



Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly  
and Creative Works for Minnesota  
State University, Mankato

---

All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other  
Capstone Projects

Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other  
Capstone Projects

---

2011

## Evaluation of School Social Workers' Time Spent in Direct and Indirect Practices

Kris Brummund  
*Minnesota State University Mankato*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>



Part of the [School Psychology Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brummund, K. (2011). Evaluation of School Social Workers' Time Spent in Direct and Indirect Practices [Master's capstone project, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/525/>

This Other Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.



# Evaluation of School Social Workers' Time Spent in Direct and Indirect Practices

Kris Brummund  
Department of Social Work  
Minnesota State University, Mankato



**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to explore District 77 school social workers' time distribution of direct and indirect services. Time spent in these services for school social workers is not well researched or documented.

## Literature Review:

School social workers' roles include a diversity of indirect and direct services such as (but not limited to) attending meetings, intervening on crisis, counseling individuals and groups, participating in multidisciplinary teams, advocating for policy change, consulting with parents, teachers, and/or administrators, collaborating with community agencies, and connecting families with resources.

Garrett & Barretta-Herman (1995) found that only 10% of school social workers had an accurate job description. Having a poorly defined job description leaves school social workers vulnerable to imprecise standards and expectations. Research suggests keeping records of daily activities and reporting this information monthly to administration can help document indirect and direct service time and help demonstrate if this is meeting the program goals (Leyba, 2009; Franklin, 2000; Garrett, 2006; Staudt & Craft, 1992). These reports also support the social worker when giving suggestions to administration about necessary changes in social worker roles or programming (Leyba, 2009; Staudt & Craft, 1992).

Mary Richmond is credited with the first conceptualization of casework and identified direct social work as "direct action of the mind upon mind" and indirect as "indirect action through the social environment" (Johnson, 1999). Many other definitions of direct and indirect practices have emerged since. The social work dictionary (Barker, 1999) defines direct practice as "the term used by social workers to indicate their range of professional activities on behalf of clients in which goals are reached through personal contact and immediate influence with those seeking social services" (p.130) and indirect practice is defined as "those professional social work activities, such as administration, research, policy development, and education, that do not involve immediate or personal contact with clients being served. Indirect practice makes direct practice possible and more efficient" (p.238). Similarly, the encyclopedia of social work identifies direct practice as social work represented at the micro-level involving individuals, families, and groups (Corcoran, 2008).

Because so many indirect practices link the client to an avenue of change it becomes more difficult to distinguish indirect from direct practice unless indirect practices solely focuses management or administration. Research has argued that we should not view direct and indirect practices on a continuum but rather interconnected (Feit, 2003). It is important to remember no matter how direct or indirect work is defined, each is equally important and impacts the other. Unfortunately indirect work is often neglected and not recognized in research, administration, and by social workers themselves (Johnson, 1999; Leyba, 2009).

## Methodology:

A process evaluation was used to assess Mankato District 77 school social workers' time distribution of indirect and direct services. This was a convenience sample of two school social workers employed at District 77 Mankato Public Schools. Upon IRB approval, consent was given by both school social workers to participate in this study. They documented narratively in a daily service log how their time was being expended in a two week time period (May 2, 2011 through May 13, 2011). A total of 160.5 hours were logged between both social workers in 15 minute increments. It focused specifically on services provided by the school social workers such as time spent conducting groups, phone calls, consultation, meetings, preparation, etc.

For the purpose of this study direct time is defined as face-to-face micro practice with individuals, families or groups in which goals are established. Indirect practice is defined as work that helps facilitate change of established direct practice goals, including but not limited to collaboration and consultation. This researcher grouped data according to emerging themes (or tasks) based on these established direct and indirect definitions. The amount of time spent in each task was entered and analyzed using SPSS (statistical software) and excel.

## Research Questions:

1. Where is direct time being spent for district 77 school social workers?
2. Where is indirect time being spent for district 77 school social workers?
3. Where is the majority of time spent for district 77 school social workers?

## Key Findings:

Work time was divided into 4 categories: indirect work, direct work, transition time (between buildings, home visits, etc.), and lunch. Indirect work consisted of 69 percent of social workers time, direct work 18 percent, transition 10 percent, and lunch 3 percent (see figure 1). When comparing direct and indirect work time, indirect tasks account for approximately 3.5 times more work than direct tasks (see figure 2). Direct and indirect services were also broken down into task categories. The breakdown of indirect tasks includes consultation (30%), emails/phone calls (28%), home visits (5%) paperwork (8%), preparation (4%), administrative meetings (8%), IEP or ASM (9%), filing/documentation (3%), and other (5%) (see figure 3). Direct tasks include individual time (29%) and group time (71%) (see figure 4).

According to the data analysis indirect time accounts for most of the school social workers' work time, followed by direct time. Among indirect work, consultation and returning emails and phone calls accounts for most of the task time, and group time was the highest direct task time. It should also be noted that 10% of social workers' time is spent transitioning between buildings or home visits. This time consists of approximately 16 hours of a social worker's time in a two week period.

Figure 1: Percentages of Work Time

Work Time	Percentage
Indirect Work	69%
Direct Work	18%
Transition	10%
Lunch	3%

Figure 2: Comparison of Direct and Indirect Time

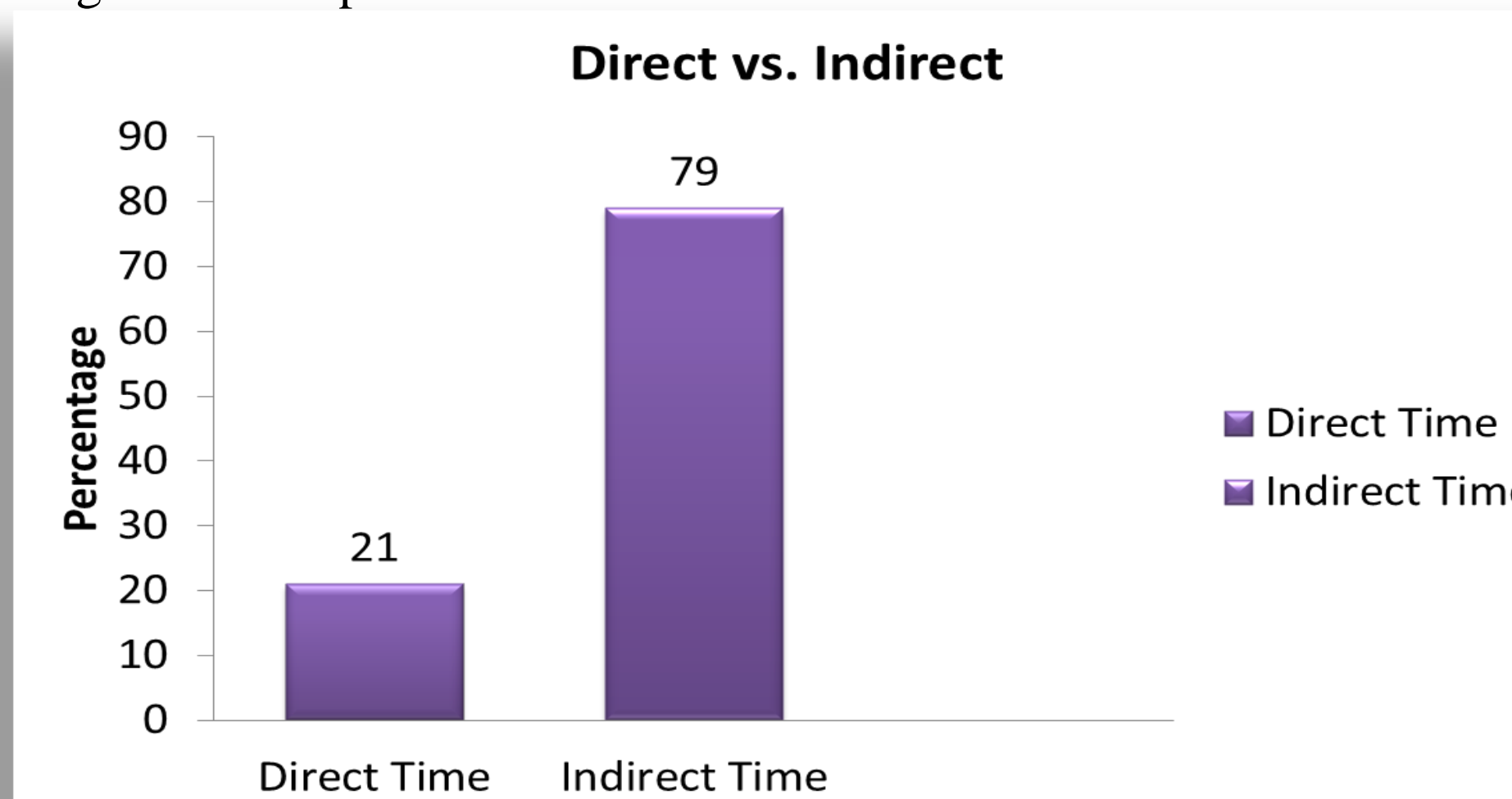


Figure 3: Breakdown of Indirect Tasks

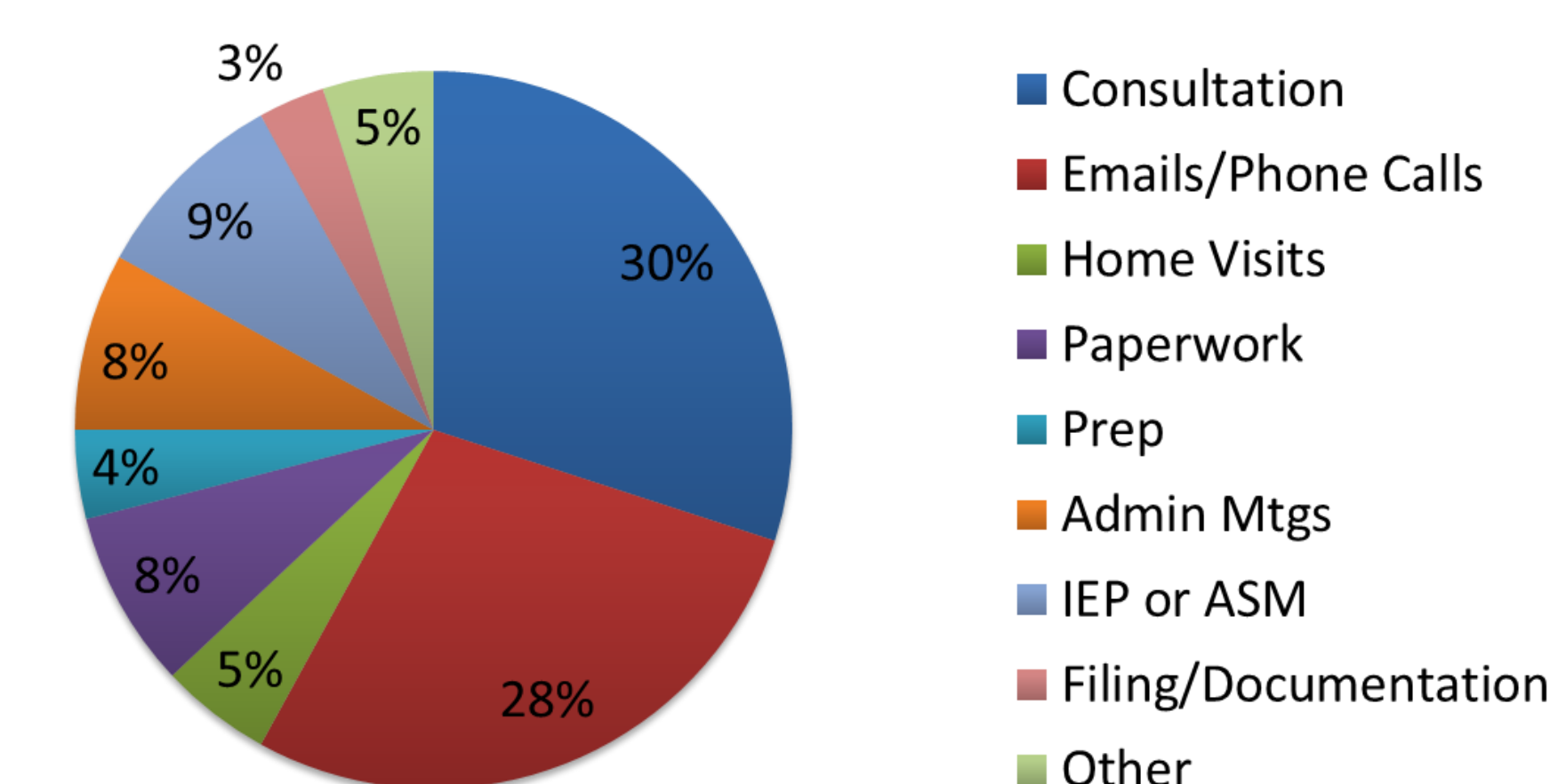
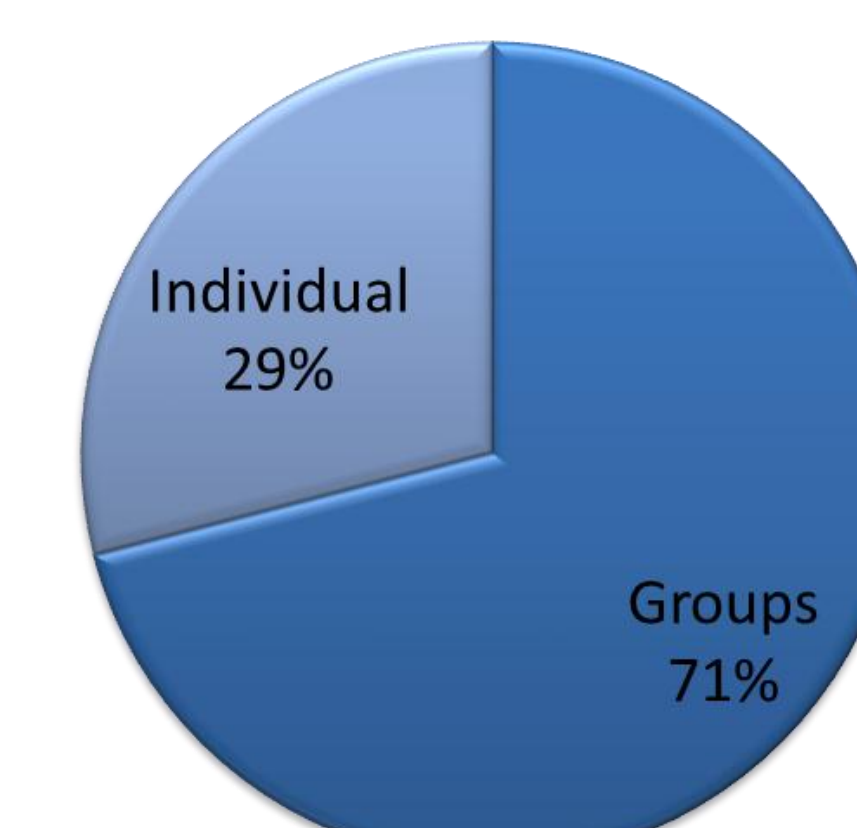


Figure 4: Breakdown of Direct Tasks



## Conclusion:

District 77 employs two school social workers for 11 buildings. This stretches the availability of time to offer indirect and direct services to all students within the district. Transition time between buildings also consumes 10% of school social workers' time, thus decreasing the amount of direct and indirect service time for each building. Often the two school social workers in district 77 skipped lunches in order to provide more services.

This research will help open the dialogue between school social workers and administration about programming needs and help determine if the services the school social workers engage in are meeting district goals. School social workers can also take this data and compare it with the job description set up by their district to determine if needs for the school, students, and community has changed. Based on the data from this research school social workers spend the vast majority of their time in indirect services. The need of indirect services will only continue to rise as families and communities struggle with economic changes and stress.

## Strengths & Limitations:

Although the process evaluation provides answers to the research questions, those answers are not representative of other school districts nor are they representative of the time distribution of services for a full school year. Ongoing evaluation will need to be conducted.

This utilized a very small convenience sample which does not allow generalizability of the data. However, because there were only two school social workers this allowed an easy implementation and quick results. This type of program evaluation would be easy for them to continue if they choose.

The quantitative data analysis does not show an accurate representation of all tasks conducted. Many tasks overlap such as consultation via telephone during transition and working lunches with drop in consultations, phone calls, and returning emails. It would be impossible for every single task to be accurately documented. Readers should be mindful that these tasks are not stopping and then moving onto the next tasks. More often than not, they are simultaneously occurring. The school social workers did not always have time to log their service time as it occurred because they were very busy, thus entering data retrospectively which limits the accuracy of the data.

Lastly, how direct and indirect practices are defined will impact the findings of this study. Because indirect and direct practice are often linked with each other, it can be difficult to separate which is occurring, especially in a profession in which brief encounters often occur. These brief encounters may be viewed by school social workers as direct practice time.

## References:

Available Upon Request