

# Military Social Work Field Placement: Analyzing the Time and Activities That Graduate-level Interns Provide to Military-connected Schools

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Despite research suggesting that supportive school communities can shield students from depression, alienation, and school failure, civilian schools have struggled to address the unique needs of military-connected (MC) children. In response to this, a consortium between eight MC school districts and a school of social work was established. As part of the consortium, MSW students were trained to engage in direct service provision with MC children. This study examines the activities of 30 MSW student interns during a single academic year. Findings show that interns spend the majority of their time engaging in individual work with students, approximately 36 percent of whom are MC. Interns also spend a considerable amount of time engaging in group work and conducting psychosocial assessments. Interns allocate a significant amount of time to students' academic struggles, issues of bullying, attendance and truancy, school violence and bystander responses, and school connectedness. Findings from this study provide a baseline assessment of interns' current practice. The data generated have implications for social work education and practice.

KEY WORDS: *fieldwork; military-connected children; school social work*

Children from military families often grapple with a multitude of military-specific demands. However, in the last decade, civilian schools have struggled to address the unique needs and circumstances surrounding children from military families (Esqueda, Astor, & Tunac De Pedro, 2012; Tunac De Pedro et al., 2011). The primary source of their struggles: gaps in current preservice training programs and the school's overall capacity to provide supports in the face of budgetary restrictions. Research suggests that supportive school communities can, to a degree, shield students from the effects of depression, despair, alienation, and school failure (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009). To better meet the needs of military-connected (MC) students, a consortium between eight MC school districts serving approximately 117,000 students (10.1 percent of whom are MC) and a school of social work was established in June 2010. As part of the consortium, a cadre of MSW interns were given military-specific training and were placed in an MC school (to be classified as an MC school, at least 3 percent of students enrolled or 400 students overall must have a family member serving in the military). As

part of their training, interns participated in a three-day orientation on the role of social work in schools prior to the start of their placement. The orientation included an overview of military culture, the needs of MC students, and protocols addressing child abuse and safety issues. Interns were also required to attend two-hour bimonthly seminars in addition to their traditional field and practice coursework. Seminar topics included bullying prevention, psychological first aid, gangs, and school-based programs developed to address the unique needs of military families. Student interns also received instruction on disaster response and crisis intervention, family therapy, and mental health counseling with families and individuals who have served in the military.

## ROLE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

According to the [School Social Work Association of America \(2009\)](#), school social workers provide direct and indirect services in an effort "to address the concerns of at-risk" student groups. As direct service providers, school social workers are often asked to facilitate prevention, intervention, and crisis response efforts that may help students resolve

family issues or school-related concerns; cope with stress, grief, or loss; or overcome psychosocial or emotional issues. School social workers may also be asked to conduct psychosocial assessments, facilitate small-group therapy sessions, or serve as a family-school liaison. As indirect service providers, school social workers may serve on interdisciplinary special education teams, collaborate with community agencies, or consult with teachers and administrators. They may also engage in macro-level practice (see [Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 1998](#)) including, but not limited to, policy and program development efforts to address the needs of the client. School social workers are asked to fulfill a number of roles—counselor, case manager, advocate, and educator ([School Social Work Association of America, 2009](#)). It can be challenging for them to negotiate multiple roles, especially in schools that enroll multiple at-risk groups. War-time can pose additional challenges, particularly in schools that service a high concentration of MC students who may be experiencing a parent's deployment.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF MC CHILDREN**

MC children grapple with a multitude of military-specific issues that can contribute to adverse social, emotional, psychological, and academic outcomes ([Esqueda et al., 2012](#); [Tunac De Pedro et al., 2011](#)). Deployment-related stressors, including the stress of the nondeployed parent ([Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2010](#); [Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009](#)) and shifts in household responsibilities ([Chandra et al., 2010](#); [Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007](#); [Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009](#)), have resulted in poorer outcomes among MC children. Research has also established links among deployment-related behavioral problems, school engagement, and school connectedness ([Chandra et al., 2010](#); [Mmari et al., 2009](#)). The number of behavioral problems reported by school staff and caregivers increases during a deployment. Parents and school staff also posit that the cumulative effects of deployment-related stressors may negatively affect the academic performance of MC children and their levels of school engagement ([Chandra et al., 2010](#)). Although deployments are stressful and challenging for children and families, MC children face a number of non-war-related

challenges as a result of their parent's military service. Chief among them is frequent school transitions.

The average MC student can expect to attend between six and nine different schools prior to the 12th grade, a figure that is three times that of the average non-military-connected (NMC) student ([Buddin, Gill, & Zimmer, 2001](#); [Kitmitto et al., 2011](#); [Military Child Education Coalition \[MCEC\], 2012](#)). Prior to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (MIC3), a piece of legislation seeking to minimize the inequities facing MC youths as they transition between schools and across state lines, differences in academic policy were detrimental to the educational progress and success of MC students who were attending public schools ([Council of State Governments \[CSGs\], 2010b](#); [MCEC, 2012](#)). The MIC3 allows the laws of a "sending" state (for example, graduation requirements, advanced placement, age of enrollment) to apply to MC youths who transfer to a school in another compact state ([CSGs, 2010a](#)). Even though states have widely endorsed the MIC3 (46 states and the District of Columbia), implementation of the compact at the local level has been challenging. Awareness of the policy appears to be limited ([CSGs, 2010b](#); [Esqueda et al., 2012](#)). Academic barriers thus remain and must be addressed, but schools must also do more to support MC students and families socially and emotionally.

MC children often report that they feel disconnected from the school community (for example, peers and staff) ([Mmari et al., 2009](#)). Culturally responsive supports are thus needed to address the needs of these children and families ([Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005](#); [Hosek, Kavanagh, & Miller, 2006](#); [Jensen & Shaw, 1993](#)). Examples of such supports include training service providers to address the specific needs of military children and families, sharing resources ([Amen, Jellen, Merves, & Lee, 1988](#)), and dedicated efforts toward the fostering of a military community ([Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, 2003](#)). Despite the need for additional school community supports, there are little empirical data on how school communities are coming together to support military children.

## **FIELD EDUCATION AND PLACEMENT**

As part of their graduate education and training, MSW students are required to engage in a minimum

of 900 hours of field experience with one hour of weekly supervision. Field education practicum is critical to the preparation of MSW graduates (Pierce, 2008). Time spent in the field is essential to interns' development and practice. Thus, the documentation and examination of how student interns allocate their time is of great importance. Few studies, however, have examined how student interns allocate their time in the field (Agresta, 2004; Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001), and, as of this writing, no identified studies have examined how student interns allocate their time in MC schools. This study fills an existing gap in the literature.

This study describes the activities of MSW interns who were placed in MC schools during the 2010–2011 academic year. The purpose of this study is to examine how a consortium of school communities (that is, districts, schools, and a university) provides supports for military children through the placement of graduate-level social work interns. Study aims include exploring what activities MSW interns prioritize when placed in MC schools; examining how interns allocate their time and practice between MC and NMC students; and documenting differences, if any, in how interns allocate their time across semesters. Data from this study will provide a baseline assessment of the interns' current practice with clients in schools. The data generated may also have implications for social work education and practice. Finally, the data will be used to identify preservice training gaps and future areas of inquiry. The overarching goal is to use data to facilitate more meaningful practice experiences for graduate interns.

## **METHOD**

This study was conducted as part of a school–university consortium serving eight MC school districts surrounding seven military installations in California. The goal of the consortium is to serve MC children using a data-driven model for responsive schooling. The consortium's mission also includes changing the overall climate of schools so that MC and NMC students feel more welcomed, connected, and supported in school. Undergirding this mission is an overarching belief that changes in school climate will increase the emotional well-being of all students and reduce engagement in risky behavior; this belief is supported by empirical data highlighting the

importance of supportive school environments in protecting students from negative social and emotional outcomes (Astor et al., 2009). In accordance with the consortium's mission, a large research university provided graduate-level training to a cadre of MSW student interns to increase the professional capacity of consortium schools and districts and the number of supports in districts that had few or no social work or pupil personnel (for example, school psychologists, counselors, social workers) supports. Interns received micro- and mezzo-level training that prepared them to deliver direct intervention services to students, in-service trainings for school staff, and parental support services. In line with the *NASW Standards for School Social Work Services* (NASW, 2012), interns also received macro-level training in preparation for bringing about planned change at the organizational level (Netting et al., 1998), such as implementing schoolwide programs (for example, military pride club). Finally, interns were required to attend bimonthly seminars on topics identified by the field faculty as relevant for practice with MC students and families.

## **Sample**

As part of the consortium's evaluation efforts, data were collected from students, parents, school staff, district personnel, social work interns, and field faculty on an ongoing basis. This study is limited to data obtained from interns. The sample comprised 30 first-year student interns (25 women and five men) who were selected based on their field placement. Each completed a year-long placement in an MC elementary, middle, or high school during the 2010–2011 academic year. Thirty interns completed a placement in an MC school during the 2010–2011 academic year, and all 30 were included in the study (100 percent response rate).

## **Instrument**

A structured, Internet-based questionnaire was developed by the research team in consultation with social work field faculty to examine how student interns were allocating their time in MC schools. The questionnaire encompassed three core areas: (1) time spent engaged in professional practice (measured in hours), (2) unit of intervention (MC student/group or NMC student/group), and (3) content area/area of focus (measured in

hours). The instrument is not expected to have high internal consistency, as interns are expected to address a number of content areas with multiple client groups that do not necessarily interrelate. The research team was unable to cross-validate the interns' reports with any other detailed reports of their practice. Test-retest was also not feasible. Consequently, the psychometric properties of the instrument are unknown at this time and thus are not reported here.

**Time Spent Engaged in Professional Practices.**

Interns were presented with 13 professional activities. Activities included individual and group work with students, home visits, behavioral assessments, program development, and professional development for school staff (see Table 1 for a complete list). For each activity, interns were asked to indicate how many hours they spent on the activity and to identify the unit of intervention. The number of hours was measured on a continuous scale with no minimum or maximum value required.

**Content Area/Area of Focus.** Interns were presented with a list of 30 topic areas and asked to report on the number of hours spent on each area. Areas included bullying, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the disability of family member,

and attendance and truancy, among others (see Table 2 for a complete list). Given the consortium's focus on addressing the unique needs and circumstances surrounding MC students, the areas included in the questionnaire were identified by members of the research team and field faculty as relevant based on their work with MC students and families. Content areas were also chosen in consultation with the research literature on MC children and families. A few studies have examined the relationship between the demands of military life (for example, multiple deployments/reentry, the disability or injury of family member) and substance abuse, mental health (for example, conduct issues), violence perpetration, family dysfunction, child maltreatment, and education outcomes (for example, school connectedness). For a comprehensive review of these studies, see Tunac De Pedro et al. (2011).

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected at the end of the fall and spring semesters during the 2010–2011 academic year using Qualtrics (2013), an online survey tool. A survey link was emailed to all 30 MSW student interns who were placed in an MC

**Table 1: Time (in Hours) Interns Spent in Professional Practice, by Semester and Unit of Intervention (n = 30)**

Activity	Number of Students or Groups					Number of Contact Hours				
	Fall Semester		Spring Semester		Overall	Fall Semester		Spring Semester		Overall
	MC	NMC	MC	NMC		MC	NMC	MC	NMC	
Work with individual students	147	206	81	199	633	1,063	1,660	899	1,650	5,272
Work with student groups	35	36	60	91	222	242	277	432*	834	1,785*
Social and behavioral assessment	72	21	52	84	229	256	382	117	164	919
Families Work with families	34	41	38	55	168	100	101	68	107	376
Team meetings	25	62	42	53	182	36	111*	41	56	244*
Individual education plan and special education meetings	21	48	31	41	141	57	46	35	59	197
California Healthy Kid Survey-related activities	1	0	17***	17	35	1	0	28*	43*	72*
Planning and conducting school events	10	7	15	16	48	102	23	70	48	243
In-service staff training and professional development	7	16	16	15	54	49	64*	54	30	197
Program development	26	13	14	13	66	100	58	221	186	565*
Home visits	2	8	3	12	25	2	6	5	4	17
Work with groups of families	0	2	1	0	3	0	20	5	7	32
Grant writing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>1,806</b>	<b>2,008</b>	<b>2,748</b>	<b>1,975</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>9,919</b>

Notes: All p values are derived from t tests for dependent samples comparing the first and second semesters. MC = military-connected student; NMC = non-military-connected student.

\*p < .05. \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 2: Time (in Hours) Interns Spent in Professional Practice, by Semester and Content Area/Area of Focus (n = 30)**

Content Area/Area of Focus	Fall Semester	Spring Semester	Overall
Academic struggles	574	469	1,043
Bullying/victim/bystander school response issues	288	578	866
Attendance/truancy	171	286	457
School connectedness/climate	239	203	442
Conduct issues	188	200	388
Suspension/expulsion related	252	109	361
Parental supports (academic, social, resource)	171	178	349
Alternative school/programs related	196	119	315
Multiple deployments/reentry	145	169	314
Special education	133	143	276
After-school supports	169*	85	254
Child abuse/neglect	100	138	238
PTSD/depression/secondary PTSD	88	94	182
Gangs	63	104	167
Cultural or diversity education	63	91	154
Death	78	69	147
Social-emotional difficulties or emotional impairment related	71	64	135
Discrimination/prejudice/hate	68	66	134
Sexual harassment, assault, abuse	55	60	115
Foster care/kinship care/group home	71	32	103
Other health related	52	47	99
Suicide or suicide attempt related	48	42	90
Substance use related	29	56*	85
Domestic violence related	25	59	84
Immigration and/or English-as-a-second-language issues	29	41	70
Disability of family member/injury	35	31	66
Interstate Compact related	24	25	49
Weapon use	24	9	33
Sexual orientation	3	4	7
Homicide or homicide attempt related	1	1	2

Notes: All *p* values are derived from *t* tests for dependent samples comparing the first and second semesters. PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder.

\**p* < .05.

consortium school. Each student intern was asked to independently respond to questions related to the time he or she spent engaged in professional practice, his or her unit of intervention, and area of focus. The student interns were given two weeks to respond. Students received a follow-up e-mail from a member of the research team at that time. A senior member of the field faculty team sent a second follow-up e-mail two weeks later. Individual intern responses remained confidential and were stored in a password-protected database. Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to the start of data collection.

### Data Analysis

The research team computed the number of hours and units of intervention separately for each of the semesters and for MC and NMC students and

families. To compare responses across semesters, *t* tests were conducted. It is a long-term process to develop a stable caseload, strengthen client rapport, and nurture meaningful partnerships. As such, comparisons were made between the fall and spring semesters. The research team believed that understanding these differences would yield valuable insights into how time in the field is allocated and the professional experiences of interns that could inform future foundation year curriculums and placements. The research team further expected that the number of hours spent engaged in professional practice would increase in the spring semester. Comparisons were not made between the activities directed at MC students and NMC students because of major differences in the relative sizes of these student populations. Minimal significance level was set at *p* < .05.

## RESULTS

Results for the fall and spring semesters were similar and are therefore discussed concurrently. It is important to note, however, that there were variations in the reports provided by the student interns across schools. Information is reported separately by military connectedness (connected or not connected). On average, student interns reported 357.64 ( $SD = 167.45$ ) contact hours and saw 69.42 ( $SD = 29.23$ ) students or groups. Overall, interns provided close to 10,000 contact hours (see Table 1).

### Time Spent Engaged in Professional Practice and Unit of Intervention

The student interns spent the majority of their time engaging in individual work with students; a total of 633 students received 5,272 hours of service (36 percent of these students were MC). Interns also spent a substantial amount of time engaging in group practice; a total of 222 groups met for 1,785 hours (43 percent of these groups comprised MC students). Finally, the interns in this study spent a considerable amount of time conducting social and behavioral assessments; they conducted 327 assessments over 919 hours (38 percent of assessments completed were with MC students). Interns spent fewer hours in team meetings, planning and running events, school in-service and staff development training, and Individual Education Plan (IEP) and special education meetings. Interns also spent fewer hours working with families, yet they were able to see 168 of them (43 percent of whom were MC). Twenty-five home visits were reported (80 percent of visits were with NMC families). No interns were involved in grant-writing activities. Unless noted in Table 1, differences in the number of hours spent engaged in professional practice and the unit of analysis between the fall and spring semesters were not statistically significant. Given the small number of participants, however, tests of significance should be seen as exploratory.

Comparison between the fall and spring semesters shows that the total number of hours interns spent engaging in professional practice during the spring semester (5,163 hours) was only slightly higher than for the fall semester (4,756 hours). The number of hours spent with MC students, however, decreased slightly in the spring semester (1,975 hours) when compared with the fall (2,008

hours). Despite this decrease in overall time spent with MC youths, the number of hours spent with MC student groups doubled from the fall to the spring semester (from 242 to 432 hours;  $\alpha = .025$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There was also a threefold increase in the number of NMC student groups from the fall to the spring semester, although the difference was not statistically significant (from 277 to 834 students).

Although not statistically significant, the number of hours interns spent developing programs for MC students doubled from the fall to the spring semester (from 100 to 221 hours), whereas the number of hours spent developing programs for NMC students almost tripled (from 58 to 186 hours) in the spring semester. The number of IEP and special education meetings, however, decreased among MC students (from 57 hours to 35 hours) in the spring semester and increased among NMC students (from 46 to 59 hours). There was an overall decrease in the number of hours interns spent conducting social and behavioral assessments for both MC students (from 256 to 117 hours) and NMC students (from 382 to 164 hours).

### Content Area/Area of Focus

Interns were asked to report on the fieldwork activities they were involved in while at their placement and the number of contact hours they spent on each area. According to these reports, intern hours were spent addressing the following topics: students' academic struggles (1,043 hours); issues of bullying, school violence, and bystander responses (866 hours); attendance and truancy (457 hours); and school connectedness (442 hours). During the academic year, interns spent fewer hours on each of the following topics: the Interstate Compact, weapons use, sexual orientation, and homicide attempts (see Table 2).

There were some notable differences between the fall and spring semesters. The number of hours interns spent on domestic violence issues in the spring semester was double the number of hours they spent in the fall (59 versus 25 hours), as was the case for bullying (578 versus 288 hours) and substance-related issues (56 versus 29 hours)  $t(29) = 2.67$ ,  $p < .012$ . Interns spent about half as many hours on after-school activities in the spring semester (from 169 to 85 hours),  $t(29) = -2.37$ ,  $p < .024$ , and foster care-related issues (from 71 to 32 hours).

## DISCUSSION

Findings from this study suggest that MSW interns completing their placement in a MC school prioritize multiple professional activities. They are also able to provide services for a large number of clients ( $n = 1,806$ ), 40 percent of whom are MC students. Given the consortium's emphasis on supporting MC students through the placement of graduate-level social work interns, the current study's findings suggest that the consortium's efforts have been successful. Despite these positive findings, there are a handful of areas that require attention. For example, there were no significant increases in the number of hours interns spent engaging in professional practice between the fall and spring semesters (4,756 vs. 5,163 hours). Developing a stable caseload, strengthening client rapport, and nurturing meaningful partnerships are long-term processes and, as such, one would expect that the number of hours spent engaged in professional practice would increase in the spring semester. This study's findings do not follow this trajectory, which can be interpreted in one of two ways: either the interns are starting out with heavy caseloads, or the caseloads are not expanding as the school year progresses.

In addition to these findings, data from this study support the findings of previous research that suggest tension between micro- and macro-level work (see [Austin, Coombs, & Barr, 2006](#)). According to intern reports, they spent a majority of their time engaged in micro-level clinical practice. They rarely engaged in collaborative activities, including in-service training and grant writing; this is a cause for concern given the importance of interdisciplinary teams and financial resources for the advancement of the needs of at-risk and/or vulnerable student populations. Similarly, few interns worked with community organizations on behalf of their schools. Also, few interns were able to initiate schoolwide programs or work with large groups of students and parents.

Macro-level practice is a vital component of the school social work profession according to the roles and responsibilities outlined by the [School Social Work Association of America \(2009\)](#). The core competencies outlined by the [Council on Social Work Education \(2008\)](#) further reinforce the importance of macro-level practice. The findings described in the preceding paragraph may reflect the interns' prioritization of clinical skills in

the first year. Alternatively, these findings could reflect the interns' lack of awareness regarding the impact of macro-level work on individual clients ([Lay, Khaja, McGuire, & Gass, 2008](#)). Simply stated, the students in this sample may struggle to recognize the relationship between macro-level practice and the benefits accrued for individual clients.

## Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

The MSW interns included in this study sample prioritized a number of professional activities. The majority of their time was spent in micro- and mezzo-level clinical practice (for example, conducting individual assessments and sessions and group and family therapies). The interns' focus on clinical practice is not surprising, given the emphasis on clinical practice in the first-year MSW curriculum. MSW programs require that first-year social work students develop a basic grounding in clinical (micro-level) practice. First-year curriculums and placements thus emphasize training in generalist practice ([Pierce, 2008](#)).

Though first-year field curriculums and placements emphasize generalist practice, this study highlights areas in which instructors, both inside and outside the classroom, can help strengthen the practice experiences of MSW interns and the students they serve. For example, field educators can offer students guidance in the area of policy practice ([Jansson, 1984](#)). Because students' main focus during this first year is to learn and develop a mastery of clinical skills for prevention and intervention with children and families, they often are unable to contextualize how their practice is nested within the parameters of the practice environment, including external policies and organizational structures. Interns need to know what services children and families qualify for within a school setting and how their clients can access outside resources for continued assistance. Information about the length of time the child or family is eligible for services and how to make appropriate referrals should be part of the interns' working knowledge base. Field educators might consider focusing some of their efforts on increasing awareness and education about and application of macro-level practice during the first year. Field educators might also want to encourage collaboration between the students and members of the school community.

The interns' relative lack of engagement in collaborative activities is troubling, given the importance of interdisciplinary teams to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable student populations. Field educators should thus encourage the student interns to share new ideas and the knowledge, skills, and abilities they developed through their experiences with members of the school community to promote change within the school environment. Ideas that are agreed upon can be worked on together. Such collaborations would help strengthen the skills of the intern and provide an avenue for the intern to learn about the roles of others in the school and to educate school personnel on the role school social workers can play within the school context. Field educators should also encourage student interns to participate any in-service trainings offered by the school.

Intern reports suggest that few interns participated in the in-service training. In-service training, however, provides interns with an opportunity to connect with members of the school community and potentially opens a door to future collaboration. In-service trainings can also provide student interns with a venue for increasing the awareness and responsiveness of school personnel to the needs of individual students and the student body as a whole. Interns and schools cannot be empowered to respond to client needs if only a few interns participate in school in-service training.

Although these recommendations are not meant to be exhaustive, they provide social work practitioners working in school settings with ideas for enhancing field education and practice. This study also has implications for their continued efforts to support MC students and families.

### **Implications for Continued Efforts to Support MC Students and Families**

The school–university consortium discussed in this study places a major emphasis on supporting MC students through the placement of graduate-level social work interns. In this respect, the introduction of the MSW internship program in consortium schools was a success. Approximately 40 percent of the interns' hours were spent engaging in professional practice with MC students or groups. The increase in personnel and support services allowed children and families to access support services that otherwise would not have been offered, including individual, family, and group counseling. Moreover, even though only a few

interns were able to initiate schoolwide programs with large groups of students and families, when these programs or activities were organized by the interns to celebrate or honor military families (for example, a cake-cutting ceremony to honor the birthday of the Marine Corps), their efforts were well received by the school community. Findings from this study therefore suggest that schools that are struggling to address the unique needs and circumstances experienced by MC children may want to consider partnering with universities to increase their capacity to serve military families through the placement of MSW student interns.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Even though the interns in this sample spent the majority of their time engaged in micro- and mezzo-level clinical practice, there were major variations in how they allocated their time. This finding may highlight one important method of school reform, which is empowering schools and school personnel to define their local goals and engage in practices leading to the attainment of these goals. Variations in the student interns' professional practice could reflect local goals. Alternatively, variations in professional practice could also reflect the interns' preference and desire to engage in the practices with which they are most comfortable. Additional research is needed to determine whether variations in practice reflect local empowerment or intern preference.

### **Limitations**

This study did not address whether the military-specific training that interns received had an influence on their practice with MC students. This study is based on an instrument that has not yet been validated, and sample size limits the study's generalizability. Future studies might consider examining whether training influences the amount of time interns spend with MC students. Future studies might also examine whether this study's findings can be replicated with a larger sample and the same instruments. Such a study would enhance our understanding of school social work practice with MC students. Finally, future studies must examine the impact of the interns' activities on student–client outcomes.

### **CONCLUSION**

Findings from the first year of the internship program for students placed in consortium schools

suggest that student interns provide valuable resources to MC schools. These findings also highlight a number of gaps, including gaps in training and practice. The data, however, served as a mechanism for change. The data collected as part of this study allowed the consortium to alter its curriculum and training so as to facilitate more meaningful practice experiences for graduate interns and the students they serve. For example, when the data revealed an overall lack of participation by interns in school in-service training, the consortium was able to respond to this gap in training. The consortium organized a series of professional development workshops for the 2011–2012 student interns as part of the interns' field education experience. The introduction of additional professional development modules provided student interns with an opportunity to develop a range of new skills sets that they could then apply to their individual practice, thereby contributing to their development as professional practitioners. This study serves as an example of the importance of collecting data on interns' practice to identify their educational needs and improve the overall quality of field education. Moreover, when data are used to improve practice, clients benefit from these better prepared interns and practitioners. **CS**

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