

60th State School Social Work Conference

Presented by the:

New York State School Social Workers' Association

November 6 & 7, 2025



"A Gem of a Profession: Celebrating 60 Years of Collaboration and Professional Growth for New York State School Social Workers"

Conference Program

**Hotel Canandaigua
Canandaigua, NY**



Please Join Us!



The NYSSSWA Board and Conference Committee would like to encourage you to join us for the **New York State School Social Workers' Association's 60th Annual "Diamond" State School Social Work Conference**. Please review the complete program to assist you in making your workshop selections when registering. Be sure to **register early as space is limited**. We look forward to seeing you in November.

NYSSSWA Board

President: Wendy Castiglia

Past President: Peg Barrett

Vice President: Dr. Carmen Villavicencio-Hein

Secretary: Mara Kasden

Conference Treasurer: Trish Hoyer

University Liaison: Dr. Robin DeLuca-Aconi

Buffalo/Western Reps: Wendy Castiglia & Peg Barrett

Capitol Region: Jackie Gaffney

Mid-Hudson: Carrie Frost

Mohawk Valley Reps: Michelle Williams

Nassau/Suffolk Reps: Mara Kasden, Dr. Marilyn Solano

New York Reps: Dr. Krystal Folk-Nagua, Dr. Carmen Villavicencio-Hein

Northern: Mollie Jenne-Phelan

Rochester Reps: James Garner & Jody Rumfola

Westchester Rep: Jacqueline Sanchez-Young & Monique Johnson

Conference Committee:

Wendy Castiglia, Conference Chair

Peg Barrett

Ada Freeman

Joan Conti

Trish Hoyer

Michelle Mellon

Kelly Hannon Nichols

Katie Peck

Jacqueline Sanchez-Young

Emilie Tothero

Michelle Williams

Dot Kontak, **Director of Communications & Member Benefits**

60th NYSSSWA State Conference – Schedule of Events

Wednesday, 11/5/2025 Pre-Conference (1.5 CEs) [Optional]

7:00 pm – 8:30 pm "Pre Conference: Mindfulness and Meditation for School Social Workers" by Jill Wojcik Pula, LCSW, 500 Certified Yoga Instructor

Thursday 11/6/2025 (5 CEs)

8:00 am – 8:45 am Registration, Continental Breakfast (*Nutra-Grain blueberry & raspberry bars, Nature's Bakery oatmeal strawberry crumble bar, fruit bowl, coffee/tea*)

8:45 am – 9:00 am Welcome & Opening Remarks

9:00 am – 10:30 am Opening Keynote: "Diamond-Strong: 60 Years of School Social Work Service Through a Diversity Lens" by Rolanda L. Ward, Ph.D., MSW, M.Div. (1.5 CEs)

10:30 am – 11:00 am Break (Visit Exhibit Area)

11:00 am – 12:30 pm Breakout Sessions A: (1.5 CEs)

A1: "The ADHD & Executive Function Lens for School-Based Interventions" by Valerie Mackiewicz; MS, AACC, CACP, Certified ADHD Coach Practitioner

A2: "Pre-Teen Suicide: State of the Research" by Paige Picou, Ph.D.

A3: "Coping Skills Support Group- Learn how to start one in your school!" Tina LaMendola, LCSW, DBT-CBT Specialist

A4: "Chronic Absenteeism: Breaking the cycle" by Nicole Wiler, LMSW & Colleen Ramos, LMSW

12:30 pm – 2:00 Luncheon, Ruth Schwartz Award, Annual Meeting

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm Breakout Sessions B (2 CEs)

B1: "The Grief & Trauma Backpack" by Kara Juszczak, LCSW-R, CCFP

B2: "Implementing 'Just Practice' Assessments in School Social Work Practice" by Laura Rice Stein, Ph.D., LCSW, MS.Ed.

B3: "From Personal Loss to Creating Connections: A School-Based Approach to Co-Occurring Disorders" by Stephanie Marquesano, Esq.

B4: "Suicide Safety Planning with Youth: A Clinical Workshop" by Paige Picou, Ph.D.

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm Meet and Greet Informal Gathering

Friday 11/7/2025 (5.5 CEs)

7:45 am – 8:30 am Coffee/Tea, Continental Breakfast (*Fruit, danish and pastries, muffins, bagels and cream cheese, and coffee/tea*)

8:30 am – 10:00 am General Session: "Supporting Students on Medication: A Psychopharmacology Primer by Dori Marshall, M.D., (1.5 CEs)

10:00 am – 10:30 am BREAK (Visit Exhibit Area)

10:30 am – 12:00 pm Breakout Sessions C (1.5 CEs)

C1: "From Dysregulated to Resilient: Strengthening Frustration Tolerance Through Relationships" by Kelly Zinn, D.S.W., LCSW

C2: "Cannabis and the Developing Brain: The Blunt Truth" by Erin Parr, MACP, CASAC

C3: "Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of Eating Disorders" by Alexandra Wilkosz, D.S.W.

C4: "Applying DBT in a School Setting Within the MTSS Framework" -Monique Johnson, LCSW

12:00 pm – 12:45 pm Luncheon

12:45 pm – 2:15 pm Breakout Sessions D (1.5 CEs)

D1: "Navigating Grief & Loss in Schools: Strategies for Support" by Kelly Zinn, D.S.W., LCSW

D2: "What Don't You Know About E-Cigarettes & Vaping?" by Colleen Babcock & Erin Parr, MACP, CASAC

D3: "Building Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Programming in NYS Schools" by Kristen Stanton, M.S.

D4: "Facilitating a DBT-Informed Parent Group in a School Setting" by Monique Johnson, LCSW

2:15 pm – 2:30 pm Break

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm Closing Keynote: "Utilizing Mental Health Team Relationships to Maximize Student Outcomes" by James Garner, LMSW & Kate DiGregorio, LCSW (1 CE)

60th State School Social Work Conference Program of Events



Wednesday, 11/5/2025 Pre-Conference (1.5 CEs) [Optional]
(FREE for NYSSSWA Members. \$35 for Non-Members.)

7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Pre Conference: "Mindfulness and Meditation for School Social Workers" by Jill Wojcik Pula, LCSW, 500 Certified Yoga Instructor



"Mindfulness and Meditation practices have been around for thousands of years. Research has begun to show the benefits of these practices from reduced stress and improved well-being, to managing symptoms of depression, anxiety, along with improved focus. Mindfulness can be defined as paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and acceptance. This practice invites us to slow down, breathe and observe your inner experience. Mindfulness is the simple process of

noticing new things about the familiar. When we actively notice, we become open to new perspectives and change."

Target Population: K-12

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate

Thursday 11/6/2025 (5 CEs)

8:00 am – 8:45 am Registration, Continental Breakfast (Nutra-Grain blueberry & raspberry bars, Nature's Bakery oatmeal strawberry crumble bar, fruit bowl, coffee/tea)

8:45 am – 9:00 am Welcome & Opening Remarks

9:00 am – 10:30 am Opening Keynote: "Diamond-Strong: 60 Years of School Social Work Service Through a Diversity Lens" by Rolanda L. Ward, Ph.D., MSW, M.Div. (1.5 CEs)

Social work's commitment to diversity is the bedrock of strong schools. Yet, recent local and federal actions create challenges for effective practice. This workshop aims to identify, explain, and teach strategies that will help district leaders extract the brilliance of every student in every school and district. In this session, participants will learn the theoretical underpinnings of education equity from a historical perspective. Information about changes in educational policies over the last sixty years will be explored. In addition, participants will develop their knowledge about the many ways social workers practice from a diverse lens. This includes an analysis of how knowledge about diversity has changed. Specifically, participants will explore the relationship between effective diversity practice and student achievement. Finally, participants will learn about action planning and will draft a local action plan that can be shared with school leadership.

Target Population: K-12

Topic Skill Level: Intermediate

10:30 am – 11:00 am Break (Check Out All the Exhibits!)

11:00 am – 12:30 pm Breakout Sessions A: (1.5 CEs)

A1: "The ADHD & Executive Function Lens for School-Based Interventions" by Valerie Mackiewicz; MS, AACC, CACP, Certified ADHD Coach Practitioner

This workshop serves to expand understanding and support strategies for school-based interventions for students with ADHD. Participants will acquire an "ADHD & Executive Function" lens of clarity and competence for working confidently with the ADHD population and affected families.

Target Population: K-12

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate

A2: "Pre-Teen Suicide: State of the Research" by Paige Picou, Ph.D.

In this workshop, participants will learn about the prevalence of suicide in pre-teen youth, understand how these rates are changing across time, hear an overview of research attempting to understand why pre-teen youth die by suicide, and discuss opportunities for future research. This



Courtney Hill, NYSUT Find out how we are part of NY's "Collective Care Teams"

presentation aims to highlight the importance of understanding suicide in pre-teen youth and to provide insight on what the state of the research in this population means for clinicians who work with youth.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Beginner

A3: "Coping Skills Support Group- Learn how to start one in your school!" by Tina LaMendola, LCSW, DBT-CBT Specialist

There is a growing rate of students reporting increased levels of anxiety and stress with recurring themes of academic pressures, social media influence, increased sport/club demands, and college & future decisions to name just a few. One of the best ways to address these issues is through the creation of a coping skills support group. This specialized group is an excellent way for students to learn new skills, develop self-confidence, become more aware of how others see them, practice new behaviors, and better understand how to deal with stress and challenges. This group model provides the following:



Connect with peers who have similar experiences; Decrease mental health stigma; Normalize for students they are not alone; Learn and practice healthy coping skills; Provide hope that recovery is possible; Participants will learn how to start a group up in your building in an easy format and get administrator/staff buy-in quickly!

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Intermediate/Advanced

A4: "Chronic Absenteeism: Breaking the Cycle" by Nicole Wiler, LMSW & Colleen Ramos, LMSW

In this workshop we will dive into the increasing difficulty and struggles of attendance to school and truancy within the school setting. We will demonstrate a variety of supports and systems that have increased student attendance especially at the middle and high school levels. We will explore challenges and opportunities for growth, school-based interventions, MTSS teams, community partnerships and how to use multidisciplinary teams as a source of creativity and planning to increase attendance within school and to school.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Intermediate

12:30 pm – 2:00 Luncheon, Ruth Schwartz Award, Annual Meeting

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm Breakout Sessions B (2 CEs)

B1: "The Grief & Trauma Backpack" by Kara Juszczak, LCSW-R, CCFP

This training will explore the impact of grief and trauma on the school environment, when administrators, educators, parents, and students bring their stories with them to each interaction. School staff will learn about trauma-informed care as it applies to the education



*Tricia Hoyer receives
President's Award*

system and how to regulate their emotional experiences that get carried into the learning environment.

Target Population: Pre-School to 12

Topic Skill Level: Intermediate

B2: “Implementing ‘Just Practice’ Assessments in School Social Work Practice” by Laura Rice Stein, Ph.D., LCSW, MS. Ed.

The Just Practice Framework (Finn, 2020) offers a powerful approach for school social workers to guide their assessments of students and strengthen their engagement and ongoing work with students and their families. This workshop will introduce the framework’s five core processes and share and unpack its five core concepts – meaning, history, context, power, and possibility. Participants will also learn how to utilize the framework and have an opportunity to practice doing so.

Target Population: K-12

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced

B3: “From Personal Loss to Creating Connections: A School-Based Approach to Co-Occurring Disorders” by Stephanie Marquesano, Esq.

As a mother whose son died at 19 from an accidental overdose and lived with co-occurring disorders (mental health challenges and substance use issues), Stephanie Marquesano brings powerful lived experience and a deep professional commitment to prevention, early intervention, and integrated care. This session introduces a first-of-its-kind co-occurring disorders (COD) prevention curriculum designed for high school youth, with tools adaptable for younger grades. Grounded in early intervention, it equips school social workers to educate, reduce risk, strengthen protective factors, and foster open, stigma-free conversations. Participants will explore strategies for integrating COD prevention across school tiers and building pathways to support—laying the foundation for developmentally appropriate care that evolves with students’ needs and responds with compassion and connection for the youth and family when COD is already present. PENDING

B4: "Suicide Safety Planning with Youth: A Clinical Workshop" by Paige Picou, Ph.D.

In this workshop, participants will learn about crisis theory, understand the components of a successful suicide safety plan, and practice suicide safety planning. The goal of this interactive workshop is to help clinicians gain useful skills to engage in suicide safety planning and lethal means counseling with at-risk youth and their families. These skills can be used in both school and clinical practices.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Beginner

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm **Meet and Greet Informal Gathering**



Mohawk Valley 2024

Friday 11/7/2025 (5.5 CEs)

7:45 am – 8:30 am Coffee/Tea, Continental Breakfast (*Fruit, danish and pastries, muffins, bagels and cream cheese, and coffee/tea*)

8:30 am – 10:00 am General Session: "Supporting Students on Medication: A Psychopharmacology Primer" by Dori Marshall, M.D., (1.5 CEs)

In this talk we will review the common presentations in school of ADHD, Anxiety Disorders, and Depressive Disorders. For each, we will review evidence-based models of management, including the most commonly used medications, indications, how they work, common side effects. Questions - including case-based questions - will be encouraged.

Target Population: K-12

Topic Skill Level: Advanced

10:00 am – 10:30 am BREAK (Check Out the Exhibit Area)

10:30 am – 12:00 pm Breakout Sessions C (1.5 CEs)

C1: "From Dysregulated to Resilient: Strengthening Frustration Tolerance Through Relationships" by Kelly Zinn, D.S.W., LCSW

Students struggling with anxiety and dysregulation often lack frustration tolerance, leading to outbursts, avoidance, or withdrawal. This workshop will explore how to help students build resilience by strengthening their sense of connection and emotional safety. Drawing from developmental psychology and practical, relationship-based strategies, participants will learn to foster frustration tolerance in ways that validate emotions while setting firm, supportive boundaries. In addition to classroom and counseling techniques, attendees will gain tools to collaborate effectively with parents, empowering them with strategies to reinforce frustration tolerance at home. This engaging and interactive workshop will provide actionable strategies to help students handle challenges.

Target Population: Elementary/Middle School

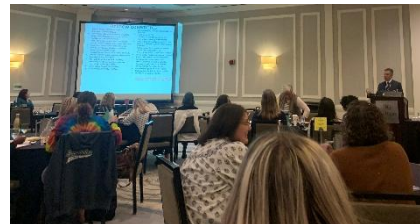
Topic Skill Level: Intermediate



Be sure to visit "The Book Guy"

C2: "Cannabis and the Developing Brain: The Blunt Truth" by

Erin Parr, MACP, CASAC



Cannabis is considered to be highly disruptive to the developing child and adolescent brain. Which youth are the most at risk for developing a cannabis use disorder? Which youth are more likely to experience the emergence of mental health disorders in connection with their cannabis use? It is essential to understand the effects of cannabis on periods of critical brain development to support prevention efforts and encourage low-risk cannabis use in youth who are consuming. Common weed “myths” about the perceived safety of cannabis are demystified and strategies for having effective cannabis conversations with youth are offered.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate

C3: "Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of Eating Disorders" by Alexandra Wilkosz, D.S.W.

Eating disorders—including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder—are serious conditions that impact social, emotional, and physical health. Without effective treatment, they can become long-term struggles and, in some cases, even be life-threatening. These disorders often arise from a complex interplay of genetics, personality traits, and environmental factors, such as childhood experiences, social comparison, traumatic events, and cultural beauty standards. While causes, several evidence-based interventions can support individuals in achieving lasting recovery. This presentation provides a comprehensive overview of eating disorder treatment, covering epidemiology, clinical features, assessment, diagnosis, illness progression, and medical complications. Additionally, it will explore research-backed approaches and practical skills that can be applied in real-world settings.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Beginner

C4: "Applying DBT in a School Setting Within the MTSS Framework" by Monique Johnson, LCSW

This training introduces school social workers to practical strategies for integrating Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) principles and skills within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. Participants will explore how DBT can be adapted for universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and intensive (Tier 3) interventions to promote emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness in students. The session will emphasize how DBT aligns with social-emotional learning (SEL). By the end of the training, participants will be knowledgeable and aware of how to apply DBT-informed tools to support student academic performance, emotional well-being, and behavior. role-play exercises to practice applying DBT techniques. Mindfulness and stress-reduction exercises will also be incorporated to allow participants to experience the strategies firsthand.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced

12:00 pm – 12:45 pm Luncheon

12:45 pm – 2:15 pm Breakout Sessions D (1.5 CEs)

D1: “Navigating Grief & Loss in Schools: Strategies for Support” by Kelly Zinn, Ph.D., LCSW

Grief is a universal experience, extending beyond death to include major life changes including divorce, placement in foster care, deployment, and incarceration. This workshop will engage participants in discussions and learning activities that cover both grief theory and practice approaches, resulting in actionable knowledge and tools to create caring, inclusive school environments that will support students through major life changes. The presenter will also discuss the impact of grief on school staff and provide suggestions for school community wellbeing and self-care, as well as ways of reaching out to families and caregivers and the importance of connecting to community support.

Target Population: K - 12

Topic Skill Level: Intermediate

D2: “What Don't You Know About E-Cigarettes & Vaping?” by Colleen Babcock & Erin Parr, MACP, CASAC

What you don't know about e-cigarettes and vaping discusses the current fact and myths the American public is facing and the risk to our youth. We will discuss products, paraphernalia, marketing, current statistics & studies conducted by Roswell Cancer Institute and school surveys.

Target Population: K - 12

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate

D3: “Building Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Programming in New York State Schools” by Kristen Stanton, M.S.

Does your school district have written policies and procedures on how to support a child who may be at risk for suicide? Have all school staff been trained in how to respond to a child who may be a risk or how to support a school after a traumatic loss? Attendees will learn how school districts can develop a comprehensive suicide prevention program from the ground up utilizing a multi-tiered system of support model. Attendees will leave with the information and resources needed to assess their districts policies and protocols and to understand the staff trainings and student programming required.

Target Population: K - 12

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced

D4: "Facilitating a DBT-Informed Parent Group in a School Setting" by Monique Johnson, LCSW

This presentation will explore the value of implementing a DBT-informed parent group within the school setting, particularly in schools that are already teaching DBT STEPS-A. Such groups are especially beneficial for parents of children who are participating in DBT or who struggle with



intense emotions and challenging behaviors. Grounded in the core principles of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), this group model equips parents with practical strategies to manage their own stress and to support their children’s emotional and behavioral regulation. School social workers will learn how DBT-informed parent groups can foster a shared language across school and home environments, improve student outcomes, strengthen parent-child relationships, and build stronger partnerships between families and school staff. The presentation will also highlight key implementation logistics, essential DBT skills to teach, and effective strategies for engaging parents, drawing from real-world examples in school settings.

Target Population: Middle School/High School

Topic Skill Level: Beginner/Intermediate/*Advanced

2:15 pm – 2:30 pm Break

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm Closing Keynote: “Utilizing Mental Health Team Relationships to Maximize Student Outcomes” by James Garner, LMSW & Kate DiGregorio, LCSW (1 CE)

This session will explore role delineation for school based mental health teams highlighting strengths and training of disciplines within our MTSS system. Various interventions and the resource mapping process utilized to build more evidence based interventions within each of the 18 schools in our district will be explored. As the mental health needs have grown, we capitalize on the strengths of our mental health disciplines and leverage strategic community partnerships to lessen existing gaps.

Target Population: K - 12

Topic Skill Level: Advanced

Ending Announcements & Adjourn

See You In Canandaigua!



Note: Hotel Pictures provided by Hotel Canandaigua