

# Bridging the Gap: School Based Mental Health and Student Outcomes

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## Background

From the Children's Hospital Colorado Website:

After the COVID-19 Pandemic, youth anxiety and depression rates have **doubled**.

- School based mental health systems have become a **critical point of access** for youth experiencing mental health issues.
- Schools can **recognize early or current symptoms**, as they manage students for most of their day.

Student outcomes can be **proximal** or **distal**, across skills, behaviors, and attitudes, all measured and observed on an individual scale.

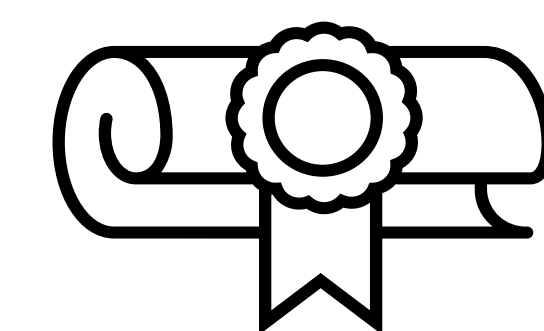
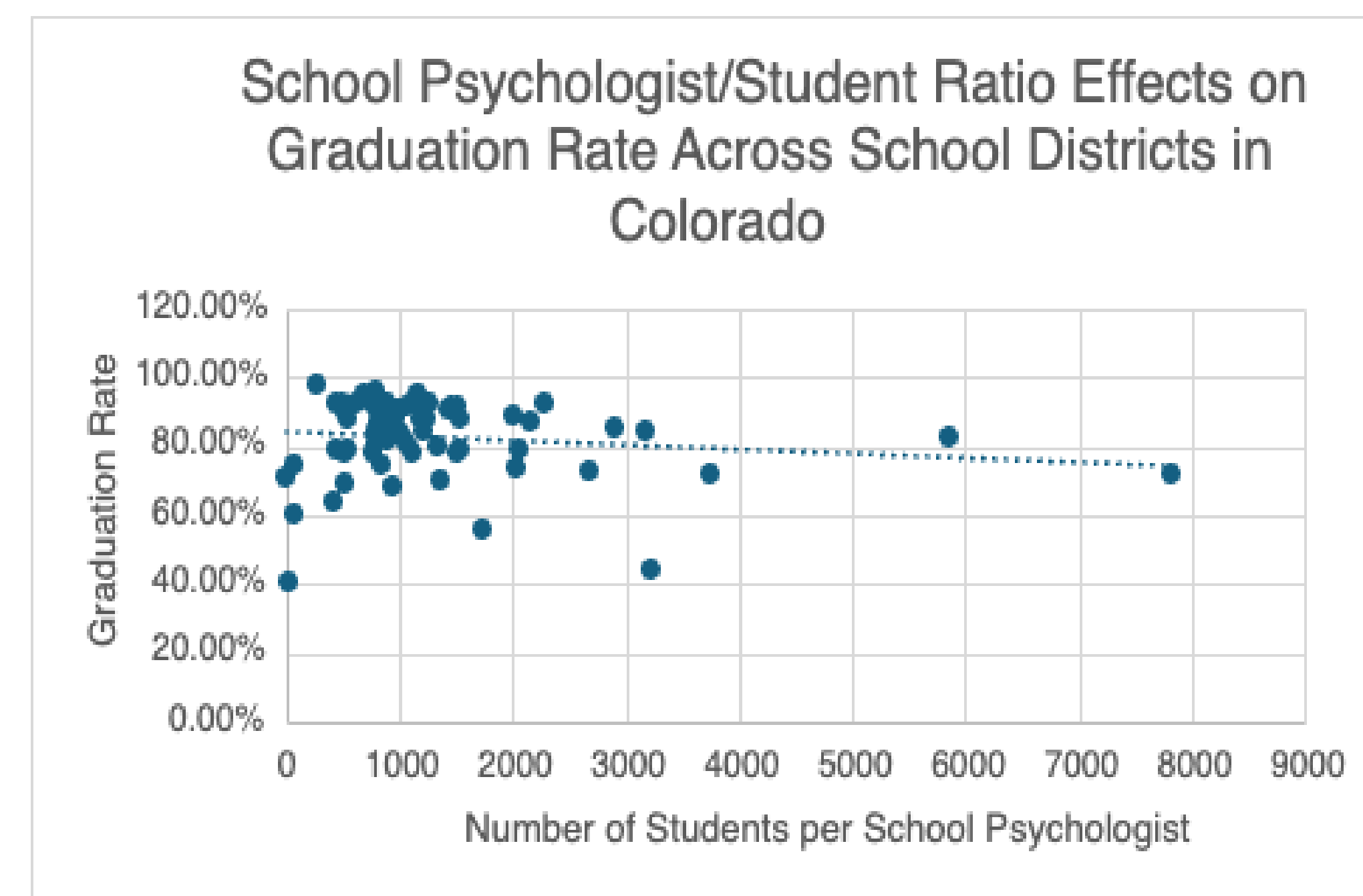
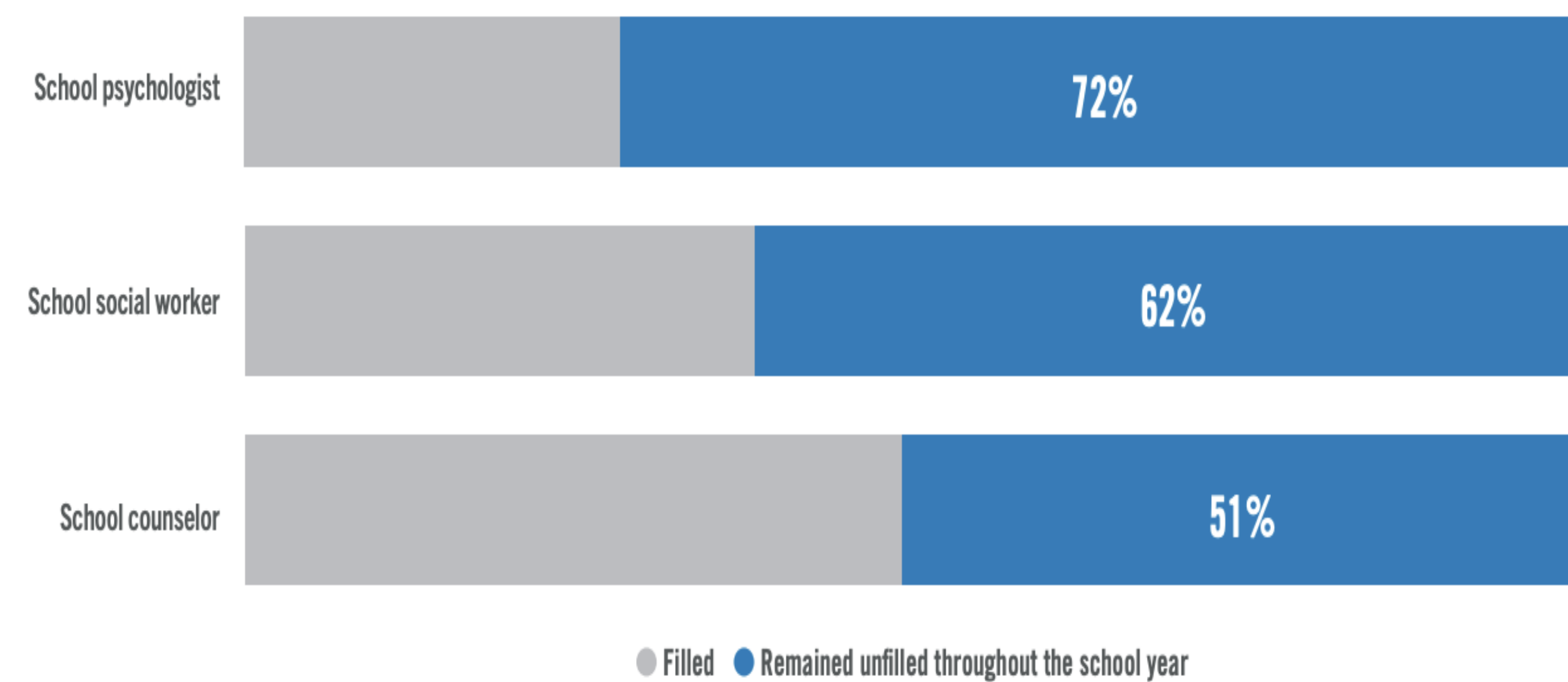
For example:

- proximal behavior would include **observations** of a student doing an instructed task.
- a distal skill would include course grades, or **performance** on broad, standardized tasks.

### Project Aim:

**To investigate the barriers of implementing school based mental health systems and its effect on youth by analyzing student outcomes.**

PERCENT OF POSITION OPENINGS AT BEGINNING OF 2022-23 SCHOOL YEAR THAT REMAINED UNFILLED BY THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR



**If school psychologists are too difficult to administer, what other initiatives are available?**

## Methods- Survey

Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) 2023:

- 26%** of youth reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year (**decrease** from 40% in 2021).
- 11%** of youth seriously considered suicide in the past year (**decrease** from 17% in 2021).
- 19%** of youth could fire a loaded gun without adult permission in less than an hour.

## Methods- Literature Review

- Children with externalizing symptoms in elementary school tend to have worse outcomes in life. The internalizing symptoms only **increased into adulthood**.
- Academic **improvement** in students has been linked to services that **support social emotional functioning**, whether that be prevention or therapy.
- Students who excel in social and behavioral areas targeted by SEL programs scored **higher** on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) than students with high levels of substance use, attention problems, depression, and antisocial behavior.

## Methods- Legislation

### Greenlights Grant Initiative

- Navigation and resource point for school safety grant processes.
- Ensures equitable federal funding.
- Raises awareness of school safety.



### TCHAT Program (Texas)

- Delivers free telemedicine for students to identify and assess mental health needs.
- Provides access to mental health services.
- Allows students into care instead of waiting months to access a service provider.
- Addresses stigma around mental health.

### Wellness Checks In School Programs Act (Illinois)

- Implements wellness checks to identify students grades 7-12, including school districts with high percentage of Medicaid and referrals by **school counselors**.
- Establishes a referral process for immediate intervention for students identified as having a behavioral health issue that requires intervention.

### Bipartisan Safer Communities Act

- BSCA emphasizes proactive crime prevention strategies, community engagement, and partnerships between law enforcement agencies and local organizations.
- Provides resources and support to strengthen law enforcement capabilities.
- Highlights the importance of accessible mental health and substance abuse treatment to address underlying issues contributing to criminal behavior.

## COLORADO

### Children's System of Care

- Serves as the single point of access to address the behavioral health needs of children and youth in Colorado, regardless of payer, insurance, and income.

### I Matter

- Colorado House Bill 21-1258: Provides access to mental health and substance use disorder services for youth.
- Addresses needs that may have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Medicaid Disenrollment Crisis

- Flaws in connecting patients with insurance despite qualification leaves providers uncompensated and patients without necessary treatment.

## Results

- Mental health and student outcomes has shown to be a **bidirectional relationship**.
- If schools center **student engagement** across social and emotional learning, schools may perform better academically, which in turn can reward them with **more funding**.
- Funding is an obstacle across schools and legislation.
- School districts hesitate to implement programs for a variety of reasons, including **trust** in continuous funds, **delegation** of program requirements, and grant **processes**.
- The COVID-19 quarantine uplift, and the implementation of programs like I Matter could have contributed to the **decrease** in the HKCS results.

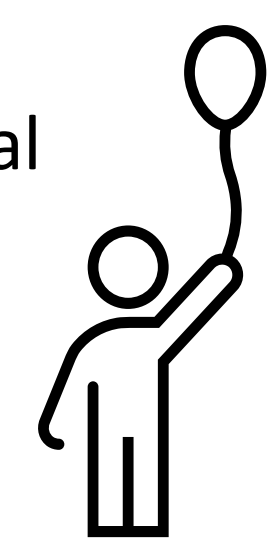
## Limitations

- The data for expulsion/suspension available did not include title 1 or at-risk schools, but instead separated by gender, race/ethnicity, or ELL, special needs, or 504 statuses.
- Because education data was restricted and often had missing or unrelated info, it was difficult to correlate school psychologists, and similar access points to students' academic success

## Future Implications/Next Steps

- Expand student success **outside** of academic outcomes.
- Invest in **early prevention strategies**, fostering healthy relationships with caregivers, trusted adults, and the community.
- Increase **access points** for youth, including school psychologists, counselors, and social workers.
- Remove **barriers** to care, regardless of income or insurance providers.
- Create **healthy environments** for youth, promoting safe discussions surrounding mental health, specifically social emotional learning.
- Implement **better frameworks** between legislative, political, and educational systems.

More research is necessary to correlate SMH programs and student outcomes.



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## References

