

School Social Work Week Recognized in Beauregard Schools

Beauregard Parish schools will recognize School Social Work Week, March 5-9, to highlight the role that school social workers play in the school system, according to Mac Spikes, Director of Special Education. The School Social Work Association of America is sponsoring the week with the theme: "United to Make a Better World."

"School social workers are instrumental in furthering the mission of our school system to provide opportunities for all of our students to achieve academic success and to thrive in our global society," said Spikes. "School social workers bring a unique skill set and knowledge to the school system and to the student services teams in our schools."

Beauregard Parish employs two social workers, Shea Budnik and Ashley Campbell, who divide their time among the twelve parish schools. Both have a Master's degree from the LSU School of Social Work, are Licensed Clinical Social Workers, and are Nationally Certified School Social Workers. Budnik has worked for Beauregard Parish schools for 19 years and Campbell for 8 years. Both worked with other agencies as social workers before joining the school system.

School social workers in Beauregard Parish are a part of the Pupil Appraisal division of the Special Education department and work collaboratively with assistant principals of discipline, teachers, behavioral interventionists, educational diagnosticians, and speech therapists to provide services related to a student's social, emotional, and life-skill needs. They participate in



Special Education and Individual Educational Planning (IEP) meetings, and coordinate cases of those students with medically complex needs, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, vision and hearing loss, and emotional disabilities.

School social workers help meet emotional, physical, and social needs that might interfere with a child's ability to learn and adjust to school. They are the link between student, family, school, and community to promote and support students' academic and social successes. They also coordinate services with resources outside the schools system, such as with doctor's offices, mental health hospitals, governmental social work agencies, and professional counselors.

"One of the biggest challenges in a rural area is that there are limited resources and those resources are constantly changing," explained Campbell. "We have to remain vigilant to keep a current contact list which is workable for our students and their families."

They interact with school staff to help them better understand the factors which may affect a student's performance and behavior. They assist with behavior management

issues and provide direct support to school staff. Their goal is to help the school system respond effectively to each child's needs.

"We are advocates for our clients," explained Campbell, "and our clients are both the children and our school system."

In a typical day, school social workers meet with parents, participate in and coordinate special education evaluations, observe students in the classroom setting to evaluate progress, and help develop educational plans. They interact with assistant principals on positive reinforcement and behavioral plans and meet with students as a reminder that they are there to help and encourage them in the school setting. They consult with parents, administrators, and pupil appraisal staff; write letters and call outside resources on behalf of the students and their families; participate in IEP meetings; and mediate between families and schools when sensitive situations arise.

"School social workers must have the gift of problem solving, communication and mediation skills, and a heart for service," said Budnik.

"In this job, unlike many social work situations outside a school setting, we get to follow our students from year to year and see them achieve successes," she said. "Seeing positive results from doing your job is part of what makes being a school social worker so rewarding."

"During this special week set aside to recognize school social workers, it is appropriate to honor the work that these professionals do in our schools and for our students," concluded Spikes. "We have exceptional social work professionals in Ms. Budnik and Ms. Campbell who have the best interest of our students at heart every day."