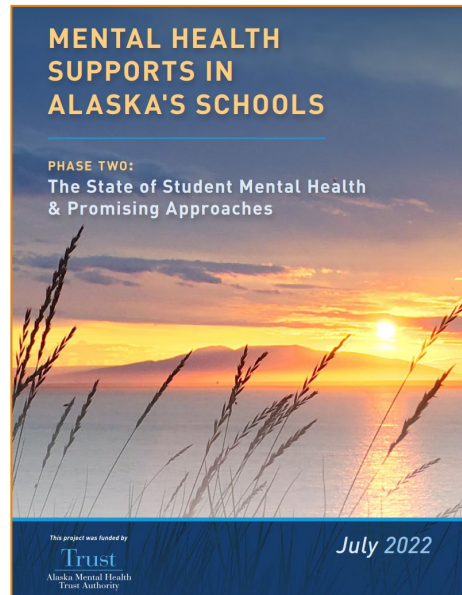
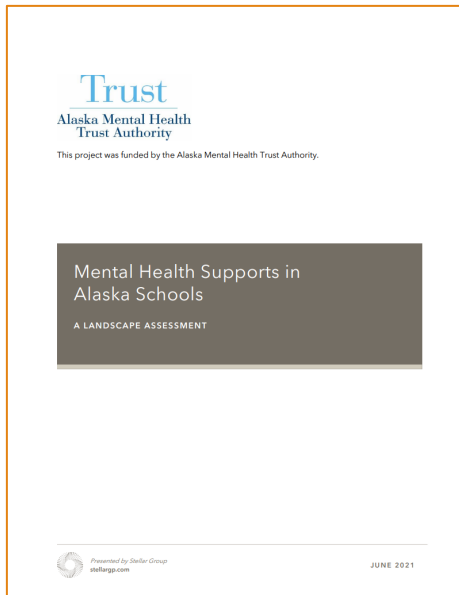


# Mental Health Supports in Alaska Schools

October 2022



- **Jimael Johnson**, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
- **Bev Schoonover**, Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse/Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
- **Sharon Fishel**, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
- **Pat Sidmore**, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

# MH Supports in Alaska Schools Timeline

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# Why This Work Matters?

- **Use the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) continuum to build a shared understanding** of what mental health services and supports are currently being offered.
- **Identify gaps in services and supports** for Alaskan youth & families affected by mental illness, substance misuse, developmental disabilities, and trauma.
- **Work collaboratively to develop policies and advocacy for resources** to better address gaps and opportunities.
- **Increase interest to improve mental health education and supports in school settings**, including the AK Legislature, ongoing Medicaid reform efforts and national influences.



# Alaska

hopeful  
futures  
campaign ➤

## BY THE NUMBERS

**158,000**

Number of  
K-12 Students  
(2022 Projection)<sup>i</sup>

**10,000**

Children with  
major depression<sup>ii</sup>

**6,000**

Children with  
major depression  
who do not  
receive treatment<sup>iii</sup>

**1 : 5,368**

Ratio of School  
Psychologists to  
Students  
(Recommended  
Ratio 1:500)

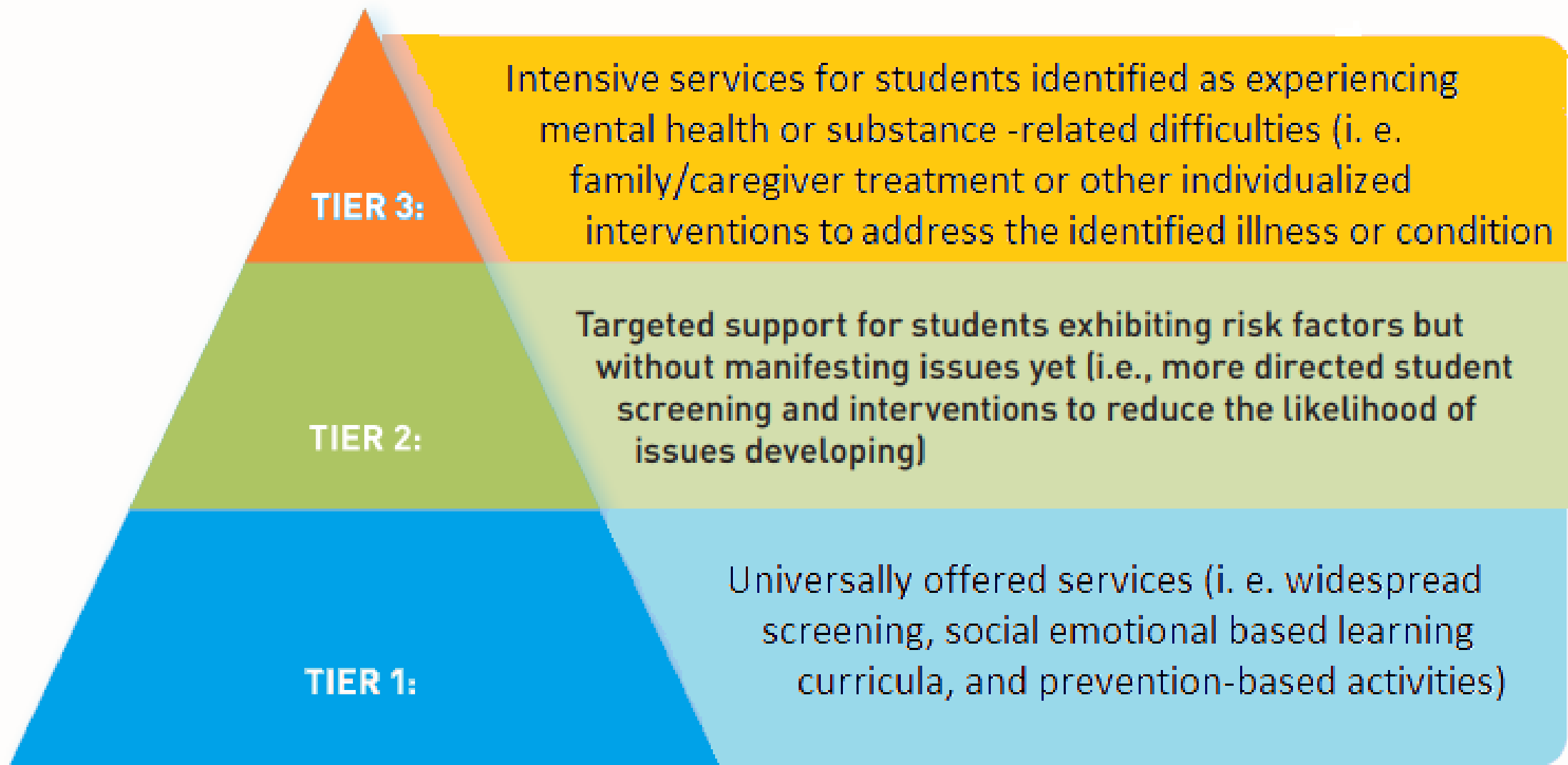
**1 : 6,240**

Ratio of School  
Social Workers to  
Students  
(Recommended  
Ratio 1:250)

**1 : 417**

Ratio of School  
Counselors to  
Students  
(Recommended  
Ratio 1:250)

Source: Hopeful Futures Campaign- America's School Mental Health Report Card February 2022



# Multi Tiered Systems & Supports (MTSS)



This project was funded by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

## Mental Health Supports in Alaska Schools

A LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT



JUNE 2021

# Phase 1: Key Findings and District Profiles

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<https://alaskamentalthrust.org/alaska-mental-health-trust-authority/resources/>

# Phase 1: Research Overview

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**32**

## **District Interviews**

Every Alaska public school district was invited to participate in an interview.

Thirty- two districts completed interviews, representing more than 91% of students in Alaska.

**5**

## **Areas of Inquiry**

The interviews focused on five areas of inquiry:

- Mental health concerns
- Foundational elements
- Mental health supports
- Impacts and barriers
  - Ideal systems

**1**

## **Summary Report**

Findings were synthesized into a summary report of key themes and findings.

Additionally, profiles were created for each of the 32 districts interviewed.

Phase two of the research was completed in July 2022

# List of School Districts Interviewed

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Alaska Gateway School District  
Aleutian Region School District  
Anchorage School District  
Annette Island School District  
Bristol Bay Borough School District  
Chatham School District  
Chugach School District  
Craig City School District  
Denali Borough School District  
Dillingham City School District  
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District

Galena City School District  
Haines Borough School District  
Hoonah City School District  
Iditarod Area School District  
Juneau Borough School District  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District  
Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District  
Kodiak Island Borough School District  
Kuspuk School District  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
Lower Yukon School District

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District  
Mount Edgecumbe High School  
Nenana City School District  
Nome Public Schools  
Petersburg City School District  
Sitka School District  
Tanana City School District  
Unalaska City School District  
Yukon-Koyukuk School District  
Yupiiit School District



# Phase 1 Key Findings- Mental Health Supports

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- Districts are providing some level of supports and services.
- A combination of internal and external resources generally allow most districts to provide some level of social emotional learning and mental health supports and services to students.
- However, the levels of services and supports available vary significantly between districts.

# Phase 1 Key Findings- COVID 19

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- Districts shared observations of pandemic-related student concerns such as isolation, trauma, depression, and anxiety, as well as burnout and increased stress and anxiety among staff.
- Increases in student mental health needs that are predicted to continue are prompting some districts to review the levels of social emotional learning and the mental health supports and services they will provide moving forward.
- Delivery of social emotional learning curriculums and student mental health supports, and services were disrupted by COVID-19.
- Virtual delivery was generally found to be less effective than in-person.
- However, many districts are finding ways to use virtual platforms to address gaps and add additional student supports and services.



# Phase 1 Key Findings- In-Service and Staff Support

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- In-service and Professional Development time is leveraged to bring mental health training to staff.
- In-service and professional development opportunities for staff training help deliver content on school climate and mental health priorities.
- Training topics have included trauma-engaged principles, culturally relevant approaches, and social emotional learning, among numerous others.

# Key Findings- Community Partnerships

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- **Trained school staff and community partners are critical** to providing mental health supports and services.
- **State, regional, and local community partners are integral to supplement services outside of a district's scope**, such as more intensive Tier 3 residential treatment or ongoing psychological interventions.

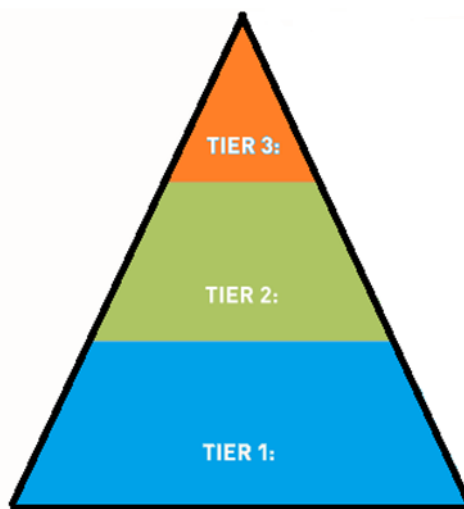


# Mental Health in Schools Profile: Annette Island School District

**Annette Island School District (AISD)** is in **Southeast Alaska** and based in **Metlakatla** on the west coast of Annette Island, 15 airmiles south of Ketchikan. As of October 2020, the district's three schools served approx. 315 students.

Examples of AISD's approach to providing mental health supports include:

- Family engagement specialist role to provide behavioral health and limited social worker supports and to build relationships with students and families.
- Collaboration between AISD and community partners on student mental health services, supported by a weekly partner meeting between school counselors and community providers.
- Progression toward closing trust gaps with families and expanding overall engagement, including a new partnership with Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) on the FIRE Grant, a family engagement grant.
- Culturally-responsive programming through annual student workshop opportunities, and integration of cultural groups at student assemblies.



## UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES & SELECTIVE SUPPORTS

	<b>Tier 1</b> Universally offered, schoolwide supports	<b>Tier 2</b> Early intervention & targeted supports
Approaches, curriculums, models & programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response to Intervention</li> <li>• Student portfolios</li> <li>• Seminars for major grade transitions (i.e., 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>)</li> <li>• TEEN TRUTH</li> <li>• Second Step</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response to Intervention</li> <li>• Individual counseling</li> <li>• Parent meetings</li> <li>• Services and supports through outside providers</li> </ul>
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff, counselor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselor, family engagement specialist, special education teacher, nurse</li> <li>• Annette Island Service Unit</li> <li>• Children's Mental Health</li> </ul>
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universally offered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response to Intervention process</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID and general budget funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID and general budget funds</li> </ul>

INTENSIVE SERVICES & SUPPORTS	
	Tier 3 More intensive supports
Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual counseling</li> <li>• Services and supports through outside providers</li> </ul>
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itinerant and telehealth contracted outside providers</li> <li>• Children's Mental Health</li> <li>• Annette Island Service Unit</li> <li>• Community Connections</li> <li>• Raven's Way</li> <li>• iGrad</li> </ul>
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response to Intervention process</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special education and general funds</li> </ul>

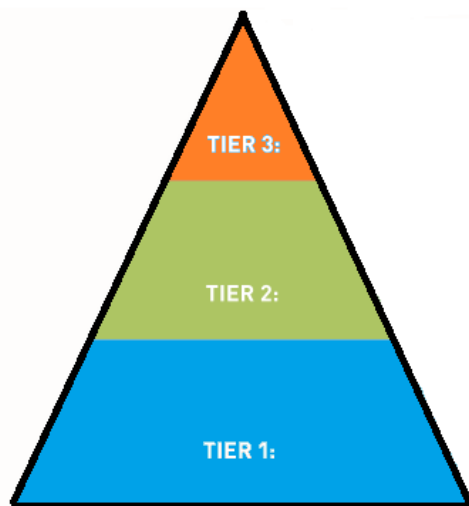
# Mental Health in Schools Profile: Fairbanks North Star Borough

**Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD)** is located in **Interior Alaska**. Based on pre-kindergarten through grade 12 district enrollment totals as of October 2020, the district's 35 schools serve approximately 10,430 students, in addition to 970 students enrolled in the Fairbanks BEST Homeschool program.

Examples of FNSBSD's approach to providing mental health supports include:

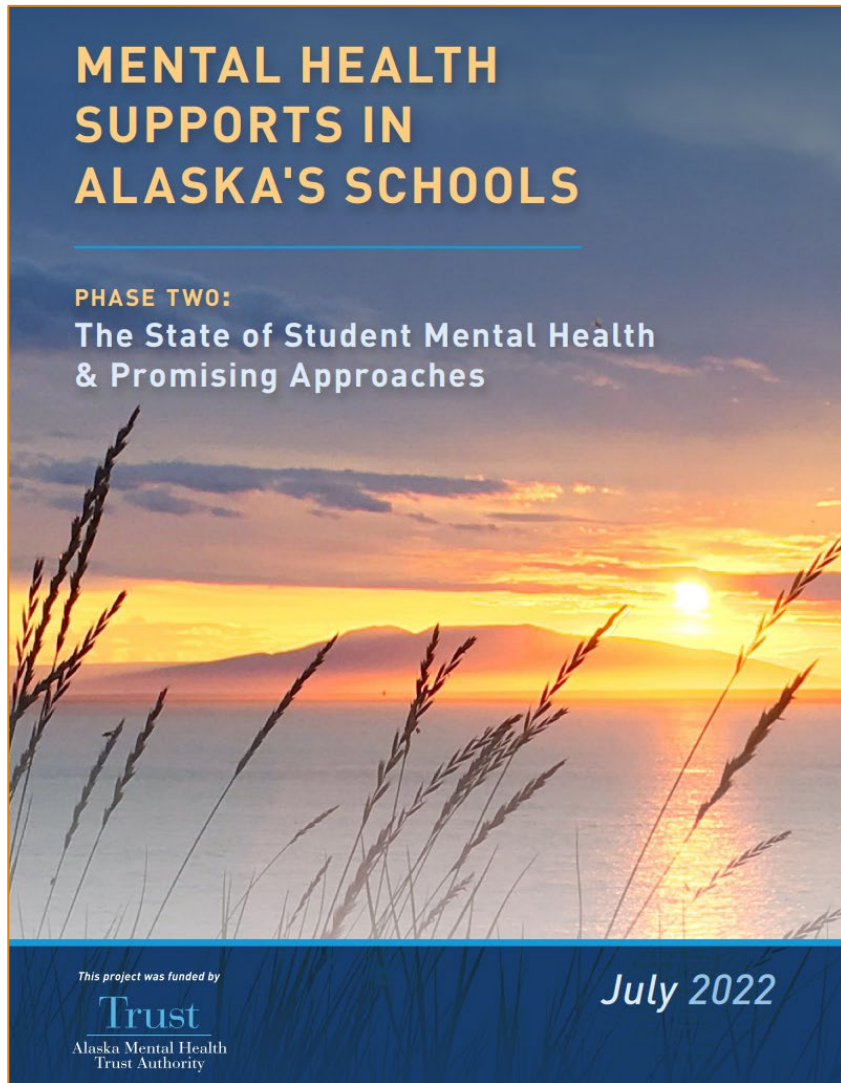
- Access to supports through a dedicated student support services team staffed by roles such as counselors, social service managers, prevention intervention specialists, and behavior aids, among others.
- Offering an annual in-service day focused on culturally-relevant education, as well as significant tribal and community consultation in the district planning processes.
- Completing an annual contracted audit focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Sharing of resources and offering of additional student services and supports through community partnerships.
- Availability of transparent school climate data through the FNSBSD data dashboard.





UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES & SELECTIVE SUPPORTS		
	Tier 1 Universally offered, schoolwide supports	Tier 2 Early intervention & targeted supports
Approaches, curriculums, models & programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Step</li> <li>• Sources of Strength</li> <li>• CHAMPS</li> <li>• Kagan strategies</li> <li>• Zones of Regulation</li> <li>• Character Strong</li> <li>• SMART kids</li> <li>• Fourth R</li> <li>• Safe Dates</li> <li>• PREPaRE crisis response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check &amp; Connect</li> <li>• Second Step</li> <li>• Individual counseling</li> <li>• Small groups</li> </ul>
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher, counselor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student support services team</li> <li>• Project AWARE social service managers</li> <li>• Community volunteers</li> <li>• Fairbanks Native Association</li> </ul>
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universally offered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student support services team</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General, grant, Title, and CARES funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant funds</li> </ul>

INTENSIVE SERVICES & SUPPORTS	
	Tier 3 More intensive supports
Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual counseling</li> <li>• De-escalation spaces</li> <li>• Contracted services through residential treatment program</li> </ul>
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School psychologists</li> <li>• AK RISES mental health clinicians</li> <li>• Project AWARE social service managers</li> <li>• Alaska Behavioral Health</li> <li>• Family Centered Services of Alaska</li> </ul>
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTSS process</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General, grants, and CARES funds</li> </ul>



# Phase 2: Key Findings and Case Studies

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[Mental Health Supports in Alaska's Schools \(mhtto.wpenginepowered.com\)](http://mhtto.wpenginepowered.com)

# Research Overview

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**6**

## **Case Studies**

6 school districts were identified based on their different emerging and best practices. Interviews were conducted among school district leaders and service providers.

## **Policy Analysis and State of Student Mental Health**

In addition to the case studies, the Stellar Group also gathered relevant indicator data to examine trends in student mental health indicators, as well as recent national and state policies that have been passed or are currently under review.

**1**

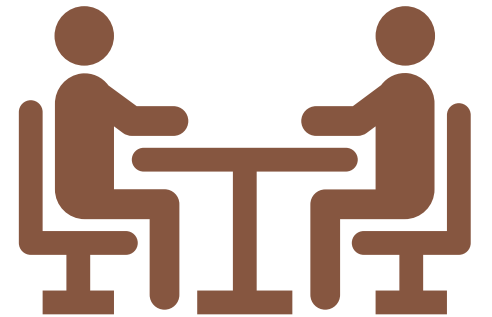
## **Summary Report**

Findings were synthesized into a summary report., which includes the 6 case studies, policy analysis, and indicators.

# Key Findings- School Support Services

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- School counselors and school psychologists in Alaska are **tasked with serving more students than recommended**.
- Most respondents were performing **activities considered appropriate for school counselors** (based on professional standards).
- More than half of respondents reported also performing **non-counseling duties** such as covering classes or supervising classrooms and common areas.



# Key Findings-Funding Opportunities

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- Sustainable funding sources and policy changes can help continue the program's impacts in school communities, including:
  - COVID-19 Relief
  - Expanded Telehealth Funding
  - Potential Medicaid Funding
  - Other Federal Funding Opportunities (USDOE, SAMHSA, etc.)

# Key Findings-Student Mental Health Status

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- **Indicators provide deeper context to behavioral health** in schools on national, state, and regional levels including:
  - Student Demographics
  - Academic Performance
  - Risk Factors (Community, family and student)
  - Protective Factors (Community, family and student)
- While the youth mental health crisis gets more serious, **protective mechanisms currently in place may not be enough** to respond to the growing needs of Alaska's students.



# Mental Health in Schools Phase II: Case Studies

<https://mhtto.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/BHInSchools-Phase2-FINALi.pdf>

» **CASE STUDY: TELEHEALTH SCHOOL COUNSELING:**  
**Kuspuk School District's** partnership with a telehealth company to provide counseling support in remote village schools

» **CASE STUDY: ONSITE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS:**  
**Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District's** embedded clinicians, provided through a partnership with a local foundation

» **CASE STUDY: TRAUMA-ENGAGED SCHOOLS:**  
**Juneau School District's** introduction of Alaska's unique trauma-engaged approaches throughout its school communities

» **CASE STUDY: SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS:**  
**Lower Kuskokwim School District's** continuous commitment to its school social work program

» **CASE STUDY: SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CLINICS:**  
**Kodiak Island Borough School District's** long-standing partnership with the island's hospital system to offer school-based services

» **CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY ADVOCATES:**  
**Lower Yukon School District's** work with local experts to provide culturally relevant supports through community human service providers



## » CASE STUDY: TELEHEALTH SCHOOL COUNSELING:

**Kuspuk School District's** partnership with a telehealth company to provide counseling support in remote village schools

In the fall of 2019, KSD started building a foundation to fill the gap in school mental health supports and services. At the time, the school district did not have funding for school counselors. A leadership team member took on the role of school district champion and laid out a vision for increasing the availability of services through telehealth.

The school district contracted with [DotCom Therapy](#), a telehealth company that provided [remote speech therapy services](#) for the school district. The KSD team leveraged DotCom Therapy's telehealth expertise during the implementation and sustainment of the program. DotCom Therapy provided a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for part-time telehealth school counseling services. The role continued to expand and is now a full-time contracted position. The telehealth school counselor is based outside of Alaska but works the same school day hours as the onsite staff.

Services provided by the counselor include:

- » Student individual and small group counseling sessions
- » Staff counseling sessions
- » Crisis assessments
- » Social emotional learning classroom lessons
- » Staff professional development

*"If this can be done at nine remote villages in Alaska, I think it can be done almost anywhere - as long as you have just a little bit of importance placed on it and find the right person or the right group to connect and contract with."*  
- KSD leadership

## » CASE STUDY: TRAUMA-ENGAGED SCHOOLS:

**Juneau School District's** introduction of Alaska's unique trauma-engaged approaches throughout its school communities

### PROGRAMS AND FUNDING FOR TRAUMA-ENGAGED APPROACHES

Building a foundation in trauma-engaged approaches has been a multi-year effort for JSD. Initially, school district leadership participated in a trauma-sensitive schools working group with the [Association of Alaska School Boards](#) (AASB). Since then, the school district has rolled out multiple trauma-engaged pilots and programs, including:

- » Ongoing professional development in three Title I schools focused on integrating trauma-engaged approaches into practice through the [Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience](#) (CLEAR) Project funded by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
- » Introduction of a school-district level Trauma Engaged Specialist position and early-childhood to secondary student supports through the [Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise Southeast Alaska](#) (STEPS Alaska) managed by AASB
- » Addition of Mental Wellness Clinicians and Family Advocates at four Title I elementary schools through funding from the [Juneau Community Foundation](#) (JCF), [Alaska Children's Trust](#) (ACT), and school district funding.
- » Addition of Mental Wellness Clinicians at three secondary schools through the [Project Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education](#) (Project AWARE) through national grant funds managed by Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED)

*"Go in eyes wide open that there is work that needs to be done. It's important work, it's challenging work. It's affirming to have the resources to take on that challenging work."*  
– JSD administrator

<https://education.alaska.gov/apps/traumawebtoolkit/new-framework-page.html>

# Questions and Discussion

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- **Jimael Johnson**, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
- **Bev Schoonover**, Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse/Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
- **Sharon Fishel**, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
- **Pat Sidmore**, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
  
- **Joel Isaak**, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
- **Kristina Weltzin**, Alaska Department of Health – Behavioral Health
- **Leah Van Kirk**, Alaska Department of Health – Behavioral Health

