

# Supporting Student Mental Health in Minnesota Schools

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# Background and Objective



- **Minnesota youth are experiencing rising mental health challenges**
  - Increases in depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation
- **Many do not receive appropriate mental health support**
- **Schools are the most common point of access for mental health services**

# Research Questions



**Overarching question:** How are Minnesota's school mental health systems (SMH) meeting students' needs and where do critical gaps remain?

**Phase 1:** Using existing data, what is the current state of student mental health outcomes and family / community / school determinants (influences) in Minnesota?

**Phase 2:** Gathering new (focus group and survey) data, how can we improve the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of systems supporting student mental health in Minnesota schools?

# Phase 1: Analysis of Existing Data



- **Descriptive and correlational analysis of existing public educational records and survey data:**
  - Minnesota Student Survey,
  - Minnesota Principals Survey,
  - Minnesota Safe Learning Survey,
  - Staff Automated Reporting (STAR) database, and
  - MDE Data reports and Analytics
- **Findings are reported at the state level and compared across the Economic Development Regions (EDRs)**

## **Finding 1:**

Mental health needs among youth are rising; and are outpacing identification and support systems.

## **Finding 1:** Rising Mental Health Needs

The percentage of students who reported:

- Any **long-term mental health problems increased**

**23% in 2018-19 → 29% in 2021-22**

- Being **challenged by negative emotions increased**

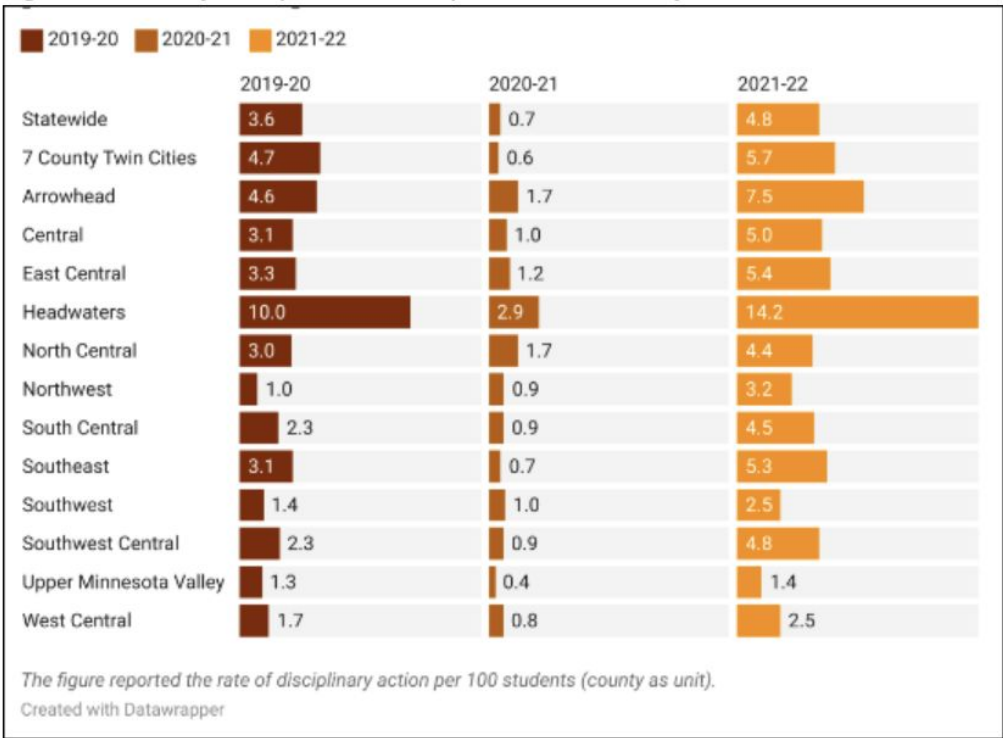
**36% in 2018-19 → 44% in 2021-22**

# Finding 1: Rising Mental Health Needs

## School Disciplinary Actions

- The statewide rate of school disciplinary actions increased from 3.6 to 4.8 per 100 students.
- Same patterns were observed across all Economic Development Regions (EDRs).
- The decline in 2020–21 was likely attributable to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 5. Rate of Discipline Actions per 100 Students from 2019-20 to 2021-22

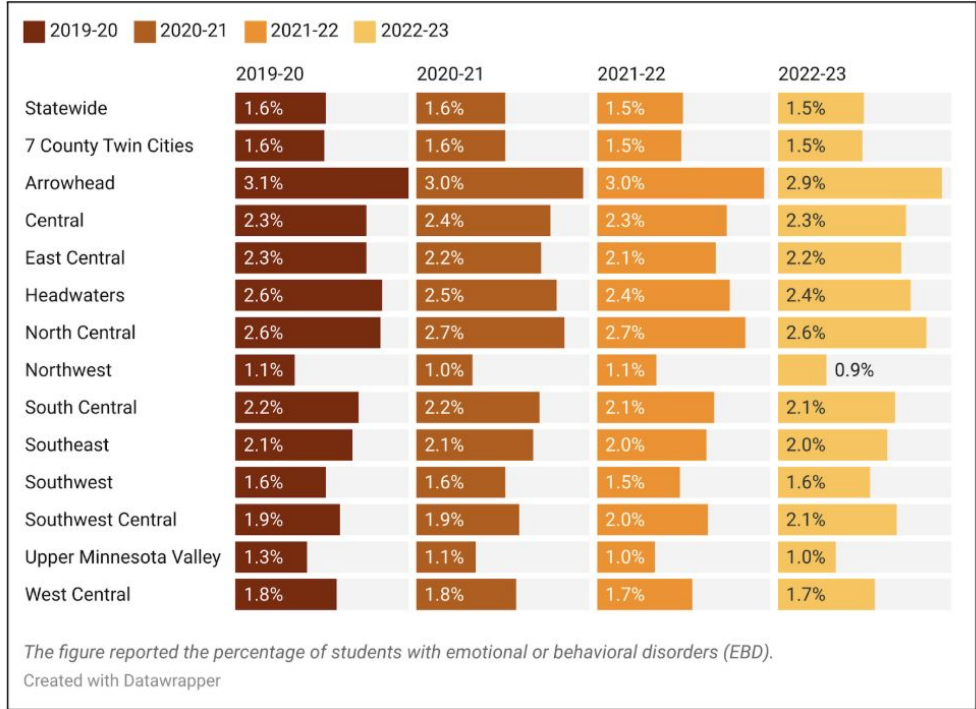


# Finding 1: Rising Mental Health Needs

## Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD) Rates

- 0.1% decline from 2019-2022 in the percentage of students identified with EBD.**
- Same patterns were observed across most of Economic Development Regions (EDRs).

Figure 6. Percentage of Students Identified with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) from 2019-20 to 2022-23



## **Finding 2:**

School Mental Health Support Staffing is  
Insufficient to Meet Rising Student Needs.

## Finding 2: Insufficient School Mental Health Support Staffing to Meet Rising Student Needs

| Recommended Ratio and Year                    | All School Mental Health Staff | Guidance and Counseling Staff | School Psychologist        | School Social Worker       | School Nurse             |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Recommended Ratio (Professional Associations) | N/A                            | 250:1 (ASCA <sup>6</sup> )    | 500:1 (NASP <sup>7</sup> ) | 250:1 (NASW <sup>8</sup> ) | N/A (NASN <sup>9</sup> ) |
| 2019-20                                       | 221:1                          | 626:1                         | 1156:1                     | 687:1                      | 1450:1                   |
| 2020-21                                       | 208:1                          | 587:1                         | 1119:1                     | 649:1                      | 1361:1                   |
| 2021-22                                       | 205:1                          | 566:1                         | 1128:1                     | 637:1                      | 1371:1                   |
| 2022-23                                       | 195:1                          | 539:1                         | 1060:1                     | 607:1                      | 1370:1                   |

*Note.* The ratios were calculated by using the full-time equivalence (FTE) staff instead of raw head count.

## **Finding 3:**

Mixed Student Perceptions of Support and Safety in Community and School Environments.

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### **Family and Community Support**

From 2018-19 to 2021-22, the % of students **feeling cared by:**

- **Other adult relatives (>90%) and friends (>92%)**  
**decreased by less than 1%;**
- **Parents (>95%) and adults in their community (>63%)**  
**decreased by 2-5%.**

*\*Referring to a combination of "Some", "Quite a Bit", and "A lot" three responses categories.*

## **Finding 3:** Mixed Student Perceptions of Support and Safety in School and Community Environments



### **Family and Community Safety**

From 2018-19 to 2021-22, the % of student **felt safe:**

- **Going to and from school** (95%),  
**decreased by <1%.**
- **In the neighborhood** (96%) or **at home** (97%),  
**increased by < 1%.**

*\*Referring to a combination of "Agree", "Strongly Agree" two responses categories.*

## **Finding 3:** Mixed Student Perceptions of Support and Safety in School and Community Environments



### **School Support**

From 2018-19 to 2021-22, the % of student agreed:

- **Adults at school listen to students** (73%),  
**teachers care about students** (87%),  
**changed by <1%.**
- **Most teachers at their school are interested in them as a person** (>60%), **decreased by 2%.**

*\*Referring to a combination of "Agree", "Strongly Agree" two responses categories.*

## **Finding 3:** Mixed Student Perceptions of Support and Safety in School and Community Environments



### **School Safety**

From 2018-19 to 2021-22,

- **Most students (>87%) feeling safe at school, decreased by 3%.**
- **Students (>73%) feeling adults at their school treat students fairly, increased by 3%.**
- **Students (70%) feeling the school rules are fair, decreased by 6%.**

*\*Referring to a combination of "Agree", "Strongly Agree" two responses categories.*

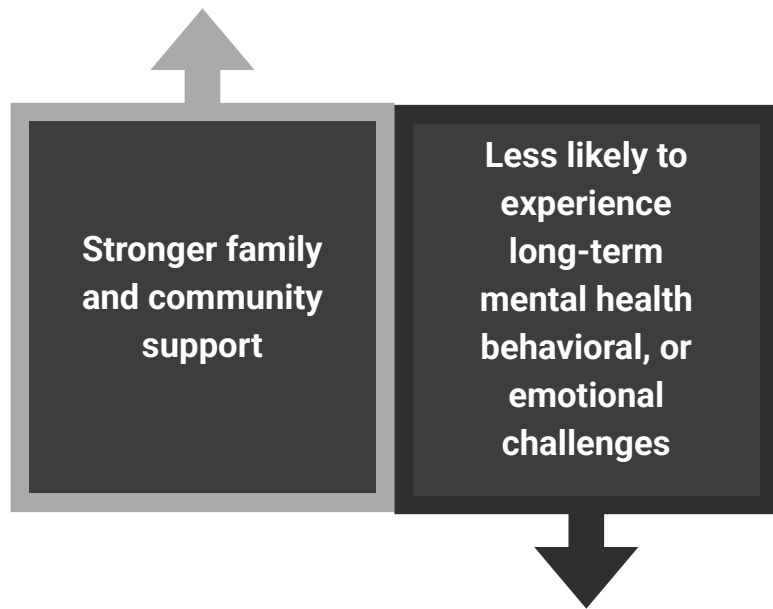
## **Finding 4:**

Stronger Family and Community Support and Safety Is Associated with Better Mental Health Outcomes.

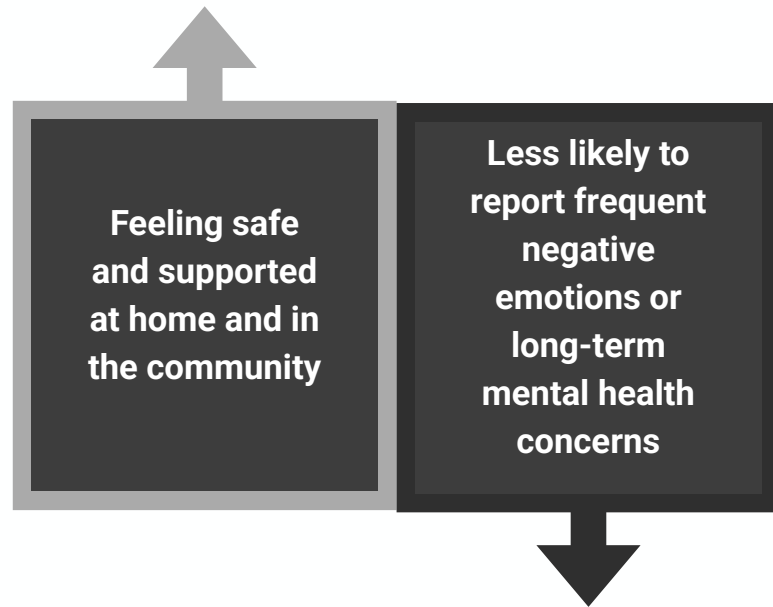
## **Finding 4:** Stronger Family and Community Support and Safety Is Associated with Better Mental Health Outcomes



Correlation and regression analyses showed that...



and



## **Finding 5:**

Gaps in School and District Capacity to Address Rising Mental Health Needs

## **Finding 5:** Gaps in School and District Capacity to Address Mental Health Needs



- In 2023, **98%** of principals' perceived students mental health challenge is a main barrier to their learning
- From 2021 to 2023, principals' confidence in addressing student mental health challenges **decreased by 14%** (60% to 46%).
- In 2023, just **45%** of principals agreed that their school or district is able to provide adequate support for students experiencing mental health challenges

## Recommendation 1.

- Districts should universally adopt a **comprehensive school mental health framework** at all educational levels
- Two useful frameworks:
  - [School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System \(SHAPE\)](#)
  - [Interconnected Systems Framework \(ISF\)](#)

## Recommendation 2.

- Districts should implement **systematic data collection and data-based decision making** processes
  - Use evidence-based social-emotional behavior screeners that incorporate student voice
  - Disaggregate data by demographics
  - Review data with both behavioral and academic indicators systematically and regularly

## Recommendation 3.

- Districts should continue **collaborating with community-based mental health providers**
  - Community-based services supplement the supports students are receiving at school
  - Collaboration across school and community mental health providers is key

## Recommendation 4.

- The state and districts should **invest in mental health promotion** activities.
  - Mandatory mental health education;
  - Social-emotional learning (SEL);
  - Restorative justice;
  - School climate initiatives;
  - Relational strategies (e.g., consistent teacher greetings, constructive feedback, and class meetings that foster belonging and emotional safety).

## Recommendation 5.

- The state and districts should work to **hire and retain SMH staff**. Including:
  - **School support personnel**, who hold expertise in prevention and early intervention strategies
  - **School-linked mental health providers** who can provide direct services to students identified as needing ongoing, individualized therapy.

## Recommendation 6.

- The state should support districts in coordinating **wraparound services supporting students' basic needs**:
  - E.g., housing, food, and financial stability

## Recommendation 7.

- The **state should adopt policies and provide funding** that support these needs and models.
- **Leadership and technical assistance should support** policies, funding, and SMH models to ensure fidelity and sustainability.

*More detailed information about recommended state policies and funding strategies are available at: <http://z.umn.edu/supporting-smh-systems-mn>*

# What's next?



**In Phase 2, we are developing a statewide survey to fill the gaps that remain.**

- **Right now:** Focus groups with policymakers, advocates, parents, caregivers, students, educators, and school mental health providers
- Pilot survey in Winter 2026
- Statewide survey in Spring 2026

**Are you interested in participating?**

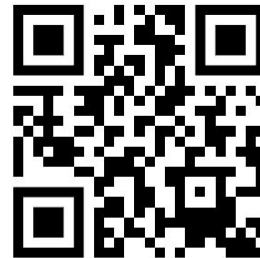
Questions?

Want more  
information?

Link to comprehensive report and regional reports:  
[z.umn.edu/supporting-smh-systems-mn](https://z.umn.edu/supporting-smh-systems-mn)



Link to provide feedback and express interest in  
participating: [z.umn.edu/SMH-MN](https://z.umn.edu/SMH-MN)



# Theoretical Framework

