Salary, Education, Benefits, and Job Descriptions of Nurses, Teachers, and Social Workers: A Comparative Analysis
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work within the Texas Administrative Code</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Situation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification Codes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Descriptions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Social workers play a vital role in assisting individuals and families become independent and self-sufficient by working to address issues such as mental illness, child welfare, aging, substance use, and joblessness. For instance, social workers are the primary professionals providing services for individuals with mental illness, which affects community members and families regardless of race, socio-economic class, or gender (SAMHSA, 2007).

The purpose of this white paper is to examine current Texas state compensation for social workers, teachers, and nurses. This paper will compare the salary, benefits, education, and job descriptions of these three professions to discern the reasons for current compensation disparities among the three professions. This paper compares the entry-level (i.e. undergraduate degree level jobs with no worker experience) salary, benefits, education, and job descriptions of social workers to teachers and nurses. This paper also provides recommendations for alternatives to the current salary classification codes for social workers.

Problem Statement

According to a 2006 report from the Texas Health Professions Resource Center, the supply ratio of social workers, especially in rural areas has declined. Teaching, nursing and social work have all been identified as professions experiencing shortages in many parts of the state. The Hogg Foundation (2009) reported that in Texas, solving mental health work force issues such as cultural competency and workforce shortages is a vital need. As of January 2008, the Federal Government designated 184 of Texas’ 254 counties as “Health Professional Shortage Areas for licensed mental health professionals” (Hogg Foundation, 2009).

Moreover, recruitment and preparation of social workers and support to schools of social work consistently do not receive the same level of support that teachers, nurses and their educational institutions receive. An example is the allotment of $24.7 million for the Professional Nursing Shortage Reduction Program to recruit and retain nursing faculty, a $9 million increase during FY 2006-07 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2007). The 2008-09 state of Texas budget also allocates $4 million in proceeds from the tobacco lawsuit settlement to support innovative nursing education programs.

In Texas, social work is a licensed profession, requires similar levels of education, and has comparable job descriptions to that of teachers and nurses. Yet social workers are paid at rates that are significantly less than those other two professions. Under the existing classification system, positions occupied by social workers are classified at lower levels than the other two professions, resulting in lower compensation.

In addition to the disparity in salaries among social workers, teachers and nurses, there are differences in the benefits provided to each profession. While most state employees receive the same standard benefits, other types of assistance are often not available to
social workers. Examples of such disparities include loan forgiveness programs, allowance of work time for professional supervision, and reimbursement for licensure costs.

**Social Work within the Texas Administrative Code**

Social Work
Social work is a broad profession that encompasses several career paths such as case management, counseling, substance abuse treatment, and community outreach. Social workers are licensed as required by the state of Texas and are expected to adhere to the licensing Code of Conduct. The following Texas Administrative Code lays out the requirements for using the title “Social Worker” and the scope of practice for the baccalaureate social worker.

*Texas Administrative Code*

§787.101 Purposes and Scope
(b) The Act restricts the use of the titles of “Social Worker” or any other title that implies licensure or certification in professional social work services.

§781.402 The Practice of Social Work
“(a) Practice of Baccalaureate Social Work—The application of social work theory, knowledge, methods, ethics and the professional use of self to restore or enhance social, psychosocial, or biopsychosocial functioning of individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities. Baccalaureate Social Work is generalist practice that may include interviewing, assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, case management, mediation, counseling, supportive counseling, direct practice, information and referral, problem solving, supervision, consultation, education, advocacy, community organization and the development, implementation, and administration of policies, programs and activities. A LBSW (Licensed Baccalaureate Social Worker) recognized for independent practice may provide any non-clinical baccalaureate social work services in either an employment or an independent practice setting…."

**Current Situation**

**Current Salary Classification Codes**

*Social Worker*
According to the State Auditor’s Office, a Clinical Social Worker I is in salary group B15 and receives a minimum annual salary of $31,729, which is approximately $2,644 per month. This requires a four year degree and the passing of a nationally administered licensing exam. B15 is also the classification for Child Protective Services Specialist II which is the position used to hire most entry level positions for Child Protective Services. In FY 2009, there were more than 4000 positions bearing that title in the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.
In 2005, the Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 6, which contained extensive reform for Child Protective Services (CPS). One component was a $5,000 annual stipend for CPS Investigative Case Workers; however, all other social workers in CPS and the Department of Protective Services do not receive that stipend, thus creating a salary disparity among workers within the same program.

_Nurse_
According to the State Auditor’s Office, a Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Nurse I is categorized in salary group B17. The minimum salary for this group is $35,651, which is approximately $2,971 per month. The Nurse I is an entry-level nursing position and does not require a Bachelor’s Degree. It only requires an individual to hold a license as a Registered Nurse, which can be accrued through a degree from a community college and a state or national licensing exam.

_Teacher_
According to the Texas Workforce Commission, entry-level secondary school teachers (Bachelor’s Degree) can expect to receive an annual (10-month) salary of $36,862. Entry-level primary school teachers (Bachelor’s Degree) can expect to receive an annual (10-month) salary of $36,738.

Teacher salary levels vary among the various school districts in the state. For example, an entry-level teacher operating within the Austin Independent School District can expect to receive an annual (10-month) salary of $42,024. That gives teachers in the Austin Independent School District a monthly salary of $4,202. This would be $3,502 if divided among 12 months, or if paid at that monthly rate for 12 months, an annual salary of $50,424.

Figure 1 shows the minimum salary an entry-level individual will receive in all these professions. The chart shows that entry-level secondary education teachers who work in Texas can expect to receive $36,862 for a 10-month contract. Although that number is sometimes different depending on which part of Texas and school district the data is being analyzed, teachers consistently receive higher salaries than social workers according to the Texas Workforce Commission.

**Figure 1: Annual Salary in Dollars**
Figure 2: 12-Month Annual Salary in Dollars

![Bar chart showing annual salary comparison for Social Worker, Teacher, and Nurse.]

Figure 2 shows the annual salary for teachers, nurses and social workers if a teacher’s monthly salary was paid at a 12-month rate. Although teachers in Texas typically receive compensation via a 10-month contract, figure 2 shows their salary if it were to be divided between 12 months.

Figure 3 below shows the significant difference among the three groups: social workers receive the lowest salaries at $2,644 per month; nurses, with fewer educational requirements, receive $2,971 per month; while teachers, working 10 months of the year, receive $3,686 per month.

Figure 3: Monthly Salary in Dollars

![Bar chart showing monthly salary comparison for Social Worker, Teacher (secondary ed.), and Nurse.]

The State Auditor’s classification codes determine the salary range of these and other professions. The current salary compensation for social workers is lower than both nurses and teachers. Although, according to Texas Education Agency, teachers make an annual
(10-month) salary of $36,862, they continue to be compensated at higher monthly rates than social workers.

As a result of the low compensation for social workers, the profession experiences high turnover rates and staff in many positions lack experience (National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies 2006). According to this research, many social workers are dissatisfied with agency environments and current compensation levels. Consequently, the profession is experiencing difficulty in retaining a sufficient and qualified workforce. In order to address this growing issue many organizations have increased their use of non-social workers to fill gaps in their workforce. However, this perpetuates the issue because of the continual induction of unqualified or under qualified workers. The problem has become cyclical as a result of the current shortage of social workers.

**Job Descriptions**

The following are job descriptions for Social Worker I and Nurse I as provided by the Texas State Auditor’s Office, and Elementary and Secondary School Teachers as provided by the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Social Worker I Job Description**
Performs moderately complex social services work. Work involves serving as a liaison between clients and their families in obtaining assistance and rehabilitative treatment. Works under general supervision with limited latitude for the use of initiative and independent judgment.

**Nurse I Job Description**
Performs entry-level nursing work. Work involves providing for the assessment, care, and treatment of patients. Works under close supervision, with minimal latitude for the use of initiative and independent judgment.

**Teacher Job Descriptions**
Elementary School Teachers- Teach pupils in public or private schools at the elementary level basic academic, social, and other formative skills.

Secondary School Teachers- Instruct students in secondary public or private schools in one or more subjects at the secondary level, such as English, mathematics, or social studies. May be designated according to subject matter specialty, such as typing instructors, commercial teachers, or English teachers.

These job descriptions are general for the broad fields that are nursing and social work. Job descriptions for specific positions may vary according to the needs of varying agencies and specialties. However, the general description shows that there is little difference between an entry-level social worker and an entry-level nurse except that a Social Worker I performs journey-level social services work while a nurse performs
entry-level nursing work. A Social Worker I also operates under general supervision while an entry-level nurse works under close supervision.

**Education**

The following are education descriptions for Social Worker I and Nurse I are provided by the Texas State Auditor’s Office and teacher as provided by the Texas Workforce Commission.

**Social Worker I**
Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university, or graduate level college or university with major course work in social work is required for a social worker position. The title social worker also requires licensure as mandated by the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. Some states require a Master’s level social work degree. However, other states allow Baccalaureate level social workers to practice with a Baccalaureate Social Work License.

**Nurse I**
Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university with major course work in nursing or from an accredited nursing program is generally preferred. Students may complete a vocational program without pursuing a Bachelor’s degree.

**Teacher**
Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university with major course work in education and a teaching license or a four-year degree in any core academic field (e.g. Math, Science, English, etc.) and a teaching license is generally preferred.

**Benefits**

Nurses and social workers receive similar benefits from the Texas Department of State Health Services. The differences in benefits become apparent when nurses and social workers are in positions at non-government agencies. Teachers receive their benefits from their respective Independent School Districts. Therefore, standard benefits tend not to differ between nurses, teachers and social workers. However, there tends to be a disparity in other types of assistance that often are not available to social workers. Examples of such disparities include loan forgiveness programs, allowance of work time for professional supervision, and reimbursement for licensure costs. These additional types of benefits that provide support for existing professionals and incentives for new professionals are disproportionately offered to nurses and teachers but not social workers.

**Loan Forgiveness**

Loan forgiveness is a profession-oriented benefit that teachers and nurses are able to easily attain. However, social workers do not receive the same level of educational assistance or loan forgiveness. Often, the loan forgiveness that social workers do receive
is directed to a certain specialty such as healthcare or protective services. The loan debt of social workers is generally higher than for teachers as a result. The Public Interest Research Groups’ Higher Education Project found that:

- Nationally, 23 percent of public college and 38 percent of private college graduates would have unmanageable debt as starting teachers.
- Nationally, 37 percent of public and 55 percent of private college graduates would have unmanageable debt as starting social workers.

The problem for newly-graduated social workers is obvious. 37% of them start out with unmanageable debt and are eligible for positions that pay significantly less than comparable professions (The Pew Charitable Trusts). Even though their first desire may be to provide social work services, they may soon be forced into other professions or disciplines as a practical matter, that of being able to pay off their debts.

**Social Worker**
Social workers are eligible to receive loan forgiveness through various, yet disjointed methods. For example, many of the loan forgiveness programs are limited to the healthcare field or child centered settings. Specifically, social workers can receive loan forgiveness of Stafford and Perkins Loans as long as the social worker provides services in a setting that is targeted for teachers and nurses, or to “high risk children and families in low-income communities” (McCallion, 2005; Department of Education, 2009). This excludes many social workers who work with various other populations such as the mentally ill, the homeless or the elderly.

**Nurse**
Nurses have a number of opportunities for loan forgiveness. For example, the Nursing Education Loan Repayment program provides nurses with up to 85 percent loan forgiveness for three years of service in shortage areas (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2009). The Department of Health and Human Services recently released $13.4 million in financial assistance to support nurses (Health Resources and Services Administration, August 12, 2009) The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is providing $500 million to bolster and expand the healthcare workforce through scholarships, loan forgiveness, and other healthcare assistance expenditures. This Act includes physicians and nurses, but not social workers (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2009).

**Teacher**
There is currently a Stafford Loan Forgiveness program for teachers (Department of Education, 2009). Upon working five consecutive years as full-time teachers for low-income families, these professionals receive loan forgiveness of up to $17,500 toward their Stafford Loans (Department of Education, 2009).

Anyone who works with children can also have a portion of their Perkins Loan forgiven. Teachers can have up to 30 percent of this loan forgiven for five years of full-time service (Department of Education, 2009). Child protective case managers and social workers also
fall within this loan forgiveness program. However, this program excludes a large number of social workers who work in other fields (Department of Education, 2009). A special concern is the lack of assistance for social workers who work in gerontological social work such as Adult Protective Services.

Several state-specific loan repayment programs are also designed to assist teachers who work in these states. For instance, Texas has a Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Assistance Program designed to attract and retain teachers in shortage areas. This loan provides teachers with $5,000 loan forgiveness for work in needed locations (American Federation of Teachers).

**Recommendations**

Additional research needs to be conducted to evaluate the job responsibilities and educational requirements for social workers, teachers, and nurses in order to determine if there is any justification for the disparities as described above. We recommend that the State Auditor’s Office conduct a study to examine the position qualifications, job descriptions and other relevant factors of social workers as compared to teachers and nurses.

It is the opinion of our professional association, the Texas Chapter of the National Association of Social Work, that the current salary classification codes should be revised to properly reflect the nature of the jobs being performed by social workers and the amount of training and education required to successfully fulfill job requirements. We understand that proper classification is only the first step in rectifying the current disparity, but we believe it is a necessary first step in ensuring fairness in the process and in being able to recruit and retain social workers in so many critical areas.

There are many benefits for Texas by removing existing disparities and at minimum, raising the level of compensation of social workers to levels comparable to other comparable professions.

- Maintain a well qualified social work workforce to fill a growing number of positions throughout the state;
- Enable the state to meet the needs of its population in key areas: mental health, child welfare, substance abuse, income security, juvenile justice, gerontology, health care, education, community development, public policy, social justice, and the like;
- Provide fair and equitable compensation for equal work;
- Provide public servants with a livable wage;
- Reduce turnover in public agencies, thereby reducing costs associated with lack of continuity, orientation and training; and
- Ensure the quality of services delivered to constituents (NASW Center for Workforce Studies).
Summary

Nursing, teaching, and social work are all important professions that serve others and society. Although all three of these professions have been identified as vital to the community, social work has continued to lack the support that nursing and teaching have historically received. This fact has hurt not only social workers, but also the clients they serve. A comprehensive and fair evaluation of the classification codes by the State Auditor’s Office is necessary to address long-held concerns about equity and the value Texas places on its workers.

The benefits of increasing compensation for social workers are tremendous for society. Social workers help people gain independence and become contributing members of society, help children remain in school, and help alleviate many other societal issues that avoid future costs, in money and in lost potential. Texas stands to gain by paying a fair and livable wage to its social workers.
References


