

It is not uncommon for Americans to turn on the news and hear about students shooting other students at school. Between 2013 and 2017, there were over 200 news reports of gunfire incidents in schools, including everything from fatal shootings to nonfatal assaults, to suicide attempts. One of the most infamous school shootings occurred on December 14, 2012. Adam Lanza, 20, killed his mother in her home and then entered the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and killed 20 children and six adults. In Red Lake, Minnesota, in March 2005, a 16-year-old male with a history of depression, drug use, and suicide attempts shot and killed his grandfather and his grandfather's female companion. He then went to his school and killed seven more people before killing himself. Many people speculated that his "inspiration" was one of the worst school shootings in history that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999. At Columbine, two male students shot and killed 12 other students and a teacher and wounded 23 others before killing themselves.

Children across the United States, in both urban and rural areas, live in a world where they experience violence (e.g., bullying, electronic aggression, gang violence, fighting) all around them—on television, in their neighborhoods, in their schools, and even in their families. As a result, children are both shocked by their surroundings and becoming increasingly numb to them. To help students and parents cope and to help prevent further violence and emotional harm, schools across the nation are implementing violence awareness and prevention programs. Social workers who provide crisis counseling and support, social skills training, and treatment for students are key components of these programs. School workers also develop and implement education and awareness programs for the community, students, and their parents.

**School social work** is the provision of services in educational settings by credentialed school social workers (NASW, 2010). School social workers use a distinct body of knowledge and a unique set of skills to enhance home-school-community collaboration. They help ensure the social functioning and success of every student. Besides school violence, social workers are involved in a host of other areas.

These include, but are not limited to, liaison work between home, school, and community; assessment and testing; case management services; development of programs to prevent students from dropping out; joining gangs; or using drugs and alcohol; development of support groups for students who are dealing with death or whose parents have divorced; helping students organize to address issues that hinder their education, such as bullying and discrimination; immigration concerns of normative students; truancy or attendance problems; child abuse and neglect; services for students with disabilities; after-school services; counseling referrals; teacher empowerment; peer mediation; interdisciplinary teamwork (with the school psychologist, school nurse, teachers); and school reform. Obviously, school social work includes a wide array of services. However, as in many countries throughout the world, within the US K-12 education system there have been few resources to realistically shift our focus from reactive social work to active promotion and prevention, in part because the number of school social workers is also insufficient for such a task. This chapter provides a context for these services and introduces the information basic to accepting the challenge of becoming a school social worker.

## The History of School Social Work **LO1**

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

329

Prior to the twentieth century, most children did not attend school. But by the early 1900s, most states had passed legislation mandating school attendance. This was a significant turning point for children's rights; no longer could children be forced to work rather than attend school. As a result of mandatory attendance, schools were faced with a larger and more diverse student body, and they needed assistance to adjust to these new academic and cultural circumstances. The specialization of school social work was founded in the early 1900s to respond to this need.

School social work traces its origins to private agencies and civic organizations in Boston, New York, and Hartford in 1906 and 1907. These organizations funded visiting teachers (the name given to early school social workers) to help support immigrant and "underprivileged" children in their schools. The Rochester, New York, Board of Education introduced the first school-financed visiting teachers in 1913. Their job was to increase interaction and cooperation between students' families and the schools (Allen-Meares, 2014). One of the most notable visiting teachers, Jane Fullerton Culbert, was a founder and the first president of the National Association of Visiting Teachers and Home and School Visitors in 1919 (McCullagh, 1998).

In 1923, the Commonwealth Fund of New York financed 30 school social workers in 30 different communities (Allen-Meares, 2014). This project raised the visibility of school social work. However, school social work then almost disappeared during the Great Depression of the 1930s. With unemployment at record highs, states could not afford the services performed by school social workers. By the late 1940s, the country was once again economically sound, and school social work reemerged. As was true of social work practice in general during the 1940s and 1950s, school social work focused on social case-work, or students' identified problems.

The identity of school social work was solidified with the founding of the American Association of School Social Workers in the 1940s. In 1955, the association became part of the larger National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (McCullagh, 1998). Other organizations exclusive to school social workers later emerged, such as the School Social Work Association of America in 1994 (Pryor, 1998).

The focus of school social work changed again during the 1960s. At this time, the efforts of school social workers began to be assessed using social science research techniques. President Johnson's War on Poverty programs pushed all social services to a new level of accountability, and survey results indicated that social workers were too focused on interactions with individual students. To better serve students, school social workers needed to take more advantage of group and community work methods (Allen-Meares, 2014). As a result, school social workers began to focus on school reform and to address the problem of inequality in educational opportunities. They also began to tackle such issues as racism and students' rights in response to racial tensions brought about by integration and busing.