<u>**Program Development and the School Social Worker**</u>

<u>**18th National School Social Work Conference**</u>

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<u>**Slide 1**</u>

My name is Laura Richard. I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi School of Social Work. Prior to my appointment 2 years ago, I worked in Louisiana with the LA Dept. of Education to define their school social work program and develop a measurement tool to assess school social work services. Before (and during) this time, I managed social workers in an FQHC providing services in several school districts in Louisiana. Prior to that I served 12 years as a school social worker providing behavior intervention services to students in a district with excessive discipline referrals or those placed in an alternative setting. My co-presenter is Valeri Stewart.

-Valeri introduces herself

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Today we would like to share a case study of the development of a school social work program as well as break down the process to make it the least overwhelming as possible.

<u>**Slide 4—Valeri**</u>

Overview of today's presentation

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How many of you work in an existing school social work program? Why, in a million years, would you consider adding more to your plate by taking on the challenge of re-developing that program? If you are like me, probably on a daily basis, you have thought—"if we did 'this' or 'that', it would make so much more sense"; or "I am not even sure what we are doing is even effective…..I know it's not efficient"; or "someone needs to re-organize school social work services in our district---we don't even know what we are supposed to be doing"; or "I am so overwhelmed with cases/students/you fill in the blank, that I feel like I am getting nowhere except burned out".   Have you been here? Am I really the only one?

Well, there are reasons that employees in any field choose to develop or re-develop a much-needed program. In fact, by going through the process, employees also become more motivated and excited about the job they have been in for the past 10 years.

Program Development or Re-Development Purposes

First of all, there are several purposes for any program development or re-development. School social work fits these categories too.

- Optimum fit of the worker to the job—making sure that your and your co-workers' skills are used in the best, most efficient way possible within the school and within the district
- Efficiency and productivity—if we work more efficiently, we will be more productive. However, I have had a hard time locating any school social work program that did not need some assistance in becoming more efficient and productive.
  - What does efficiency look like for a school social worker? I can think of the opposite of that—constantly having to explain how to do something to school staff who have referred a student to you for assistance. What about doing the same work with a student that is already being done by someone else?
- Another purpose for program development or re-development is worker satisfaction and motivation. I never had an instance where I got bored with my job, but I had many instances where it felt tedious; where my level of stress made the thought of finding different work lived in the back of my mind constantly. It is hard to find satisfaction in something that makes you feel like you accomplish nothing because you are not even exactly sure what you are supposed to accomplish in the first place. We all want to be satisfied in our jobs.
- Finally, program development or re-development can have an impact on the entire system, not just the school social workers or the department housing school social work. Program development or re-development can change the entire organization/school district beyond a particular department.

So, how do we do this?

Development Strategies

Several researched strategies exist that can assist in the development or re-development of a program.

- Job enlargement—make the job more complex and challenging; thus allowing workers to see their role as part of a whole. I don't know about you, but add one more thing to my already full plate, and I would explode---so that one is out.
- Job enrichment—workers assume more responsibility for their own work making the workflow more streamlined. It's fine to do that for yourself, but, in my experience, the more streamlined my work became as an individual, the more work I received—so that one is out
- Job rotation—exchanging job responsibilities with other school system employees in order to gain a better understanding of the organization as a whole. As much as I would like to be superintendent for a day, this option is not a viable fit for a school district
- Creating teams—subdividing the workload in a way that allows each person to contribute to the team in their area of strength or specialization. This already exists in most school districts among "special education personnel" (where we sometimes fit) or among behavior interventionists (sometimes a combination of psychologists, counselors, social workers).

- Varying work conditions—flex time; adapts to the personal and family demands of employees. Unfortunately, schools are only open during certain time periods, making flex time difficult, if not impossible. Plus, can you see telling the district office that you will be working from 6-2 while your counterpart will pick up from 2-10. Probably won't happen…..
- Finally, technology can be used to reduce some of the tedious, repetitious, and redundant types of work by having equipment handle the routine parts of our jobs….What routine parts of our jobs??? Enough said.

What do we do, then, to revitalize, improve, or create for the first time a school social work program in a school or a district? Should it only be done in individual school? Can it be done in the entire district? The answer is dependent on your individual situation. The following information can be used in either of these settings or in settings we have not even discussed. The steps in the process are transferrable and have had success at a district level in my case and at a school level in Valeri's case. Valeri will now share her experiences in developing a school social work program in a school that formerly had no school social work program or even a school counselor.

Valeri's Story

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As you listened to Valeri's story what did you think? Is this something you could do? I mean she is an intern. She did not have "other" responsibilities to deal with. Yes, she did. Every moment spent in the school setting was completely filled with serving students, teachers, and staff—much like the jobs we do.

Let's review the steps she took to develop this program---the same steps that could be used to re-develop a program or even a part of a program—say, the mental health services part of a larger school social work program.

Slide 7--Handout

1. **Engage Stakeholders**
   a. **Who are stakeholders?** Anyone who affects or is affected by a program. In a school setting, that could be looked at one of two ways—anyone affected by or affecting the entire school or the entire district OR anyone affected by or affecting the school social work program. These might be one in the same or the second way of looking at it—school social work program specific—could narrow down the pool of stakeholders to a more manageable level. Let's think about possible stakeholders of a school social work program:
      i. Students
      ii. Faculty and staff
      iii. Parents

        iv. What about outside mental health agencies serving youth in your community?

        v. Critics of the program or of initiating a program

        vi. Any other thoughts?

        vii. Let's look at it this way. Your stakeholders are those who implement the program, support the program, participate in the program, or those who make decisions about the program

  b. **Why engage stakeholders?** Stakeholders can help or hinder the process before it is conducted, while it is being conducted, and after it is complete. Stakeholders are more likely to support the evaluation and act on results and recommendations if they are involved in the process. Engagement at the beginning pays off at the end!! We want their help in order to give our program:

        i. Credibility—if engaged and supportive from the beginning of the process, your program development or re-development will be considered credible, thus something to be respected

        ii. Implementation—directly or indirectly, they are responsible for ensuring the program is implemented. If you are trying to develop or re-vamp a program, that will potentially affect the implementation process, stakeholders should be engaged

        iii. Advocates/authorizes changes—some stakeholders can make the process go a lot more smoothly if they are engaged from the beginning--- somebody has to grant you permission at some point

        iv. Funding/continuation—some stakeholders determine if the program or at least program employees will continue to receive funding. Their input is crucial to maintain and enhance our role. We are seen as contributors to the overall success of the school or district.

  c. **How do we engage stakeholders?**

        i. Determine who you need to engage—is it just the principal of the school? Is it students and parents? Others?

        ii. Then communicate with them your desire to re-develop the existing program or the request that has been made of you to develop a non-existent program

        iii. Ask for their input

            1. Explain the existing program or the need for a program

            2. Ask their opinion about the current program and needs of the school/district

            3. Have them describe the program or desire for a program from their point of view—good and bad

The entire development or re-development should be a participatory process.

2. **Program Description—**this information can be obtained from your stakeholders during engagement
   a. Who is your audience and environment? Where does/will the program take place?
   b. Describe the core components of the existing program
      i. Context---when, where, how, for whom…..
      ii. How is it currently implemented? By whom?
      iii. What are the current outcomes? Do they go along with school district desired outcomes?
   c. If a program does not currently exist, describe the core components of the future program context---setting, inputs, expected outcomes (i.e., school, district, students served, number of schools in district, students in school). For example, where will the program take place, who will implement the program, what will they actually do during implementation

It's now time to determine the true needs of the school/district:

3. **Focus the Assessment**
   a. Use your stakeholders (students, staff, families)to focus the direction of your needs assessment—just ask around
      i. Ask them what the problems are in the school/district. Needs? Strengths?
      ii. What is the school/district most focused on currently?
      iii. What direction would you like to see the school social work program going?
   b. Use your knowledge of the current program or a previous program you have worked in
   c. Collect existing data—from school/district documents, from conversations, from personal experience

4. **Gather Data**—a comprehensive needs assessment includes a collection and analysis of data, survey information, focus groups, policy review, and review of current programs. After talking to stakeholders and understanding the program based on the description, you must decide how to move forward in identifying what the focus of the program should be. It's not enough to just "think you know". To support the changes or initial implementation you want to make, hard data matters! And sharing this information with stakeholders is extremely important!
   a. Now is the time to design a fairly easy way to collect additional data based on what you found out while focusing the assessment

        i. For example, it appears that there are very few issues with bullying in the school, however, the school administration insists it is a problem. We need to somehow determine if this is true by expanding our "ask.

       ii. Additional data can be obtained through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to name a few. Valeri did not have time to formally speak to each staff member, student, and parent in the school. She was able to gather information through a teacher survey and a parent survey. Because of the age of the students, she did not conduct a student survey, but that is also a possibility. Everyone was asked the same questions. The only difference was the way the questions were worded for each sub-group. An example of the survey Valeri used is provided. Schools and districts are so individualized, though, so design your own.

          1. Survey design tools are available online (Survey Monkey, Qualtrics) or you can design your own like Valeri

          2. The easiest data to use is from questions offering a range of choices (see Val's survey)

          3. You can also sometimes find pre-existing surveys

b. How many people do I collect data from?

       i. As many people as possible is the ideal answer.

       ii. If you cannot gather information from the entire population of students, staff, and families, try to get as many as you can from the groups surveyed

       iii. If using focus groups—gathering several small groups of 7-8 people and asking the questions you want to know, allowing time for each participant to answer while someone takes notes—the numbers can be fewer as long as all groups are represented, but are more time consuming

c. What do I do with the data??

       i. You can enter responses on an Excel spreadsheet and identify how many participants responded in certain ways to the questions asked.

       ii. If using a computer-based survey tool, you can print responses and/or graphs directly from the site.

       iii. If hard copies are used from the web-based tool, you can then enter each survey and get the same responses printed with or without graphs

       iv. For data gathered through focus groups or interviews, all answers can be reviewed to identify recurring themes that can guide the program development

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5. Explore Results

    a. What have you learned?

    b. Does the needs assessment indicate the direction the program should move or a place where it should start?

    c. SHARE THE RESULTS!!

      d. Begin building the new or re-vamped program based on identified needs and school system goals

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6. **Evidence-supported program implementation**
   a. Identify the main needs indicated and/or the most pressing
   b. Develop a handbook of services to be offered
   c. Find evidence-supported programs that could be used to address the main challenges and include them in the handbook
   d. Design your own and begin providing the evidence base needed to support its youth

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7. **Evaluating Success**
   a. Program and practice evaluation should always be at the forefront of your mind
   b. ALWAYS include ways to measure the success of individual pieces of the program or the overall program in your handbook AND USE IT!!
   c. Since you have been engaged with stakeholders throughout the entire process, make sure to link your successes to those important to the school and/or district in which you work
   d. If your priorities match their priorities, and your services can be shown to impact school district priorities, you have succeeded in becoming a leader in your field, your school, and the eyes of those of us depending on you to maintain our presence in the school setting sometimes against great odds!

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THANK YOU!!!! ANY QUESTIONS???