

Viewpoint

Building Student and Community Engagement in Schools Through Social Work Placements to Support Children's Wellbeing

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Abstract

Schools focus on the education of students, but it is recognised that student engagement and educational achievement are enhanced where student wellbeing is considered. Student wellbeing can be supported both in school and through connections to the school and broader community. While teachers seek to support student wellbeing, they are often ill-equipped, given workload and educational focus, limiting their capacity to address student wellbeing needs, particularly those linked to social or community issues. School social workers provide a valuable adjunct to the work of educators, enabling a greater focus on wellbeing through the provision of targeted psychosocial support and community engagement that recognises and responds to broader factors impacting education achievement. In schools without social workers, social work student placements can provide opportunities to introduce school communities to the value and benefits social workers offer. This practice paper explores examples of school-based social work student placements offered through the social work field education program at one regional Australian University, including activities, strategies undertaken, and identified benefits of social work student placements. With indicated benefits, it is argued that the inclusion of social workers in schools adds value to the educational team, supporting children's wellbeing and thereby contributing to improved educational engagement and achievement.

Keywords: school social work; children's wellbeing; mental health; community engagement; social work field education



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1. Introduction

Education is a core measure of social determinants of health, with a clear relationship between education and life outcomes, as reflected in a focus on education in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ([United Nations 2025](#)). The importance of education as a social determinant of health and wellbeing is linked to lifelong impacts through work and income opportunities, which have implications for health and social wellbeing ([The Lancet Public Health 2020](#)). Similarly, in Australia, educational disadvantage impacts on children's future potential, with educational disadvantage being more prevalent in rural and low socioeconomic areas, resulting in lower levels of educational engagement and attainment, with ongoing implications for social disadvantage ([Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \[AIHW\] 2019, 2025](#); [Australian Early Development Census \[AEDC\] 2019, 2024](#)). As this suggests, education can have positive developmental, social, and life-course impacts,

and as the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) indicates, provide an antidote for poverty (IFSW 2005).

While access to education is recognized as a human right (United Nations [UN] 1989), not all children have the same level of access to education due to social and economic barriers, with educational disadvantages potentially having ongoing impacts. Recognizing the importance of education in addressing social issues and improving individual and community wellbeing, the UN SDGs include ‘good health and wellbeing’ targeting the promotion of mental health (Goal 3), and ‘quality education’ (Goal 4) promoting ‘inclusive and equitable’ education (UN 2015). Where children already faced educational disadvantage, the impacts of COVID-19 were noted by the UN to have significantly hampered the achievement of these goals, with high proportions of children having their access to education interrupted or denied through school closures and lack of access to remote learning (United Nations 2025). These continue to affect children’s wellbeing.

In the context of COVID-19, the pre-existing issues of educational disadvantage (Testa 2014) were exacerbated. Interrupted schooling, school closures, and moves to online learning were common, with more vulnerable children likely to be most affected and least likely to have access to online education opportunities (Calao et al. 2020). As such, it has been argued that the vital roles of schools in promoting socialization and wellbeing need to be supported by health and other professionals (Calao et al. 2020). Social work is one of the professions that can support this. Aligned with this focus on the importance of education, overcoming marginalization, and supporting student wellbeing and success, there has been a growth in school social work globally (Huxtable 2022).

With the reemergence of school social work in Australia, this paper explores practice examples of school-based social work student placements offered through the social work field education program at one Australian university. In examining these practice examples, a range of activities and strategies undertaken by social work students and the identified benefits in relation to enhanced wellbeing and/or educational engagement of children through in-school and community engagement are discussed. Through this examination of practice examples, we consider diverse approaches to the practice of social work in schools from the Australian context and how the ongoing development of community-engaged school social work can contribute to improved wellbeing and enhanced educational achievement for children.

2. Background

Student wellbeing is of growing concern internationally, with increasing recognition of the prevalence of adult mental health issues commencing by early adolescence (WHO 2013). The WHO (2025) defines mental health as “a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well and contribute to their community”, with health being understood as including physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Similarly, WHO (2013, 2015) argues mental health issues significantly contribute to situations of poverty and highlights the importance of mental health promotion and prevention through whole of society approaches with a focus on children and responses in community-based settings.

Educational disadvantage and the implications of this are recognized internationally, as indicated by the focus on enhancing educational opportunities through the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015). Similarly, ecological perspectives note the impacts of family, school, and wider social systems on children’s wellbeing and educational attainment (Crawford 2020; Houston 2017), with ecological perspectives historically applied to links between school and communities as relevant to changing contexts and addressing disadvantage (Daftary 2024). In Australia, there is evidence of higher rates of educational disadvantage in

areas of high socio-economic disadvantage, this is particularly prevalent in rural areas, and areas with higher proportions of Australian First Nations Peoples, being Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2019; Australian Early Development Census [AEDC] 2019; Gartshore et al. 2018). In areas of high socio-economic and educational disadvantage, children may face a range of social issues in their family and community context that affect their wellbeing (Gartshore et al. 2018; Maple et al. 2019). These factors are likely to negatively impact children's learning and their level of educational engagement, which is difficult to overcome (Testa 2014).

2.1. Wellbeing

Wellbeing is defined by WHO (2021, p. 10) as “a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions”. Globally, between 10 and 14 percent of children and young people are noted to have mental health issues, with school being noted as a factor influencing not only mental health, but also children's wellbeing (Polanczyk et al. 2015; WHO 2022).

Australian studies have identified that up to 14% of children and young people have a mental health issue, with a higher prevalence for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from rural and remote areas, highlighting the influence of social, economic, and environmental factors (Lawrence et al. 2016). Children with mental health issues have been identified to have higher rates of absence from school and educational disengagement, contributing to educational disadvantage (Lawrence et al. 2016; Wang and Peck 2013). Further, children in rural areas and Australian First Nations children face significant socio-economic disadvantages, with people in rural and remote areas having less access to education and lower educational achievement, a greater burden of disease with less access to health services, and higher rates of poverty (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2019).

When children's wellbeing is considered, and support is provided to address disadvantage, vulnerability, and mental health issues, they are more likely to be able to engage and achieve better in education (Franklin et al. 2009). Similarly, parental support and engagement in their children's education can be a factor in children's educational success (Yamamoto et al. 2016). While family encouragement and support of their children educationally can enhance their educational outcomes, where parents have little education, poor educational experiences, or are not welcomed into the school, they may be less likely to provide this support and encouragement (Yamamoto et al. 2016). Therefore, engagement with families and communities can enhance the likelihood of children engaging and succeeding in education. This is a role that social workers are adept at. As Altshuler and Webb (2009) argue, school social workers strive to enact both individual and systematic change.

Parental engagement in children's schooling is identified as having significant benefits in children's educational achievement (Yamamoto et al. 2016). Where children are vulnerable, disadvantaged, or socially isolated, in addition to low educational achievement and higher rates of disengagement (Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS] 2014; Zyngier 2017), it is understood that early absenteeism and behavioural difficulties are likely to contribute to further educational disengagement. This may be further exacerbated and result in further difficulties at transition points such as moving from primary to secondary education settings (Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS] 2014). Many families from disadvantaged backgrounds have had poor or difficult experiences with their own schooling, or low educational aspirations for their children, and therefore may be less engaged or less likely to be able to provide the support children require in their schooling.

(Keller et al. 2021). Where families place low priority on education, children are more likely to find school difficult and become disengaged.

2.2. School Responses to Children's Wellbeing

Given these issues associated with mental health and socioeconomic disadvantage and recommended strategies to address these, schools are well placed to support student wellbeing in addition to their primary educational role. While schools are well-positioned to play a key role in broad preventative strategies, engaging with families and implementing social, community-based strategies can be difficult for educators with competing priorities and demands, with additional difficulties occurring when schooling is disrupted.

In recent years, the education system in Australia has developed a National Student Wellbeing Framework (Australian Government Department of Education 2025) with agreement across all jurisdictions nationally. With States and Territories responsible for the delivery of public education, each State or Territory has implemented frameworks or policies aligned with the National Framework. While generally consistent, the approach differs across jurisdictions. One approach supported under the Framework is the funding of chaplaincy, which provides general, individualized student support (Russ 2019). While providing student support, this program has limitations, including that school chaplains often work part-time and/or work across multiple schools, and they are ill-equipped to provide responses to complex issues such as drug and alcohol use and mental health issues, and the broader social context that contributes to educational disadvantage (McDavitt et al. 2018). In some jurisdictions, school counsellors or educational psychologists are employed with these staff, often focusing on individual counselling and psychoeducational assessments for the purposes of implementing additional learning support (Jimerson et al. 2006). Similar to chaplains, counsellors are focused on the individual student within the school environment and do not address the social issues that impact access and engagement in schooling, but rather on educational achievement for those engaged in schooling (Russ 2019). Over the past five years, some jurisdictions have implemented additional strategies that seek to address broader psychosocial issues, including introducing social workers in schools (New South Wales Government 2020; Queensland Government 2025).

2.3. The Role of Social Work in Schools

With mental health and socioeconomic disadvantage as contributors to educational disadvantage and engagement, social workers are well placed to contribute to student wellbeing both at an individual, school, and community level. Social work approaches informed by ecological systems theory, where social workers engage with the individual, family, school, and broader community in supporting children's wellbeing, may provide effective support (Crawford 2020; Houston 2017; Huxtable 2022).

Internationally, for some years, education systems and schools have increasingly engaged social workers (Huxtable 2022; Huxtable and Blythe 2002). As outlined by Huxtable (2022, p. 2), school social workers help children and schools 'handle barriers to education', across a wide range of individual and social issues that negatively affect learning and performance. Internationally, the benefits of school social workers and their role in addressing barriers to education have been recognized in relation to improved educational, mental health, personal wellbeing, and social outcomes, including enhanced social inclusion alongside supporting disadvantaged communities (Franklin et al. 2009; Huxtable 2022; Testa 2014; Smith 2018).

While in some countries, school social work is well accepted and common, this is not internationally consistent, and the nature of school social work may vary (Huxtable 2022; Lee 2012). For example, in the United States, social workers have been identified as having

an important role in preventing distress and promoting wellbeing at both the individual and whole school level (Banyard et al. 2016). Similarly, in Vietnam, the need for school social workers to address issues and experiences of poverty, abuse, and mental health, has been highlighted (Sosa and Nguyen Thu 2020). In other contexts, the role of school social workers in working with communities to address social issues that affect educational engagement and success is recognized (Huxtable 2022).

In Australia, the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW 2011) identifies school social work as a field of practice, describing the scope of school social work practice as including work that spans individual, the school, and broader community work. Social work practice seeks to address children's access to support for behavioural, mental health, social, and relational issues, alongside working with teachers and others in the community to support children's access, engagement, and achievement in their learning (Gartshore et al. 2018).

While in many countries, school social work is well established, in Australia, this has not been the case. While school social work has existed in Australia since the 1970s, the development of school social work has been inconsistent and limited (Lee 2012). This has resulted in significant variation across states in whether social workers are employed in schools or not, how many schools a social worker may support, and the roles they have in the school. In recent years, in response to the development of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (Australian Government Department of Education 2025), there has been a shift resulting in an increase in school social work, with some states rolling out wellbeing programs that employ social workers (New South Wales Government 2020; Queensland Government 2025). Alongside this increasing interest, many universities have been working to increase social work student placements in schools, supporting the development of school social work. This enabled these schools to see the value of, and seek to continue, the support provided by social workers (Gartshore et al. 2018). With an increasing recognition of student mental health issues and wellbeing needs and the potential contribution of school social work, in recent years, there has been an increase in social work students undertaking field education placements as part of their studies in school contexts in Australia (Gartshore et al. 2018; Russ 2019). These placement programs not only prepare social work students for future practice in schools (Knox et al. 2020) but also create opportunities for schools to better understand the role of social work and how they can contribute to addressing issues of educational disadvantage. These placement programs have generally been well received in schools, with increasing student interests and demand by schools for social work students (Russ 2019). The developing place of school social work, including through social work student placements, highlights a need to better understand practice approaches. Through the examination of practice approaches and the role of community engagement, we seek to contribute to understandings of practices, including those that engage with community, that enhance children's wellbeing and educational achievement.

3. School Social Work—Student Placement Practice Examples

The following practice examples outline placement activities of social work students from one regional university in Australia who undertook school social work placements in schools where social workers were not employed. All practice examples are reported from the experience of the authors, who are social workers involved in the arrangement and support of social work student placements in schools within regional Australia. The examples have been selected as focusing on placements in schools in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage and representing diversity of practice. It is acknowledged this may not be representative of school social work practice across Australia.

The school-based placement program at the university focuses on having social work students in areas of disadvantage where there may be fewer resources, and there is likely to be a higher level of need. Activities undertaken by the social work students focused on improving student engagement and wellbeing, including through individual support, and community engagement and connection. These students undertook placement in schools that did not have a social worker. Therefore, in addition to being supported by school staff, they were professionally supervised by a qualified social worker with school social work experience who was external to the school. This supervision occurred regularly, providing professional and practice guidance. These examples consider the breadth of potential activities of social workers in work with children, teachers, parents, and communities, and how they can contribute to improved wellbeing and/or educational engagement for children and young people.

3.1. Practice Example One: Engaging Families and Communities in Children's Education

In the first case study, a social work student completed a placement in a small rural school catering to children aged 5–12 years.

Issue: The school identified that a concern that children attending the school faced was the social isolation of families and poor parental engagement in their children's learning.

Practice approach: To respond to this issue, in addition to individual support of children, the social work student developed and undertook a project engaging the school and broader community. The project aimed to provide an opportunity for parents and carers of the children to get to know each other and strengthen their connection to the school community and thereby their ability to support their child's educational engagement and achievement. The objective of the project was to enhance a sense of social inclusion by providing further opportunities to strengthen parents' sense of connection with the school community and to further support families through reducing their sense of social isolation. This work occurred in two stages:

- (1) The school had a small, pre-existing group of parents who formed the Parents and Friends Committee that worked with the school executive for the benefit of students. The social work student consulted with this committee and the school executive regarding the proposed project, which commenced with surveying all parents of children at the school to garner ideas on creating connections and support within the school community. This survey resulted in support for the establishment of a community garden where parents could meet, sit, and talk when they dropped their children off at school or waited to pick them up after school. This would create both an activity in which the broader community could be involved and an informal space where parents felt comfortable within the school environment, which is particularly important for parents who felt uncomfortable entering the school grounds due to their own poor schooling experiences.
- (2) The social work student sought funding and sponsorship from relevant government agencies and local businesses for the building of the community garden. The students then worked to engage parents through direct contact with them. Outreach also occurred with community members, including those providing sponsorship, in the construction of the garden.

Benefits and outcomes: Anecdotally, school representatives reported benefits such as parents, carers, and members of the local community, including those who had previously been disengaged from the school community, worked together to build the garden during the summer holiday period. While not involved in the construction, the social work student was invited to an opening event when the school term resumed, and their work was noted

as benefiting the school community, including teachers, parents, and children. This benefit to the school community included greater community involvement through the initiative.

3.2. Practice Example Two: Supporting School Transitions Through Engaging Community

Similar to the first case study, the social work student completed a school-based placement in a small rural school, which catered to children aged 5–12 years.

Issue: In this rural school, several children in their final year of primary school (ages 11–12 years) were identified by teaching staff and learning support staff as at risk of disengaging from their education in the transition to secondary school. This group consisted of children from disadvantaged families. The attendance of these students was poor, with limited parental interaction with the school. To attend secondary school, the children would need to travel daily to a different town for their education.

Practice approach: While providing individual support, the social work student sought to examine the factors contributing to the students' risk of potential disengagement from education. The aim was to develop a strategy to facilitate higher levels of school attendance and engagement, and successful transitions to their secondary level of education. The approach implemented included three stages.

- (1) The social work student undertook to identify these at-risk children by working closely with the teaching staff in the school, in the initial instance. In assessing the risks for these young people, one issue identified was that of anti-social behaviour reported by the local community, particularly local businesses, creating community tension. This resulted in negative community perceptions of, and community attitudes towards, the children in this age group. This isolated the children and their families and increased their likelihood of disengaging from education. Teachers reported their behaviour in class deteriorated, and on occasion, they would not attend, though they would be reported as having been seen in the community. In addition to addressing individual issues and needs of the children with the assistance of teaching staff, the social work student sought to develop a better understanding of the community concerns through meeting with relevant people, and to identify options to build better relationships between these children and local businesses.
- (2) The social work student worked with the children as a group with activities focused on developing respect for others. They then developed a community engagement strategy with the aim of bringing the children and local business owners together, with the business representatives educating the children about the workforce, getting jobs, and respecting others. This strategy involved promoting the project to the parents and carers, to gain their permission to take their children on weekly excursions to visit the vocational education college and the local high school, and to meet with local businesses. The social work student undertook groupwork with the children to support their development of social and communication skills, including protocols, respectful behaviour, and formulating questions, in preparation for the community visits. Through the visits, the children learned about how the businesses operated and how to make a living in business.
- (3) With a greater understanding of future work opportunities, the social work student then facilitated visits by the children to the local secondary school and local vocational education college. This enabled the children to gain a sense of educational possibilities in post-secondary school and the opportunities this could provide them.

Outcomes and reported benefits: Feedback from stakeholders, indicated that the project had several benefits. Teaching and learning support staff reported that the children were more interested and focused during class and support lessons, describing the children as happier overall, and their attendance improved significantly. They also reported greater

parental engagement in the children's education. Business representatives gave positive feedback, such as less negative views of the children, engaging in positive interactions with them, and being more inclined to offer employment in the future, in stark contrast to prior to their engagement.

This work in preparing the children for the visits and the visits themselves to meet with people from local businesses and schools not only increased the understanding and communication between the children and local business representatives but also gave the children a better appreciation of what they needed to achieve to engage in further education and indeed beyond into various types of work. This project provided an opportunity to develop specific social skills of children in the group, improved communication and understanding between the groups, and higher aspirations by the children in relation to their future, and therefore greater motivation for engaging in education.

Through this work with the children, the social work student enhanced the engagement of the broader community in the children's education and developed mutual understandings between the children and local community members, resulting in improved relationships. In addition, school staff reported that anti-social behaviour by these young people decreased as the community relationships improved. This resulted in greater encouragement and support for these children to continue their education. Furthermore, as reported by the school, the students' psychosocial wellbeing improved, as did their overall engagement in education and the wider community.

3.3. Practice Example Three: Supporting Student Engagement and Mental Health During the Pandemic

A social work student was placed at a specialist secondary school for young people who were deemed at risk due to their behaviours, cognitive impairments, or other disabilities. The school had a staff member designated as a wellbeing support for each year group. This person worked alongside learning support and other educational support staff. The social work student was assigned to one of the school's wellbeing units.

Issue: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school had to close for an extended period, and teaching moved online. This was particularly difficult for some young people at this school, as many lacked online resources, and some were in difficult personal circumstances, such as residing in youth refuges or other tenuous accommodation, or dysfunctional family homes.

Practice approach: The social work student worked with school staff to advocate for the young people to ensure they had access to required technology to support remote learning (e.g., smartphone, tablet). The social work student then undertook to maintain ongoing contact via phone or videoconference with each young person identified as requiring additional support, to ensure connection outside where they lived and ongoing psychosocial support. This involved the social work student regularly contacting each young person. This contact had multiple purposes. The regular contact not only enabled the monitoring of the young people's mental wellbeing but also ensured assessment of their need for and ability to access other psychosocial supports. Based on this assessment, the social work student either provided psychosocial support or facilitated the provision of support and access through other school-based services or referral to community services where required to meet each young person's needs. This assisted the young people in managing their studies online and supported them to maintain links with their community and participate in recreational and social activities. The social work student reported weekly to the head of the wellbeing unit on the welfare of the young people until they were able to return to school.

Outcomes and reported benefits: Anecdotal reports from the school indicated this support helped the young people to continue their studies even though they faced multiple

challenges in less-than-ideal personal situations. This also helped ensure the young people had support to maintain their wellbeing through the lockdown periods. As a result, these young people who would otherwise be at risk of disengaging from their education all returned to school when able to do so and remained engaged in their education.

4. Discussion

The practice examples provided above draw on the authors experiences of supporting student placements in schools where the students engaged in varied projects that responded to the specific needs of children and young people, within the school and the community in which they undertook placement. These practice examples demonstrate school social work practice with a broad scope that reaches beyond the school gate to include families and communities. Further, they provide examples of how this broad scope of social work practice can contribute to the wellbeing, educational engagement, and achievement of children and young people.

In one of these social work practice examples, the focus is on individual children and young people, their wellbeing and mental health, and access to support, in times of crisis where the risk of poor educational outcomes and disengagement from school is higher. The other two examples demonstrate the benefits of engaging families and communities in the support of children and young people's education. These two initiatives also demonstrate the value of school social workers taking a broader, social justice-informed and community-engaged approach, and the potential benefits of this. In all cases, based on the feedback received, the work of these social work students demonstrated an educational benefit to the children and young people involved. Feedback on the work of social work students in these practice examples indicated improved engagement of children in their education, with benefits extending to families and the community. Thus, demonstrating the potential value of a broad ecological systems approach to school social work.

As suggested by these examples, the issues faced by children and young people in school can be many and varied. As ecological system theory in child development (Houston 2017) suggests, these issues are affected by psychosocial and socioeconomic determinants, including individual development and needs of children, and their family, community, and social context. These issues often impact young people's social and emotional wellbeing and may contribute to poor mental health and reduced wellbeing. As identified by Testa (2014) and Franklin et al. (2009), this in turn contributes to poor engagement and/or poor performance in their education, which may lead to reduced engagement and students exiting their education early, thereby impacting future life opportunities.

Consequently, the approaches to support children and young people to meet their educational potential need to be varied and may need to reach beyond individual approaches to support, consider the specific needs of the children, and their broader social context, including the school and community in which they live. While in many countries school social workers have a primary focus on individual work with children in the school context (Allen-Meares et al. 2013), there are options for more holistic approaches that engage the student, their families, and/or the community. As Huxtable (2022, p. 5) argues, school social work requires a flexible role using a systems approach to address the range of issues affecting children's education. Social work is a profession that works 'alongside people and supports them on that journey through change so that they can achieve individual and collective wellbeing,' (IFSW 2021), with school social work recognized as bringing knowledge and skills to contribute to addressing issues that contribute to educational disadvantage (Huxtable 2022). In Australia, school social work recognises the importance of 'maximizing [children's] learning potential' (AASW 2011, p. 6), where school social workers are seen to have 'unique access to and ability to work with individuals, groups and

communities at the interface between student, school organization and curriculum, peers, family, neighbourhood and wider society' (AASW 2011, p. 7). As such, social workers may take a broad approach to interventions that maximize learning potential with a focus on not just individual dysfunction but also family and community issues that affect children and their education. In the Australian context, where for many years there have been few social workers in schools (Lee 2012), there have been efforts to increase the opportunities for social work students to undertake their placements in schools, broadening the understanding of the student and schools of the scope of school social work. Given the limited nature of school social work in Australia over recent decades, social work students on placements have contributed to the provision of social work services and student wellbeing support in schools (Gartshore et al. 2018 Maple et al. 2019). Schools simultaneously provide an important context for professional learning, with students developing and drawing on knowledge relevant to individual support, mental health and wellbeing, ecological systems theory, and building community partnerships in practice.

The recent shift in policy and increased school social work programs across multiple jurisdictions nationally in response to the National Student Wellbeing Framework brings opportunities to consider how school social work practice can benefit children through both individual support and community engagement. The practice examples, although drawing on social work student placements, highlight the potential of school social workers to support not only individual children but also promote change across a broader social context within the school and community, with the potential to address issues of educational disadvantage. Similarly, social work students can contribute to this through their placements while also enhancing their knowledge and skills for future practice in schools (Knox et al. 2020). As suggested by these practice examples, it is argued that not only is school social work beneficial in addressing educational disadvantage, but a broad ecological systems approach that includes engagement of the school and broader community is beneficial to children and young people and their wellbeing.

In summary, these examples highlight the value of an ecological systems perspective in the practice of social work in schools. This practice approach promotes the engagement of the school and wider community in addressing the challenges faced by children that impact their wellbeing and hence, their educational achievement. Engaging parents, the school, and the wider community has the potential to respond to not only individual concerns but also assist in addressing systemic influences on educational disadvantage.

This practice paper draws on limited practice examples based on the experience and perspectives of the authors. As such, the practice is presented to promote dialogue. The examples provide different approaches to school social work that have benefited children and their school communities, but may not be transferable or generalizable, as each school and community is unique. While these limitations are acknowledged, these examples provide insights into approaches to engaging with the community to benefit children's educational experiences.

5. Conclusions

While school social work in Australia has been limited, it is increasingly being identified as benefiting student wellbeing and educational outcomes with the implementation of the National Student Wellbeing Framework and increasing employment of social workers in schools in some states. The increasing opportunities for social work students to undertake placements in schools also indicate a growing recognition of the benefit of social work support to children and young people at school.

The case studies presented provide examples of the types of work school social workers may undertake. These examples highlight the potential that school social workers

can contribute to improved wellbeing for children and young people, not only through individual support but through engaging with the community. The case examples highlight the potential value of holistic, ecological systems approaches to addressing individual and social challenges faced by children and young people that teachers and other school staff are generally not able to undertake due to educational focus, limited capacity, or relevant skills. It is argued that not only social work students on placement, but also school social workers have a vital place in enhancing the potential of children and young people to maximize their learning potential and wellbeing in the school setting.

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