**Find Your Legislator Here!**

[www.in.gov/legislative](http://www.in.gov/legislative)

**Ways to Influence the Policy Process**

* Meet with legislators before and during the legislative session
* Follow bills on the General Assembly website
* Develop policy briefs to distribute to policy makers
* Network with other groups that have common interests
* Write letters and emails to your legislators

**Important Steps for Writing Letters and Emails**

1. Address the letter correctly.
2. Identify the bill or issue in the first sentence.
3. Remind the policy maker of any past contact.
4. Use your own words and relate your personal experience with the issue.
5. Make appeals using both logic (facts, statistics) and emotion (personal stories).
6. Ask for a specific action- support, oppose, vote. Ask in both the first and last paragraph.
7. Always be courteous and respectful, and thank the policy maker for his/her time.
8. Include your contact information.

**Additional Ways to Influence Policy**

* Write letters to the editor or guest columns in local newspapers.
* Attend LEAD Day and other rallies at the State House.
* Testify at committee hearings. Send in written testimony if you cannot attend.
* Thank legislators who vote with you on bills.

**Tips for Speaking with Legislators**

* Use Personal Experience
* Be timely with appointments and with issues
* Choose the best means of communication, if emails are not getting a response call their office
* Maintain a Working Relationship

**Call Your Legislator**

House 317-232-9600 or 800-382-9842

Senate 317-232-9400 or 800-382-9467

• The switchboard will direct you to the legislative assistant of your legislator.

• Leave a message regarding the bill(s) you are calling in regards to and ask for your legislator to call you back.

• Don’t be discouraged if you do not receive a call back. The number of contacts made on a particular bill are tracked by their assistants. That helps them understand what bills have community concern or support.

**Sample Letter/Email/Phone Call:**

Dear Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

I am a member of the Indiana School Social Work Association (INSSWA) and hold my Masters in Social Work.  I also am currently a school social worker at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(school)  in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (county).  I am contacting you to state my support for HB 1381, which provides for a student services providers needs assessment.  **(You could elaborate here if you wish but stick to the main points and keep it short/use facts).**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your name, credentials

Indiana’s educational system has unprecedented levels of teacher expertise and accountability, yet our schools are still failing far too many of our children, especially those children most at-risk. Two of our nation’s top educational researchers, David Berliner and Gene Glass of the National Educational Policy Center, point to research that helps explain why this is occurring. Their findings indicate that while good teachers are of course important, the most significant variables influencing a child’s education are their socio-economic status, neighborhood, and the psychological quality of their home environment (Berliner & Glass, 2014). Therefore, to address the educational needs of students, we must first address their needs outside of the school, as well as the social and emotional needs that they bring in to the school setting.

**With the above in mind, please consider the unique expertise, knowledge base, and professional lens that school social workers (SSWs) bring to addressing these issues. In this regard, please consider the following:**

* Out of all the professions that work in a school setting, including administrators, teachers, nurses, psychologists, and counselors, SSWs are the only professionals that have a mandate to use a holistic, systems-based perspective. To stress this focus, the preamble to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics states, “Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.”
* In using a holistic approach, school social workers are trained to work collaboratively with other professionals, as well as with families, community partners, and other systems that serve children and families. We are trained to be the point of contact to connect children, family, school, and community.
* Through solid research on the latest neuroscience regarding learning, SSWs are well trained in social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices.
* SSWs are trained to promote positive school community environments by developing and implementing school wide programs focused on character education, conflict resolution, and anti-bullying, just to name a few.
* SSWs are well versed in education policy and can provide a holistic lens to the interpretation of such policies, especially in regards to discipline, Response to Intervention (RTI), and special education. We also are educated to lend our voice to developing and implementing policies.
* All of the above is based in sound theory and evidenced based knowledge of assessments and interventions, and with full consideration of a child and family’s strengths and culture.

Finally, it is important to note that the Indiana School Counselor Association (ISCA), the Indiana Association of School Psychologists (IASP), and the Indiana School Social Work Association (INSSWA) issued a joint statement that the most effective school staffing model is one in which all three of these professions are present in a school. This acknowledges the uniquely valuable roles that each brings to the school setting and, as school social workers, we welcome the opportunity to work with these other professions to both clarify our roles and work collaboratively on behalf of all students.

References

Berliner, D. & Glass, G. (2014). *50 myths & lies that threaten America’s public schools: The real crisis in education*. Teacher’s College Press: New York, NY.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2010). *Code of ethics.* Retrieved from www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.asp.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), & School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) (2014, October 20). Effective school staffing model: Teaming school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers (Joint Statement). Retrieved from http://www.sswaa.org/news/198697/Joint-Statement-Effective-School-Staffing-Model--School-Counselors-School-Psychs-and-SSWs.htm