

September 6, 2019

Amy Starzecki, District Administrator
School District of Superior
3025 Tower Avenue
Superior, WI 54880

Len Albrecht, Board President
School District of Superior
3025 Tower Avenue
Superior, WI 54880

Dear Ms. Starzecki and Mr. Albrecht:

We have been asked to respond to your note on behalf of Superintendent Stanford Taylor. Thank you for contacting the superintendent's office with your concerns and perspective. It is important for us to understand the needs of school districts in Wisconsin so that our department can offer our best support and resources. We appreciate your awareness of the mental health challenges of your students, staff, and families and how those challenges affect school success.

Knowing that your district is similar to others in Wisconsin in struggling to find community mental health providers, our department has advocated for additional money and resources for school-based mental health. We agree that school-based mental health professionals offer critical support and services, including the work of school social workers.

In your letter to our department, you raised a number of concerns with the licensing process for school social workers. It is important that we clarify our policies. Our department issues school social work licenses to individuals who have completed an accredited school social work program, including graduates of school social work prep programs located out-of-state. At this time, there are three schools in Wisconsin that offer a school social work specific program. Also, individuals with a master's in social work are able to obtain a tier 1 license with stipulations, and are able to renew this license if enrolled in a program that leads to an endorsement for school social work licensure.

Our university partners have been working in recent years to expand the opportunities for individuals to obtain their school social work endorsements through online coursework and individualized programming that includes creatively matching practicum


Amy Starzecki
Len Albrecht
Page 2
September 6, 2019

students with supervisors in other districts. The prep programs in Wisconsin have reported graduating larger and larger classes of new school social workers, including through UW Madison's satellite location at UW Eau Claire. Helping prospective school social workers in your area understand the options could increase the numbers of licensed individuals available.


Our department is currently reviewing our administrative rules relating to licensure in the four pupil services license categories and how they compare to the requirements in neighboring states. Before proposing any changes, we will seek additional feedback from districts, preparation programs, school social workers, clinical practitioners, and the public. Your letter will remain at the top of the comments.

Thank you again for advocating for students and your school community in the area of school-based mental health.

Sincerely,



Sheila Briggs, PhD
Assistant State Superintendent
Division for Academic Excellence



Barbara Van Haren, PhD
Assistant State Superintendent
Division for Learning Support

sah



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF SUPERIOR

All Means All: Every Student, Every Day

Administrative Office
3025 Tower Ave
Superior, WI 54880
P: 715-394-8710
F: 715-394-8708

July 26, 2019

Dear Ms. Van Haren,

We are writing to ask for your support to address a licensing issue we are facing in our region of the state.

In Northwest Wisconsin, similar to much of the United States, our schools are significantly impacted by the mental health needs of our student population. Mental health is the most critical issue facing our children in the Superior community at all grade levels. Research has shown trauma, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, or other adverse childhood experiences directly impacts our students' ability to attend school and learn, and we see daily evidence of this in our schools. Our preliminary Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data from 2019 indicates that within the past 12 months, 53% of our students in grades 9-12 report having problems with anxiety, 21% have harmed themselves, 22% have seriously considered suicide, and 10% have attempted suicide.

As a border community to Duluth, Minnesota, our region suffers from a lack of community health providers due to Wisconsin's low Medicaid reimbursement rate when compared to Minnesota. Providers elect to locate in Duluth instead of Superior as they are able to receive higher revenue for providing the same services. Unfortunately, the border that divides our states is an insurmountable barrier for our most disadvantaged children, who are reliant on state services. District-wide, 47.7% of our students are considered economically disadvantaged. Our 2019 YRBS data also indicated 28% of our students in grades 9-12 experienced hunger due to lack of food at home within the past 30 days.

Due to the lack of mental health providers in our community, the Superior School District is making every effort to provide these vital services ourselves. We are aware that some children and families may otherwise go without services due to these obstacles. Recently, our district took the initiative to hire a school social worker to assist in providing mental health services. We discovered the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will only issue a School Social Work license to graduates of the Master of Social Work program at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Milwaukee or Green Bay. Our District views this as an unfair burden and potentially discriminatory because of the inaccessibility due to our geographical location. With only three approved programs, the closest of which is over 300 miles away, our potential pool of applicants is extremely limited.

I have discussed these concerns with DPI. The rationale shared with me is the programs in our region do not require school placements as part of their program. Their assumption is that our local programs have only a clinical focus. However, students completing programs in our backyard at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, University of Minnesota-Duluth, or College of Saint Scholastica are able to obtain school social work licensure through the MN Department of Education with none of

MISSION: The School District of Superior will ensure **all** students have the knowledge and skills for living, learning, and working successfully.

VISION: In Superior, **all means all** ... Every student, every day!

The School District of Superior does not discriminate in employment decisions based on age, religion, race, creed, color, disability, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, parental status, citizenship status, arrest record, conviction record, or membership in the National Guard or military forces of the United States, or any other characteristic protected by federal or state law.

these barriers. In fact, the states that border with Wisconsin (Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan) honor any social work graduate program that is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) as long as the candidate also has a license from that state's Board of Social Work. We fear the restrictions on approved school social work programs places an unnecessary burden upon Northwest Wisconsin and other border communities, leaving us unable to meet the needs of the children and families in the Superior School District while we are situated near these readily accessible resources in our very own community.

We are writing to strongly ask for your assistance. We urge you and all of our representatives to review this requirement and eliminate the unnecessary obstacle to this progressive step towards strengthening the social and emotional development of our District's children. We need your assistance to ensure we can attract highly qualified social work candidates in our region to serve the increasing mental health needs of our student population. This barrier directly impacts our ability to meet the needs of our students, and we believe it can be resolved without compromising DPI's high standards or reducing the quality of service provided to our students.

We eagerly await your response on how we can collaborate and next steps we can take to expand the Wisconsin School Social Work licensure to accept credentials from any CSWE accredited program and give our students the same advantages enjoyed by those in Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan.



LEN ALBRECHT
Board President
Superior School District
Len.Albrecht@superior.k12.wi.us



Amy Starzecki
District Administrator
Superior School District
Amy.Starzecki@superior.k12.wi.us