

Executive Summary

Findings of the NADD Payment for Placement (P4P) Workgroup *National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD)*

The National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD) established the Pay for Placement (P4P) Workgroup in 2024 in response to the growing national movement demanding compensation for social work students during their required field education. The student-led P4P movement, launched in 2022, has amplified longstanding concerns about affordability, equity, and sustainability in social work education. It reflects the convergence of rising educational costs, ongoing labor justice advocacy, and heightened awareness of systemic inequities revealed during the pandemic.

A Complex and Deeply Entrenched Issue

The question of how to compensate students for field work is highly complex, touching multiple stakeholders and systems. Universities and programs provide credit and academic oversight, while agencies—often under severe fiscal and workforce strain—carry responsibility for supervision and training. States seek to expand and diversify the social work workforce but face political and financial constraints. Students themselves often experience food insecurity, unstable housing, or heavy debt while managing demanding placement requirements. These intersecting realities underscore why compensation for placements has proven so difficult to achieve.

Purpose of the Workgroup

The Workgroup's charge was to study how programs and states are responding to the P4P movement and to identify emerging strategies, barriers, and policy opportunities. To do this, the group:

- Conducted a survey of NADD member programs, with 53 institutions responding.
- Gathered information about state and federal legislative efforts to fund placements
- Reviewed field education models in other professions.
- Engaged leaders including representatives from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to better understand national perspectives and advocacy directions.
- Facilitated discussions at the April 2025 NADD conference to solicit input from members and explore collaborative approaches.

Survey and Program Responses

Survey findings revealed that while 87% of responding programs support some form of student remuneration, only 29% report active or emerging P4P student chapters. Strategies range from encouraging agencies to provide stipends and expanding employment-based practicums to reducing practicum hours and seeking external workforce funding. Yet significant barriers remain, including agency resource limitations and legal ambiguity under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Legislative and Policy Responses

State legislatures are beginning to respond with a range of stipend and scholarship initiatives:

- California, Massachusetts, and Michigan have established active stipend programs tied to behavioral health and workforce development.

- Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas have introduced bills proposing stipends or grants for social work students.
- New Mexico appropriated \$10 million for scholarships and paid practicums across state and tribal institutions.
- Tennessee funded a Behavioral Health Pathways Scholarship to expand workforce pipelines.

At the federal level, programs such as Title IV-E child welfare stipends and the MSWs in Libraries Act represent targeted efforts to support social work students in specific practice areas. These examples illustrate a patchwork approach, reflecting both momentum and uneven progress across jurisdictions.

Innovations and Emerging Models

Innovative approaches are also being piloted at the program level. Loyola University Chicago reduced required credit hours to lower tuition costs, and Metropolitan State University Denver is testing an apprenticeship model that uses “braided funding” from state, federal, and employer sources to sustain compensated placements. Such experiments point to the need for structural creativity and policy alignment.

Recommendations

The Workgroup concludes that addressing Payment for Placement requires both short-term strategies and long-term structural change. We recommend:

1. Publishing this report to share findings and continue dialogue across the NADD membership.
2. Supporting local advocacy by connecting student organizers with resources and policy tools.
3. Encouraging partnerships with legislatures to pilot stipend programs and field education innovations.
4. Considering a permanent NADD task force on field education redesign, with sustained attention to compensation, equity, and workforce alignment.

Conclusion

The Payment for Placement issue is not a single problem with a single solution—it is a structural challenge deeply interwoven with how social work education, practice, and workforce development intersect. Programs, agencies, states, and students each bring vital but constrained perspectives. What is clear is that momentum is building at multiple levels, from student organizing to state legislation. Continued collaboration with national partners such as NASW and CSWE, along with collective action across NADD programs, will be critical to advancing equity, sustainability, and justice in field education.