

Social Worker of the Year
Lara Hulin

Lara Hulin, LCSW, has been a practicing social worker for 20 years. She has worked in various areas of social work, which include mental health, medical, non-profit, management, and public schools. Lara has been employed with the Houston Independent School District since 2003, and she has worked in both elementary and secondary levels. During that time, she found her life-long social work passion in the public school setting.

Lara quickly earns the trust and respect of her colleagues as well as the clients with whom she works. She fosters enthusiasm and has a positive effect on fellow staff and on the children and families. Lara is dedicated to serving others and actively works to improve existing services for those who are voiceless and vulnerable. Most students and families come to Lara with many unmet needs. Despite a multitude of obstacles, Ms. Hulin's commitment to helping all students overcome social, economic, and academic barriers allows each student to reach his or her full potential. She provides support and counseling, community referrals, programming, advocacy, and consultation.

In 2006, Ms. Hulin was selected out of approximately 29,000 district employees as Houston ISD's Employee of the Month. The Board of Trustees and the superintendent at one of the district's monthly Board meetings recognized her. In 2007, Lara was selected as the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Houston School-Based Liaison of the Year. This was due, in part, to her "take charge" personality, when she saw that many of her students could benefit from "having an extra caring adult in their lives." Lara brought the recognized nationwide mentoring program to schools, partnering high schools and elementary schools.

Lara is deeply committed to advocating for the profession of social work. She has specifically worked to enhance the recognition of the position of school social workers so that Texas' public school children can have more helping professionals in schools. Ms. Hulin helped to develop a non-profit organization to advance the progression of school-based social work. For many years, Lara has been advocating with state legislators to include social workers in the Texas Education Code. This effort has resulted in a bill (HB233) that she will continue to advocate for during the next session. Passage of this bill would ultimately impact both urban and rural public school districts. To date, Lara has been the primary advocate willing to carry this torch on behalf of her colleagues statewide.

Lara's journey of leadership and advocacy for school social work was unintentional. Rather, she accepted this role because she is genuinely passionate about the profession and helping children and families. Lara has brought together school social workers and encouraged them to work as a cohesive and effective group. Through her leadership in coordinating these efforts, she is leading the profession of school social work into a more advanced and respected place.

Through her years of work, Lara has improved the quality and accessibility of services to the community and to social work professionals. She exemplifies the best of social work values and its mission as she practices her school social work position in the public schools and her service-based leadership on a local, state, and national level.