Tuesday and tension surrounding the election outcomes, our expertise and unique skill set will be called upon to support the variety of responses students, families, and staff may experience no matter what the results may be. In order to effectively respond to the complex needs facing our school communities post election, SSWAA would like to offer a few recommendations:

- 1. Beginning with self reflection and self care** - Leading and engaging in courageous conversations is a strength of school social workers; however, it is important to be mindful of our own biases, values and experiences related to the current political climate. An article written by Barnard College Center for Engaged Pedagogy reminds us as professionals to “cultivate awareness of and remain open to your own vulnerabilities and experiences” (Jurich, n.d., paragraph 4). To guide your journey of self awareness consider *“how the election has been impacting you in your personal and professional life and what issues and possible outcomes are you most concerned about?”* (Jurich, n.d., paragraph 4). <https://cep.barnard.edu/post-election-discussions-online-classroom>. *How can you channel your strengths while being mindful of your vulnerabilities to lead healing efforts at this time?* In addition to pausing to reflect, tending to self care practices is a necessary means to sustain one’s ability to support students, families and staff during stressful times. Find a few minutes each day for the purposes of finding balance, gratitude and release. <http://www.socialworkblog.org/practice-and-professional-development/2020/04/the-art-of-self-care-for-social-workers/>
- 2. Cultivating Safe and Supportive School Communities** - Establishing a positive school climate is essential, especially in times like these, to ensure that every child is treated with dignity and respect. We must also provide children the tools and skills to successfully interact with teachers and peers who differ from them. Implementing an SEL program can be a bridge to building inclusive and supportive learning communities

that value the diversity, strengths and experiences of all students. SEL is also an intervention that can promote civic engagement and youth voice. CASEL has created a framework that explores the interconnectedness of SEL and equity

<https://schoolguide.casel.org/what-is-sel/equity-and-sel/>. The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities developed “A Day After Election Guide: A Resource for K-12 Educators and Administrators” as an approach to prepare for the needs of students not only post election but throughout the school year via classroom lessons, professional development, communication with parents and families, etc. <https://inclusiveva.org/day-after-election-guide/>. Both resources outline a school wide approach.

3. **Honoring Staff Needs** - Children and youth are observing and trying to make sense of adults’ reactions to current societal challenges. Teachers and school staff can help reduce anxiety by modeling emotional regulation and establishing an atmosphere of acceptance. Recognizing the overwhelming stress staff are enduring, offer resources and tools for staff self-care during this time of uncertainty so students can lean into the strength and groundedness of their teachers, support personnel and other school staff <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/universal-design-for-learning/practicing-self-care-during-coronavirus-5-tips-for-teachers>. Facilitate a staff meeting to check-in with how staff are coping at this moment and set collaborative guidelines for discussions that may be challenging. Staff also have a professional responsibility to not be partisan as well as an obligation to reinforce school values that foster unity, kindness and respect. Establishing school values through PBIS or SEL can prevent incidents of bias, bullying and/or harassment.
4. **Honoring Student Needs** - To respond to student distress, school social workers are offering structured opportunities either virtually or in person to attend to the physical and emotional manifestations of frustration, fears, sadness, anger, grief, etc. using mindfulness activities such as <https://mindup.org/>, [calming kids yoga videos](#), <https://vamos.gonoodle.com/>. Utilizing restorative practices through peace circles is another evidence-based solution for attending to the emotional needs of students while also teaching communication and conflict resolution skills. Although this may look different during distance learning, the essence of forming relationships and focus on guiding questions where individuals feel their voice matters remains the same. <https://www.iirp.edu/news/during-the-covid-19-crisis-restorative-practices-can-help>. Research confirms that the structured format of restorative circles promotes equity by building empathy and community. To learn more about or strengthen your skills in restorative practices the following link provides access to a variety of resources to enhance your practice <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/restorative-justice-resources-matt-davis>. School social workers must also “be conscious of the ways in which some students and families may have been and continue to be unevenly affected by policies

of the current administration” (Jurich, n.d., paragraph 11). Older students may feel particularly vulnerable, so allow expression if and when they are ready in the way that feels most comfortable for them such as writing, drawing, talking, etc.

5. **Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students** - Issues related to social inequities and injustices are difficult to discuss, yet school social workers can offer healing opportunities for this discourse. “Let’s Talk”, a guide written by Teaching Tolerance offers invaluable insight and steps for discussing race, racism and other forms of oppression.

<http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/TT%20Difficult%20Conversations%20web.pdf>. “Civil Discourse in the Classroom,” another Teaching Tolerance

resource, was originally created for young adolescents but can be adapted for all ages. The lessons outlined can be used in a number of settings according to the authors

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/civil-discourse-in-the-classroom>.

“Encouraging students to talk to each other means encouraging a context where it is possible, even likely, that these diverse backgrounds and expectations will create moments that may be awkward but also contain opportunity for deeper mutual understanding” (Shuster, p.4).

School social workers are well positioned to be transformational leaders in promoting equity, inclusivity and supportive school environments. Guiding efforts to heal our communities is fundamental to our practice not only through the direct services provided, but also through advocacy efforts. Despite these unprecedented challenges facing our nation, school social workers’ knowledge and expertise are integral to the health and well-being of the individuals and communities we serve. SSWAA is proud to offer a network of professionals and tools to support your practice such as the above recommendations. Continue to access the SSWAA website, SSWAA professional development opportunities and SSWAA Board to meet your needs.

Approved by the Board of Directors, November 2, 2020

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