

LIMITED-SCOPE AUDIT PROPOSAL

Trends in Social Workers Employed by School Districts

SOURCE

This audit proposal was requested by Representative Brenda Landwehr.

BACKGROUND

School districts hire social workers to provide assistance for students with mental health or behavioral concerns. They are typically trained mental health professionals with bachelors' or masters' degrees in social work. Social workers provide many services including assessing students with behavioral concerns, consulting with teachers to improve student behavior, and connecting parents and students with community services. In 2021, school districts employed about 650 social workers.

In 2018, the legislature approved funding for the Mental Health Intervention Team Program (MHITP) that established partnerships between school districts and community mental health centers. The primary program goal is to provide consistent behavioral health care to students in foster care and to students who may need services outside of the normal school day. Further, the program recognized that the state does not have the capacity to have parallel behavioral care systems. Partnerships between schools and community mental health centers allow schools to access services already in place in the community rather than create their own. In the 2020-21 school year, 44 school districts participated in the program.

Legislators have expressed concern that, contrary to the purpose of MHITP, the number of social workers employed by school districts has increased over the last few years.

AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND TENTATIVE METHODOLOGY

The audit objectives listed below are the questions we would answer through our audit work. The steps listed for each objective convey the type of work we would do. These may change as we learn more about the audit issues.

Objective 1: How has the number of social workers employed by school districts changed in recent years? Our tentative methodology would include the following:

- Use data from KSDE to determine how the number of social workers employed by school districts has changed since 2018.
- For a sample of school districts, collect social worker salary information. Also, interview those school district officials to understand any trends we saw in the districts. Additionally, discuss the reasons districts hire social workers, any challenges they face in hiring them, and the impact of MHITP in their decisions.
- Talk with a few community health care stakeholders to understand the impact of school districts' hiring social workers on other community services.

ESTIMATED RESOURCES

We estimate this audit would require **100 staff hours** to complete.