HIGHLIGHTING

THE WORK OF

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

AWARDS

Catalog

School Social Workers

SSWAG

Association of Georgia

2026-2027

Dear School Social Workers,

As dedicated professionals who bridge the gap between schools, students, families, and communities, you possess unique insights into those who make exceptional contributions to our field. It is with great enthusiasm that we invite you to help us celebrate and honor these remarkable individuals by nominating them for the prestigious SSWAG Awards.

We encourage you to review the following requirements for the award categories below and consider nominating outstanding peers and community leaders who exemplify excellence in their roles:

- Elsie Nesbit Trailblazer Award –Due November 30th
- Friend of Children Award –Due December 15
- Champion of Social Work Award - Due December 15
- Community Impact Award – Due January 15th
- Social Work Pioneer Award – Due January 1st
- School Social Worker of the Year – Due January 1st
- Retiree Award- Due February 1st
- Honorary Members – Due November 30th

The winners will be celebrated at next year's Annual Spring Conference, where they will receive their awards and be recognized for their extraordinary contributions.

Please ensure that all nominations include the required application materials and additional documents, and are submitted to the Awards Chair by the specified deadline.

Let us work together to shine a light on those who truly elevate and enhance our profession. Your nominations will help us acknowledge the exceptional dedication and impact of our peers.

Thank you for your participation in nominating outstanding school social workers and community leaders for the SSWAG Awards!

Best Regards,

Dr. Rasha Portis, DSW, LCSW
SSWAG Awards Chair

Dr. Laura Etheridge, DSW, LMSW
SSWAG Awards Co-Chair

The Elsie Nesbit Trailblazer Award

The Elsie Nesbit Trailblazer Award - The Elsie Nesbit Trailblazer Award was established to honor Elsie Nesbit's contributions to the Visiting Teacher/School Social Work profession. Ms. Nesbit was a trailblazer who worked tirelessly to implement Georgia's first Compulsory Attendance Law in 1945. She worked with the School of Education at the University of Georgia to develop a professional training program for Visiting Teachers who were responsible for helping children enroll in school. Later the Visiting Teacher Program was merged with the School of Social Work. This award recognizes an outstanding SSWAG member who has been a certified SSW-VT member for at least five consecutive years. This individual promotes services to students and makes contributions to the school social work profession locally and statewide.

The prestige of this award is such that it is not necessarily awarded annually.
The district nominations may be from within the district or another district in the State. Nomination application must be received by **November 30th**. The recipient will be determined by the Awards Committee by February 1st.

All qualifications determined by the committee must be met. The qualifications are:

1. Must have been a certified school social worker for five consecutive years.
2. Must have made contributions to children, family, and their local community.
3. Must have made contributions to SSWAG.
4. Must have made contributions to the school social work profession.

To be considered for this award, the following items must be completed.

1. Complete an application.
2. Provide written documentation not exceeding 5 pages.
3. Provide at least one picture of nominee and a brief bio of no more than 100 words. (This is in addition to the written documentation, but other pictures are welcomed.

Due to the secret nature of the award, please keep the nominee uniformed about their nomination.



Friend of Children Award

The School Social Workers Association of Georgia (SSWAG) is proud to present the Friend of Children Award, which honors individuals who have demonstrated exceptional support and commitment to the advancement of school social work services. This prestigious award is aimed at recognizing administrators or community leaders who have made a significant impact on the well-being and success of students and their families.

To be eligible for the Friend of Children Award, nominees must meet the following criteria:

1. Support and Advocacy: The nominee must have actively supported and advocated for the integration and enhancement of school social work services. This involves championing the role of school social workers and ensuring that their contributions are recognized and valued within the educational system.

2. Program Development: The nominee should have played a key role in developing or facilitating engaging and impactful programs that improve the delivery of services to students and families. This includes creating or promoting initiatives that address the needs of students within the school and community environment.

3. Civic or Youth Involvement: The nominee must be actively involved in civic or youth organizations or boards that have a positive effect on students and their families. This involvement should reflect a dedication to improving the quality of life for young people and supporting their development.

To be considered for this award, the following application materials are required:

1. Completed Application: Submit a completed application form detailing the nominee's qualifications and contributions.

2. Written Documentation: Provide written documentation (not exceeding 5 pages) that outlines the nominee's achievements and impact in relation to the award criteria. This should include specific examples and evidence of the nominee's support and involvement.

3. Visual and Biographical Information: Include at least one photograph of the nominee and a brief biography of no more than 100 words. While only one picture is required, additional images are encouraged to provide a fuller picture of the nominee's work and impact.

The Friend of Children Award is a celebration of those who go above and beyond in their dedication to enhancing the lives of students and families through their support and advocacy for school social work services.

Deadline: December 15



The Champion of Social Work Award

Award Description: The *Champion of Social Work Award* recognizes outstanding school district leaders who supervise school social workers and social workers in educational systems that demonstrate exceptional commitment to the growth and development of the social work department. This prestigious award celebrates leaders who actively support the vital work that school social workers provide to students, staff, and the broader school community. Awardees are those who have gone above and beyond in fostering a professional and supportive environment for school social workers, prioritizing their professional growth, and uplifting their contributions to the educational system. Given the high standards of this award, it is not necessarily awarded every year. Nominees may be selected by the awards committee.

Award Criteria: Nominees for the Social Worker Champion Leadership Award must meet the following criteria:

1. **Leadership and Vision:** Demonstrates visionary leadership by fostering the growth and success of the social work department within their school district. This includes promoting the role of school social workers and ensuring that their contributions are recognized within the school system.
2. **Support for School Social Workers:** Provides ongoing support for school social workers in their work with students, staff, and the school community. This includes advocating for the needs of school social workers and ensuring that they have the resources, time, and support they need to thrive.
3. **Professional Development:** Encourages and facilitates professional development opportunities for school social workers, supporting them in their continued education, skill-building, and career growth. This can include organizing workshops, conferences, and mentorship opportunities.
4. **Uplift and Encouragement:** Actively uplifts and encourages school social workers, fostering an environment of respect, collaboration, and appreciation. This leader celebrates the contributions of school social workers and ensures they feel valued as integral members of the school team.
5. **Impact on Student and School Community Well-Being:** Champions the role of school social workers in supporting the mental health and well-being of students, creating a positive and inclusive environment for all students and school staff.

Eligibility:

- Must be a district-level or school leader who supervises school social workers.
- Must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to enhancing the role of social workers within the school district.
- Nominees should have a proven track record of leadership in supporting school social work services and advocating for the needs of social workers.

Deadline: December 15

Nomination and Evaluation Process:

Nominations should include a written statement (500 words or less) detailing how the nominee meets the criteria above, along with any relevant supporting materials such as letters of recommendation from school social workers or colleagues. Complete Packets will be evaluated by selected members of the Awards Committee and Executive Board.



Community Impact Award

School Social Workers provide the vital link between the home, school, and community to provide support services that impact students' academic achievement. The Community Impact Award recognizes the extraordinary commitment of school social work departments in the state of Georgia who contribute to the good of their communities through providing exceptional social work services. The Social Workers within the department make a significant and positive impact on the lives of students, families, staff, and community that embodies the values that is represented in the code of and embody the values represented in social worker's code of ethics and standards for school social work practice.

Two awards will be given. 1. For districts with fewer than 19 in the social work department. 2. For districts with more than 19 in the social work department.

A representative from the social work department will submit a PowerPoint presentation of no more than 10 slides highlighting one area per slide. The areas of school social work practice that should be included are

1. Attendance Support
2. Coordination and Delivery of Resources and Wrap Around Services
3. Crisis Response and Intervention
4. Mental Health and/or Behavior Support
5. Community Outreach
6. Student (individual and group) and Family Engagement
7. Vulnerable Population Support (Foster Care, Unhoused, Migrant Families, etc)
8. Professional Development of department, school staff, and interns.

Districts with less than 19

- Districts must have a social worker(s) who is a current member of SSWAG and have one year of previous membership prior to submitting the application **(January 15th)**

Districts with more than 19

- Districts must have at least 3 social worker(s) who have current membership in SSWAG prior to submitting the application (**January 15th)** and must have been a SSWAG member for 3 years including current year.

Award: 250 dollars per winning district and feature on SSWAG website.



Social Work Pioneer Award

Award Description: The Social Work Pioneer Award is a prestigious honor presented to a school social worker who has made significant, lasting contributions to the field of social work, specifically within K-12 education and youth development. This award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated excellence in practice, advocacy, leadership, or research, and whose efforts have created a profound and lasting impact on the field of school social work. The Social Work Pioneer Award celebrates those who have advanced the practice of school social work and influenced positive change for students, educators, and school communities.
Given the high standards of this award, it is not necessarily awarded every year. Nominees may be selected by the executive board (voting and non-voting members) or chosen by the current president. The nomination application must be received by **January 1**.

Award Criteria: Nominees for the Social Work Pioneer Award must meet the following criteria:

1. **Innovation and Excellence in Practice**
    - Demonstrates outstanding practice and leadership in school social work.
    - Implements innovative, evidence-based interventions or programs that significantly improve student well-being, mental health, or educational outcomes.
    - Contributes to new approaches or frameworks addressing emerging challenges in schools, such as trauma-informed care, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning.
2. **Advocacy for Students and School Communities**
    - Actively advocates for the needs of marginalized, underserved, or vulnerable student populations.
    - Engages in efforts to improve school or district policies that enhance student mental health, safety, and well-being.
    - Influences systemic change through collaboration with educators, administrators, families, and community organizations.
3. **Leadership and Mentorship**
    - Provides leadership in advancing the role of school social workers and supports the professional development of others in the field.
    - Contributes to the growth and recognition of school social work at local, state, or national levels.
    - Develops and promotes professional standards, training programs, or advocacy efforts that strengthen the school social work profession.
4. **Research and Contributions to Knowledge**
    - Contributes to the field of school social work through research, publications, or presentations that shape the understanding of the practice.
    - Engages in research activities that influence practice or policy, advancing evidence-based strategies in school settings.
5. **Long-Term Impact and Legacy**
    - Demonstrates measurable, long-lasting impact on students, school communities, or the field of school social work.
    - Creates a lasting foundation for future generations of school social workers, ensuring continued improvements in student support services and school climate.
    - Exhibits sustained commitment to advancing social work within the school environment over a significant period.
6. **Commitment to Social Justice and Equity**
    - Champions social justice, inclusion, and equity within school environments.
    - Works to reduce disparities in resources and services, particularly for marginalized student populations (e.g., racial minorities, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities).
    - Advocates for policies and practices that promote an inclusive, supportive, and safe learning environment for all students.
7. **Professional Integrity and Ethical Practice**
    - Upholds the highest standards of professional ethics and integrity in all areas of their work.
    - Demonstrates a commitment to the NASW Code of Ethics and social work values, including social justice, dignity, and the importance of human relationships.

Nomination Process: To nominate a candidate for the Social Work Pioneer Award, the following materials must be submitted by January 1:

- **Completed Application**: Submit a completed nomination form detailing the nominee's qualifications and contributions to school social work.
- **Written Documentation**: Provide written documentation (not exceeding 5 pages) that outlines the nominee's achievements and impact, with specific examples related to the award criteria. This should include detailed descriptions of the nominee's contributions, with supporting evidence such as letters of recommendation, program descriptions, or policy changes.
- **Visual and Biographical Information**: Include at least one photograph of the nominee, as well as a brief biography (no more than 100 words). Additional images are encouraged to showcase the nominee's work and influence.
- Nominees should demonstrate a proven history of contributions to school social work that aligns with the award criteria.

Deadline: January 1



School Social Worker of the Year Award

Nomination Process:

Each District President is responsible for selecting their district's School Social Worker of the Year (SSWOY) to represent them in the statewide SSWOTY recognition program. The district winner's nomination packet must be completed and emailed by midnight on **January 1st.**

Eligibility Requirements:

School Social Workers are recognized annually as School Social Worker of the Year (SSWOTY) in their districts. District members are recognized for this outstanding achievement because of their leadership at district and state levels,political and legislative engagement, commitment to the Code of Ethics and their contributions to the School Social Work profession. **The candidate for consideration of this award must be performing the duties and responsibilities of a School Social Worker in a district.** The winner of each district will go on to compete at the Statelevel where one will be recognized as the State School Social Worker of the Year.

1. Membership: Nominees must have current membership in SSWAG, Inc. as of December 1st. Include one copy of each state and district membership payment receipt with the application. Membership runs from July 1st – June 30th, and nominees must have been a member for at least one year plus the current year.

2. Experience: A minimum of 5 years of experience as a School Social Worker is required, including the current year.

Nomination Packet Guidelines:

1. Application Form: Complete the SSWOTY application following the provided guidelines.

2. Membership Receipts: Include one copy of paid membership receipts for both District and State dues.

3. Formatting: Submit the SSWOTY supporting document should be in Word format, using Times New Roman, 12pt font, and ½ inch margins. The packet must not exceed 15 pages, including the SSWAG 2-page application and up to 3 letters of support/recommendation. **Additional letters or pages will lead to automatic disqualification.**

4. Biographical Summary: Provide a brief biographical summary (1 page) to be read at the conference and included in SSWAG's newsletter. This summary will not be scored.

5. Head Shot and Conference Bio: Submit one head shot and a brief (75 words or less) bio for the awards banquet program. This bio is separate from the biographical summary.

6. Submission: Email the completed SSWOTY packet as follows:

- 1st Attachment: Application
- 2nd Attachment: Letters of recommendation
- 3rd Attachment: Membership receipts
- 4th Attachment with the biographical summary
- 5th Attachment with the state dues receipt
- 6th Attachment Headshot
- 7th Conference Brief Bio (maximum 75 words)

Deadline:
Email SSWOTY packet including all attachments to AwardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com by midnight on **January 1st.**

School Social Worker of the Year Award

Nominee Verification Form

This form should be completed by the SSWAG District President or other SSWAG District President's Designee.

Your Name:

Your Position:

Your Email:

District Number:

School Social Worker of the Year District Nominee Name:

School Social Worker of the Year District Nominee Email:

School Social Worker of the Year District Nominee Phone Number:

Date that School Social Worker of the Year District was selected:

Please verify the following information.

- ☐ School Social Worker of the Year District Nominee was provided the SSWOTY Application Packet

_____ is being nominated for the **School Social Worker of the Year Award.**

Email completed nomination form(s) to **AwardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com** with applicant's name and "District # School Social Work of the Year" written in the subject line. All nominations must be emailed, and time stamped no later than 11:59pm on **January 1st**. Submissions received after December 1st will not be accepted.

This is a:

○ **NOMINATION**

Nominee's Name:

Nominee's email address:

Nominee's place of employment:

Years you have known the nominee:

In what capacity do you know the nominee?

Nominating Person(s) must include a one-page double spaced describing the person and a brief explanation of why you believe your nominee is deserving of the **"School Social Worker of the Year Award".**

Contact Information:
For any questions, contact Rasha Portis at 678-610-4331/Laura Etheridge 470-621-8902 or via email at AwardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com. Confirmation receipts will be sent by the SSWOTY Chair upon receipt of the application

School Social Workers Association of Georgia Retiree Award

The School Social Workers Association of Georgia (SSWAG) is thrilled to honor the retirements of our esteemed school social worker members. In celebration of their exceptional contributions, we are proud to announce the SSWAG Retiree Award. This award recognizes individuals who have dedicated many years to the field of School Social Work, have been active members of SSWAG, and are retiring under the State Board of Education retirement guidelines.

To be eligible for the SSWAG Retiree Award, candidates must meet the following criteria:

1. They must have been a member of SSWAG at the state level before the Annual Spring Conference in the year of retirement.

2. They need to have maintained state-level membership with SSWAG for at least five cumulative years, including the year of retirement.

The five-year membership duration will be verified by the Membership Chairperson to ensure accuracy.

We are eager to celebrate the achievements and dedication of our retiring members and look forward to recognizing their invaluable service to the profession.

The following information is needed to successfully acknowledge the recipient.

- Name of Retire:
- Personal email:
- Professional email:
- Phone number:
- SSWAG District:
- Current School District
- Retirement Date:
- Years of Service:
- Picture/Headshot:
- Brief Bio for Conference Program (up to 200 words)

If you have any questions, please call Rasha Portis at 678-610-4331 or AwardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com.

****Application Deadline: Midnight of February 1st. A google document will be sent to all Presidents in December. Those who need an alternative application form, please email Rasha Portis at AwardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com and submit the application via a Word document, 12 pt. font with 1/2-inch margins and email necessary attachments.**



Honorary Membership Recognition

School Social Workers Association of Georgia

Honorary Membership in the School Social Workers Association of Georgia (SSWAG) is a distinguished recognition bestowed upon individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the field of school social work or to SSWAG itself. The process for awarding Honorary Membership begins with nominations submitted to the Executive Board. These nominations are carefully reviewed and voted upon by the Board before the Winter Board meeting to ensure that only those with exceptional service and dedication are honored.

Once an individual is selected, they receive free lifetime membership in SSWAG. This lifetime membership is a mark of our appreciation and acknowledgment of their outstanding contributions, allowing them to remain connected to SSWAG and its community indefinitely, without the need for annual dues.

The formal recognition of Honorary Members takes place at the Annual Spring Conference or during the Annual Spring Awards Banquet. These events serve as a platform to celebrate and honor the achievements of the awardees, providing an opportunity for the entire SSWAG community to express gratitude and admiration. This recognition not only honors the individuals' past contributions but also highlights the impact they have had on the profession and the organization.

By bestowing Honorary Membership, SSWAG demonstrates its commitment to valuing the dedication and service of individuals who have significantly advanced the goals and mission of the association.

The following information is needed to successfully acknowledge the recipient.

- Name of Nominee:
- Personal email:
- Professional email:
- Phone number:
- Picture/Headshot:
- Brief Bio for Conference Program (up to 200 words)

To be considered for this award, the following application materials are required:

1. Completed Application: Submit a completed application form detailing the nominee's qualifications and contributions.

2. Written Documentation: Provide written documentation (not exceeding 3 pages) that outlines the nominee’s achievements and impact in relation to the award criteria. This should include specific examples why the nominee is deserving of the award.



School Social Work Association of Georgia (SSWAG)

Awards Nomination Application Form

Thank you for taking the time to recognize excellence in and the impact of school social work. This application form may be used to nominate an individual or department for **one or more** of the following awards:

- **Elsie Nesbit Trailblazer Award**
- **Friend of Children Award**
- **Champion of Social Work Award**
- **Community Impact Award**
- **Social Work Pioneer Award**
- **Honorary Membership Award**

Please refer to the **SSWAG Awards Catalog** and **Procedural Guidelines** for detailed criteria and eligibility for each award. Please note that School Social Worker of the Year has a separate application Form which can be found in the awards catalog.

Nominator Information

Your Full Name:
Your Email Address:

What is your relationship to the nominee? (Check one)
☐ District President or District Designee
☐ Co-worker
☐ Friend
☐ Family Member
☐ School District Representative
☐ Other (please specify): _____

Award Nomination Information

Please select the ONE award you are nominating this individual for:
(Submit a separate application for each additional award.)

☐ Elsie Nesbit Trailblazer Award
☐ Friend of Children Award
☐ School Social Worker of the Year
☐ Champion of Social Work Award
☐ Community Impact Award
☐ Social Work Pioneer Award
☐ Retiree Recognition Award
☐ Honorary Membership Award

Nominee's Full Name:
Nominee's School District (if applicable):

For Community Impact Award
Department Name:
District or Department Representative Name:

Nominee or Department Representative Email:
Nominee or Department Representative Phone Number:

Is the nominee aware of this nomination?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Nominee Qualification Attestation

By submitting this application, I attest that I have reviewed the eligibility criteria outlined in the **SSWAG Awards Catalog** and **Procedural Guidelines**, and that to the best of my knowledge, the nominee meets all the required qualifications. **Your Initials:** _____

Required Submission Materials

To complete this nomination, the following materials must be submitted **in a single email submission**:

1. **Nomination Statement**
   - A written narrative describing why the nominee is deserving of the selected award.
   - Maximum **5 pages** (Word document, 12 pt. font, 0.5-inch margins).
   - Be specific and include examples that align with the **criteria outlined for the selected award**.
2. **Brief Biography (100 words or less)**
   - This may be used in newsletters, awards programs, and conference announcements.
3. **At Least One Photo of the Nominee**
   - Additional photos are welcome and may be used for presentation purposes.
4. **Any Additional Documentation or Artifacts**
   - As **required or recommended in the specific award description** found in the **SSWAG Awards Catalog** and **Procedural Guidelines** (e.g., letters of support, resumes, work samples, etc.).
   - It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure all applicable documentation is included.

Note: Incomplete submissions may not be considered.

Submission Instructions

All nomination materials must be submitted **by email** no later than **midnight on the deadline indicated in the Awards Guidelines**.

Email all materials in one message to:
✉ **awardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com**

For questions, please contact:
Rasha Portis – rasha.portis@clayton.k12.ga.us or 404-780-8506/ Laura Etheridge – laura.etheridge@barrow.k12.ga.us or 470-621-8902

Thank you for helping us honor and recognize social workers who are making a lasting impact in education across Georgia!

Honorary Membership Nominee Form

This form should be completed by the SSWAG District President or other SSWAG District President's Designee.

Your Name:

Your Position:

Your Email:

District Number:

Honorary Membership Nominee Name:

Honorary Membership Nominee Email:

Honorary Membership Nominee Phone Number:

Please verify the following information.

- ☐ Honorary Membership Nominee application was submitted on this date:

Email completed nomination form(s) to **AwardsChair4SSWAG@gmail.com** with applicant's name and "Honorary Members" written in the subject line. All nominations must be emailed, and time stamped no later than 11:59pm on **November 30th**. Submissions received after November 30th, will not be accepted.

This is a:

○ **NOMINATION**

Nominee's Name:

Nominee's email address:

Nominee's place of employment:

Years you have known the nominee:

In what capacity do you know the nominee?

Nominating Person(s) must include a up to three pages double spaced describing the person and a brief explanation of why you believe your nominee is deserving of honorary lifetime membership.