

NADD LICENSING TASKFORCE – UPDATE OCTOBER 2023

Co-Chairs: Sheryl Kubiak (MI) & Goutham Menon (IL)

Current Task Force Members*: Johanna Thomas (AR); Melissa Begg (NY); Luis Torres-Hostos (TX); Jayashree Nimmagadda (RI); Jackie Mondros (NY); Catherine Gayle (GA); Karina Gil (TX); Judy Postmus (MD); Sally Backman (PN); Tonya Rickles (KS); Kristi Law (IA); Joan Blakey (MN); Cathy Potter (NJ).

*Note: This current configuration is new since September 2023 as membership was reconstituted since several folks stepped off from their leadership positions. Gratefully some have stayed on to offer continuity to the Task Force.

Two Sub-committees: 1) Alternative Pathways for Licensure and 2) Toolkit for Advocacy

Background

- For at least the last 12 years, social workers have suspected that social workers of color, particularly Black and Latinx graduates, were failing the licensing exam at disproportionate rates.
- Working with the National Association of Social Work Deans and Directors (NADD), the NYS Deans used the data they had to study their graduates and found racial disparities. NADD began to strongly request that ASWB release data on pass/fail rates by age and race. A similar study conducted in MI that replicated NY, found similar results in 2021. Finally, in 2022, ASWB published a trend analysis of data from 2011-2021.
- The data showed significant disparities between white graduates and graduates who are Black and Latinx graduates. Additionally, older vs. younger grads and those for whom English as their second language.
- When pass rates are compared to other licensed professions - where data exists (education, nursing, law, medicine) we find that they have smaller disparities than social work.
- Licensure is more than an exam, and there is no evidence that passing an exam is an indication of one's ability to practice social work (*i.e., In MI, 1/3 of practicing SW have never taken an exam*).
- A recent study compared AI research to the exam's questions and found that items did not even match the social work literature's best practices. [AI Analyzes the Social Work Licensing Exam, Concerns Deepen](#).
- In effect, the very principle of licensure— to protect the public by ensuring that social workers are competent to practice is being undercut by an exam that results in great racial disparities.
- The larger context is the dearth of the social work workforce: The country needs a strong and diverse social work workforce.

The NADD Taskforce on Licensure Reform

- The **NADD initiative is strongly supportive of SW licensure**; rather it is focused on the issue of the ASWB exam that has been shown to be flawed and inequitable.
 - We do not argue against licensing. We believe in protecting the integrity of the profession. The schools of social work have a major role to play in gatekeeping because they are required to deliver curriculum based on social work competencies and ensure that students have met those competencies.
 - There is no evidence that the exam reflects a social worker's competence or effectiveness. Researchers with expertise in test methodology and the validity of testing have shown the exam's inadequacies. <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/3cxdy/>
- Task Force members were able to meet with leaders of NADD, CSWE and NASW in April 2023. **Another meeting, including ASWB, has been set for October, 2023 at APM.**
- The **Alternative Licensure Pathways sub-committee** explores options to other approaches in achieving a licensed workforce that meets competencies of the profession. Some ideas that the task force has explored include:
 - Remove 1st level licensing (Achieved through legislation by RI, UT, and IL) and standardize individual student/graduate attainment of competency to practice tied directly to EPAS competencies measured on graduating from a CSWE accredited program to receive the LMSW by state boards.

Evidence suggests an increase in diverse licensee's and no measurable "harm to clients" in states that have gone this route.

- For the LCSW:
 - Enhancing and Increasing supervision hours post-graduation to 4000 hours prior to licensure.
 - Using a development approach (and not a one-time high stakes exam), NADD schools and NASW to work together to develop low-stakes/high impact CE pathway that candidates can take concurrently as they do their mandated supervision hours. These CE options will have a low-stakes test at the end of each unit (Like the Citi IRB programs we do at the University)
 - Develop variation in testing methods that would allow narrative or verbal approaches that could assess critical thinking and thought processes in decision-making.
 - Create an alternative exam that is rigorously tested using psychometric best practices and not 'industry standards'. Having a consultant discuss the pros and cons of developing a more psychometrically sound, equitable, and fair exam to replace ASWB (as an alternative)
 - Work with CSWE to develop a tool that consistently measures competencies across schools and states.
- The work of the **Toolkit for Advocacy sub-committee** is to develop a resource site that will help other states who are exploring alternative approaches through the legislative process. Update on the status of these legislative processes will be presented on **Wednesday, Oct 25, 2-3:30 PM at Imperial Ballroom, Salon A, Marquis Level.**

Current Work in Progress

- Collection of materials for the toolkit for advocacy.
- A survey was disseminated to assess activity across states and will be reported upon in the NADD Fall 2023 meeting. This will help us to streamline activities.
- Since licensure issues are state-level decisions, we are sensitive to the fact that while some state legislatures, local NASW and licensing boards are concerned about the inequity issues of pass-rates due to the exam and are taking action, other states are struggling to get all stakeholders on board. The taskforce urges member schools from these states to reach out and share their struggles and concerns for support and ally-ship.

In conclusion:

- Reiterate that NADD is not against credentialing/licensure but are opposed to the current "exams" that has limited and inadequate empirical evidence.
- Schools are not going "to teach to the test" (as the public complaint by ASWB against schools suggests). Schools develop curricula and programs that are required to meet CSWE accreditation standards.
- We would like ASWB data that provides the number of times a person has taken the exam – as well as by how many 'points' someone has failed the exam by (what is the range: 1-5 points; 6-10 points, etc.). Anecdotally, we know that often candidates are failing the exam by 1-5 points.
- In the interim, and implemented now, we would like to see a process where once a person has passed a particular module, that they do not have to take that module again. When a test is retaken, the person has to take the parts they did not pass.
- Consider a 'one time' fee for the exam.
- Recognize the trauma and personal pain that successful graduates of CSWE accredited programs experience when they continue to spend money on exams and then may not be able to practice.
- We would like CSWE; NASW; and other groups to work with us to ensure there is equity and fairness for our students who are our future workforce.

Interested in getting involved? Please contact Sheryl Kubiak (spk@wayne.edu) or Goutham Memon (gmemon@luc.edu).