

# Student mental health in Ontario: The role of schools

*Selected findings from the  
School Mental Health Surveys*

# Outline

1. Schools & children's mental health
2. School Mental Health Surveys (SMHS): Concepts & objectives
3. SMHS Selected Findings
4. Summary and implications

# Schools and Children's Mental Health

- **Access:** school programs can address barriers to access
- **Wide reach:** majority of children attend school
- **Highly structured:** standardized programs (curricula) that can integrate strategies that support academic learning and student success
- **Link between achievement & mental health**
- **Wide range of service providers:** can deliver evidence-based programs and strategies

# Canadian Evidence Lacking

- < 10 studies in Canada examining school influences on children's mental health



# School Mental Health Surveys





# School Mental Health Surveys (SMHS)

- 249 schools (180 elementary & 69 SS)
- 31,148 students grades 6-12
- 3,374 teachers
- 206 principals



# SMHS Concepts

- **School Composition:** SES and demographic characteristics of students
- **School Capacity:** MH staff, MH teams, agreements with community providers, referral processes, in-school services dedicated to MH, universal mental health promotion and prevention programs →→ **Focus of presentation at the Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health Summit, April 2016**
- **School Processes:** patterns of behaviors and social interactions often inferred from school climate assessments



# SMHS Concepts

- **School Processes**
  - Social-emotional learning in school (i.e., empathy, behavioral control, social skills)
  - School Belonging
- **Classroom processes**
  - Emotional Climate (teacher-student relations)
  - Quality of Student Interactions
- **Student Outcomes (dimensional ratings)**
  - Emotional and Behavioral Symptoms
  - Positive Mental Health (i.e., happy, satisfied, engaged, social support)





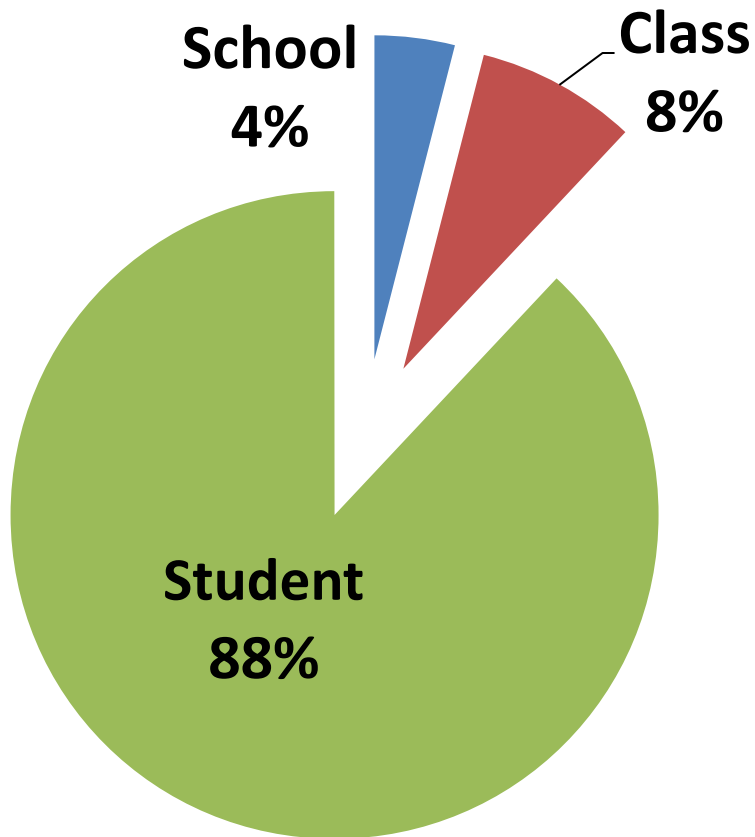
# SMHS Objectives

1. To examine the potential of schools and classrooms to influence student mental health
  - a. Between school and classroom differences
  - b. Specific school and classroom variables
  - c. School and classroom differences in SES inequalities in student mental health
  
2. To examine access and barriers to mental health services in schools

Objective 1a:

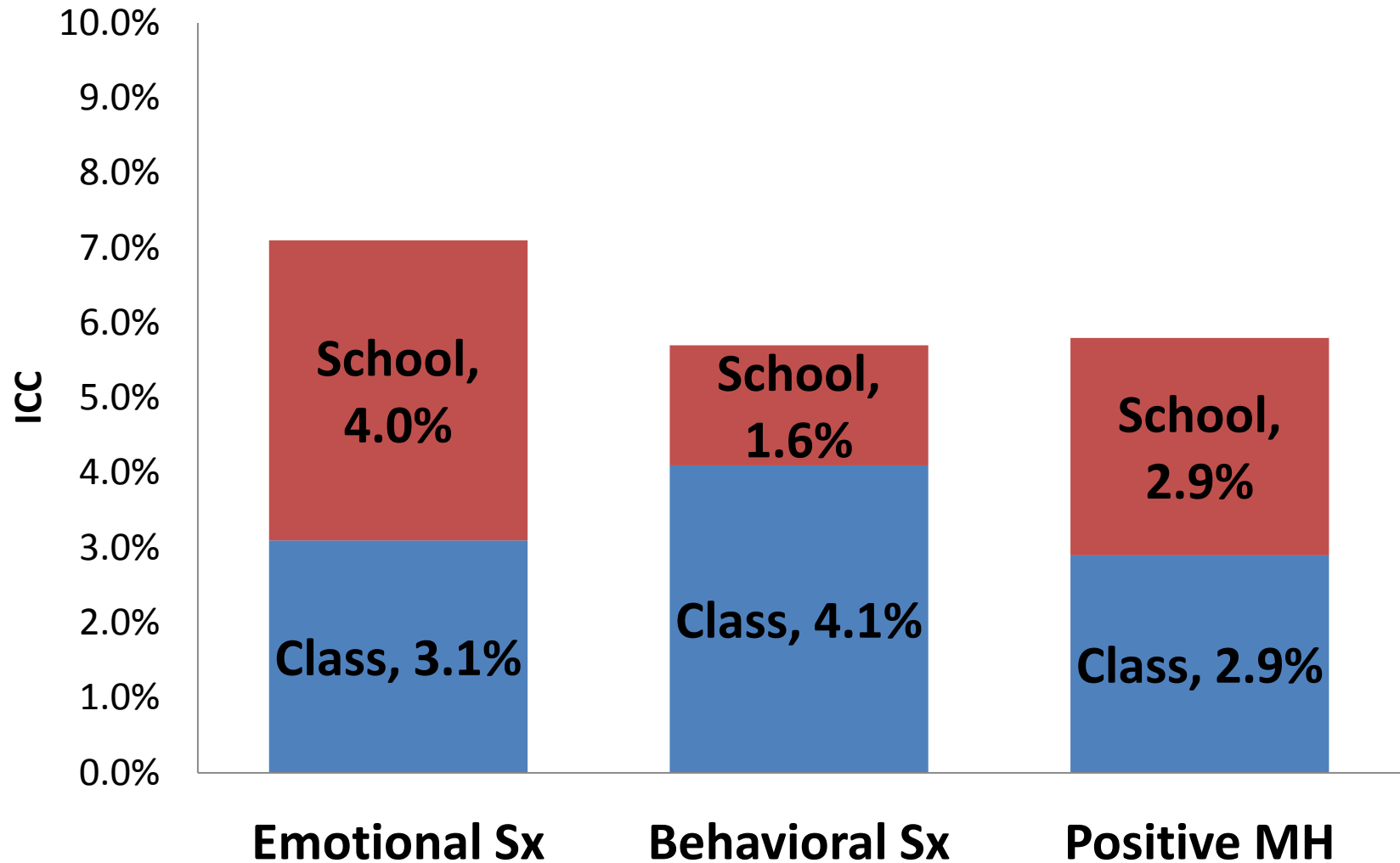
Between school and class differences

# Partitioning Variance & Intra-Class Correlation Coefficient (ICC)



ICC Size	Importance
1%	Small
4%	Medium
8%	Large

# SMHS Findings: Between school & classroom differences (ICCs)

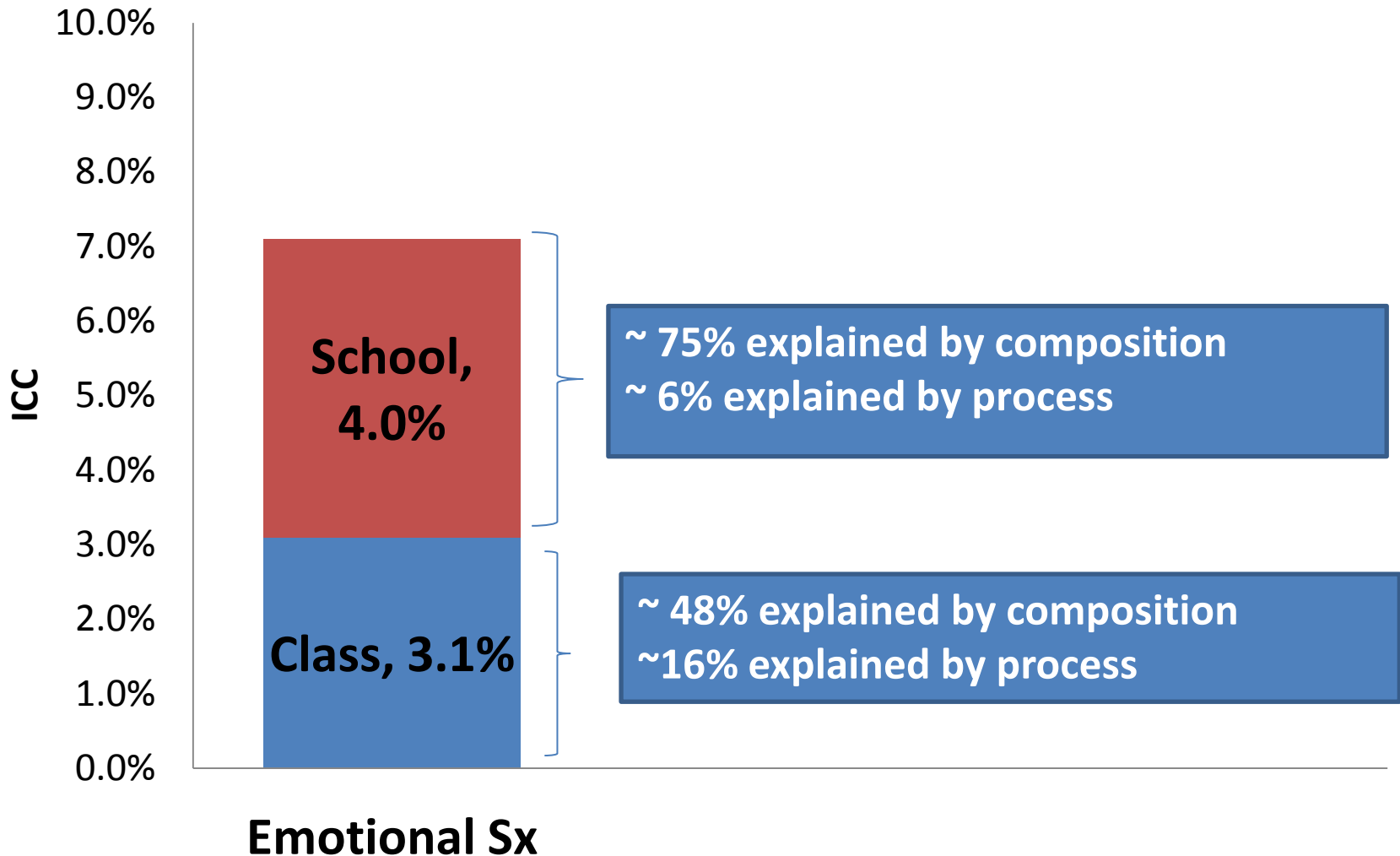


Objective 1b:

School and classroom variables that account for differences

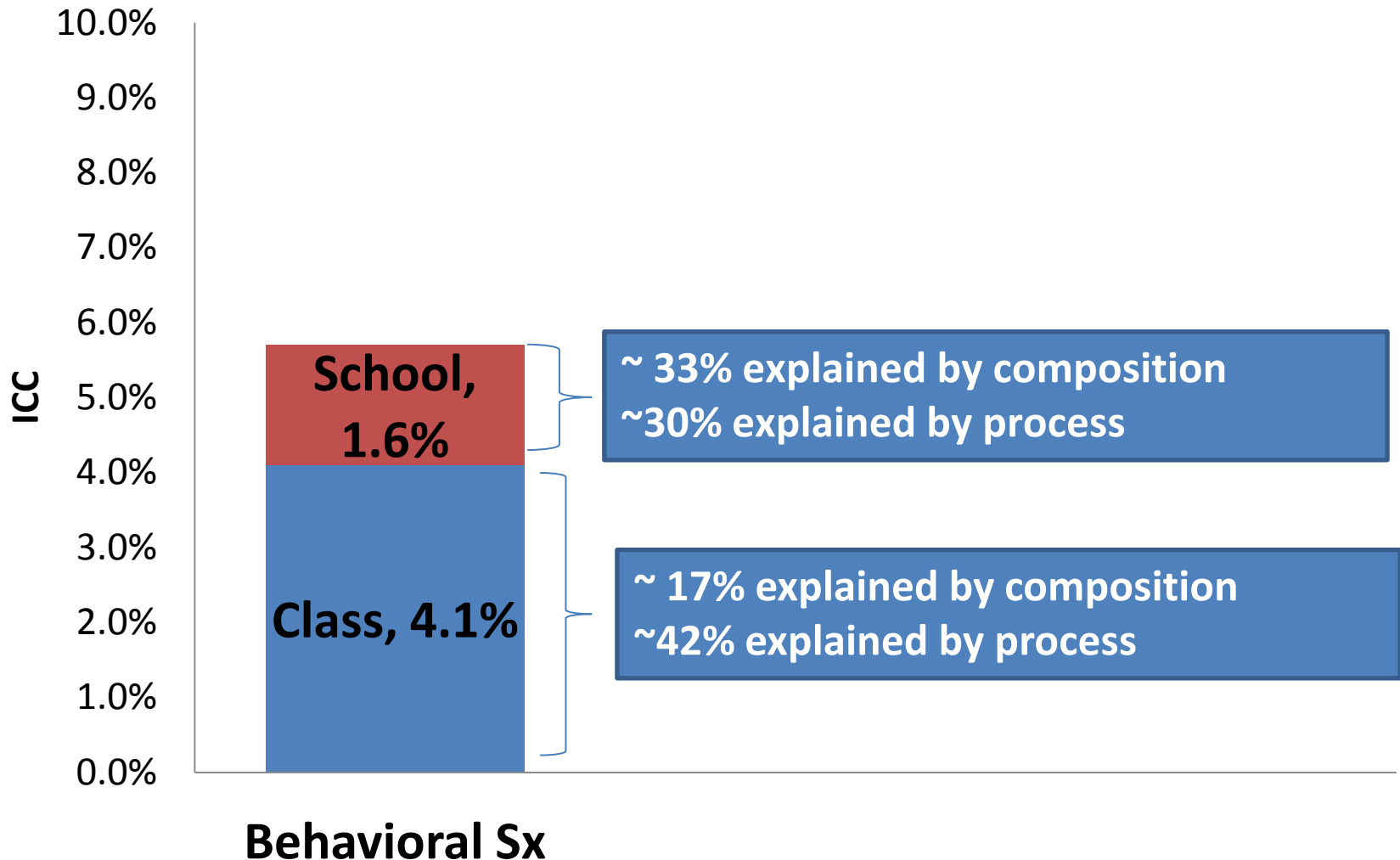
# SMHS Findings:

## Student composition, school & class process variables (ICCs)



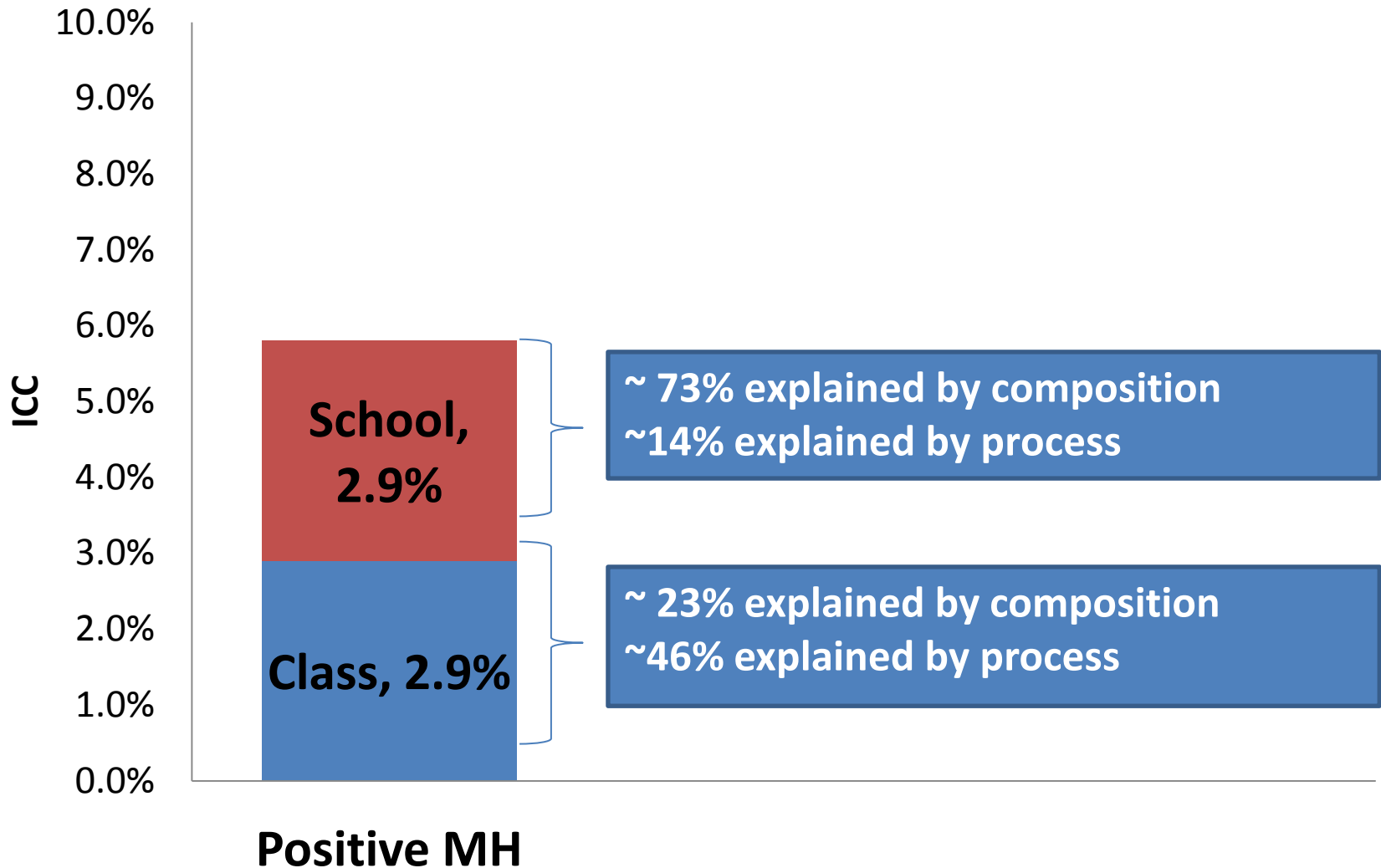
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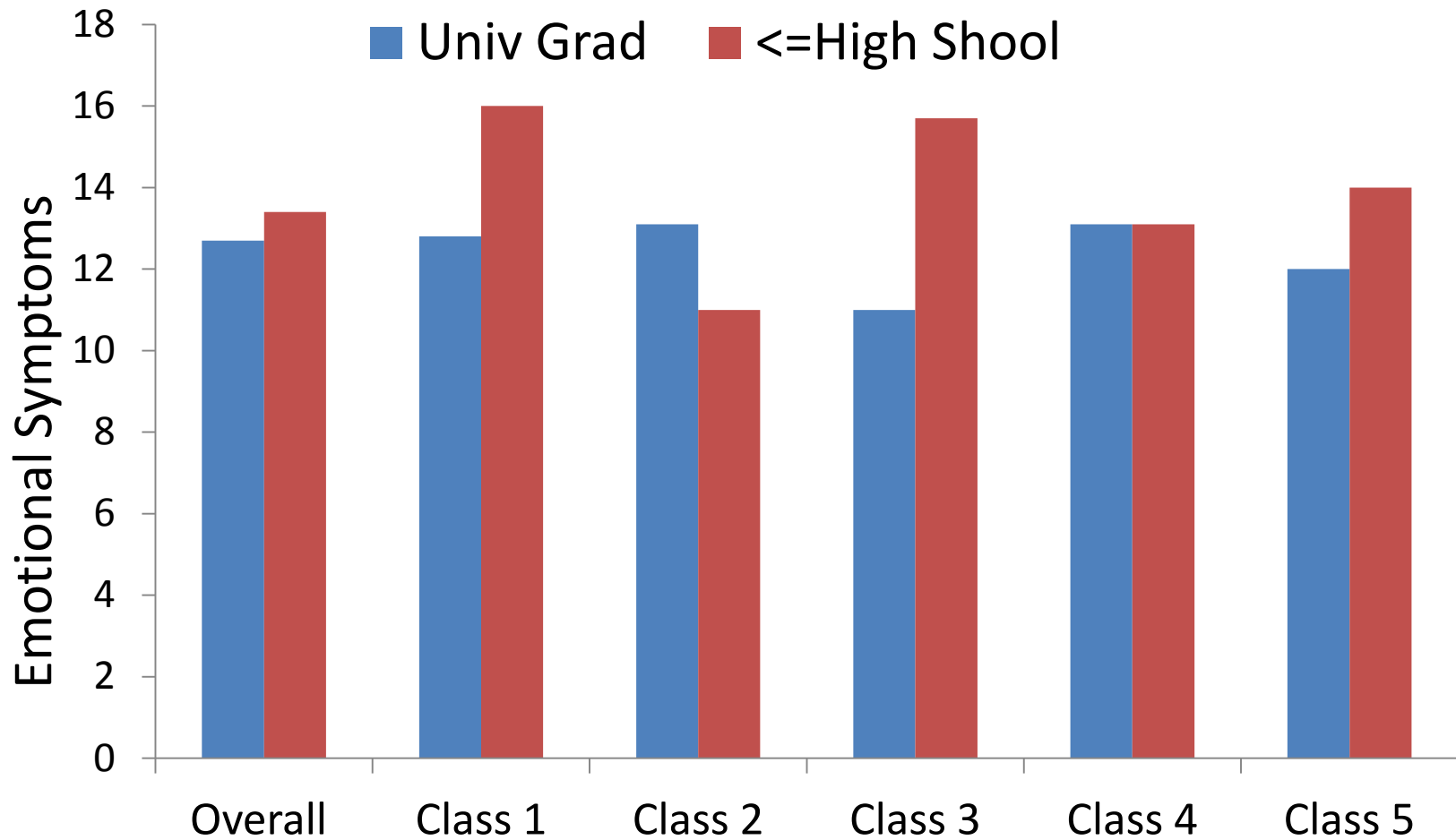




Objective 1c:

Classroom differences in SES inequalities  
in student mental health – 'resilience'

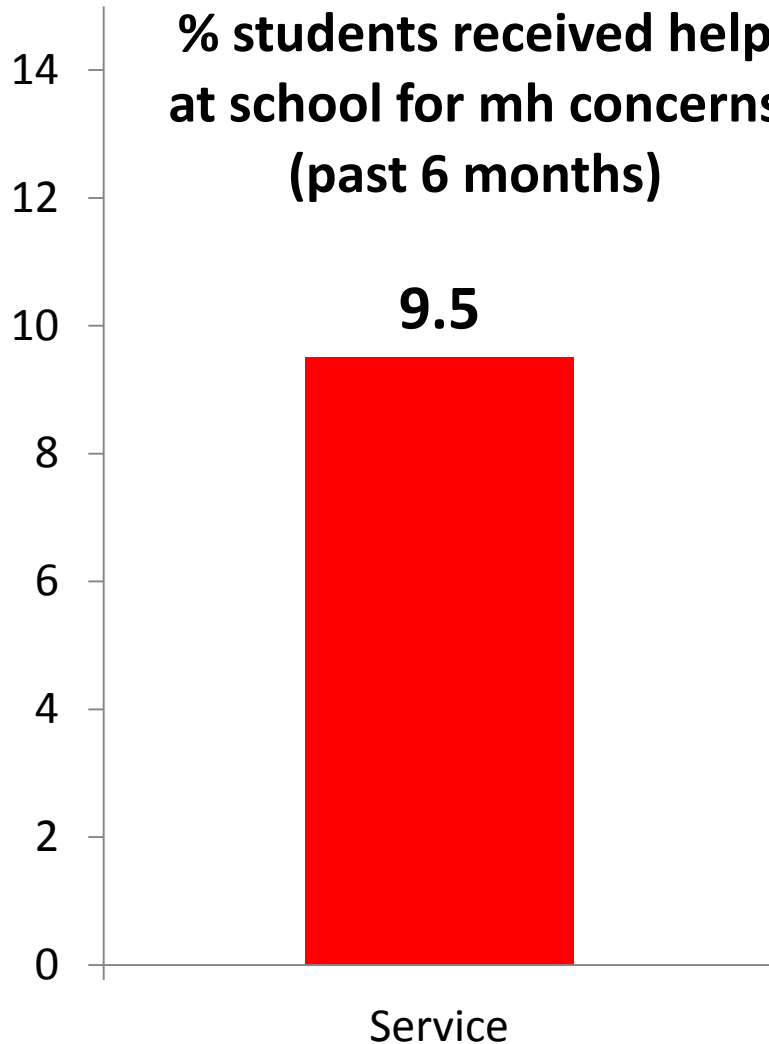
# SMHS Findings: Classroom Differences in SES Inequalities in Emotional Symptoms



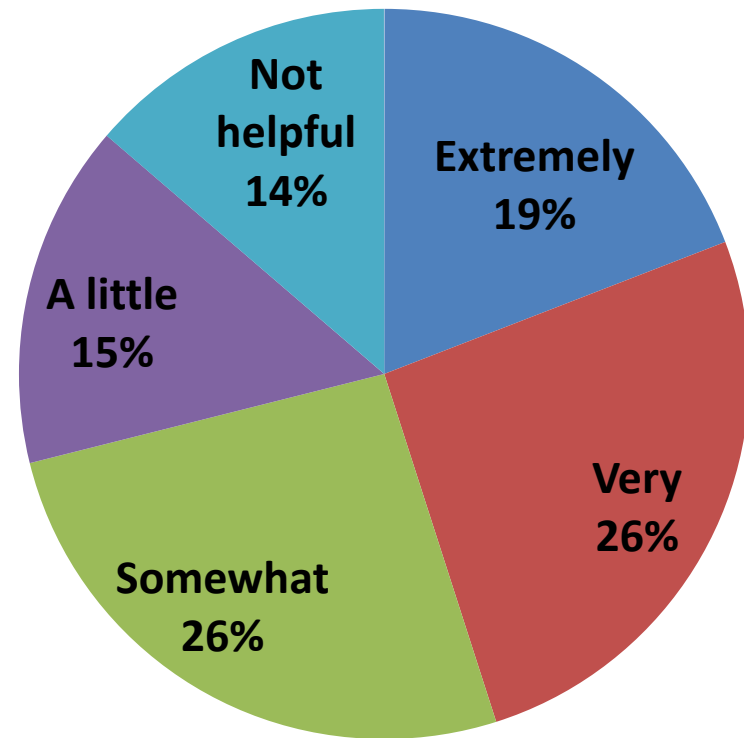
Objective 2: Access and barriers to  
mental health services in schools

# MH Service Use at School

**% students received help at school for mh concerns (past 6 months)**

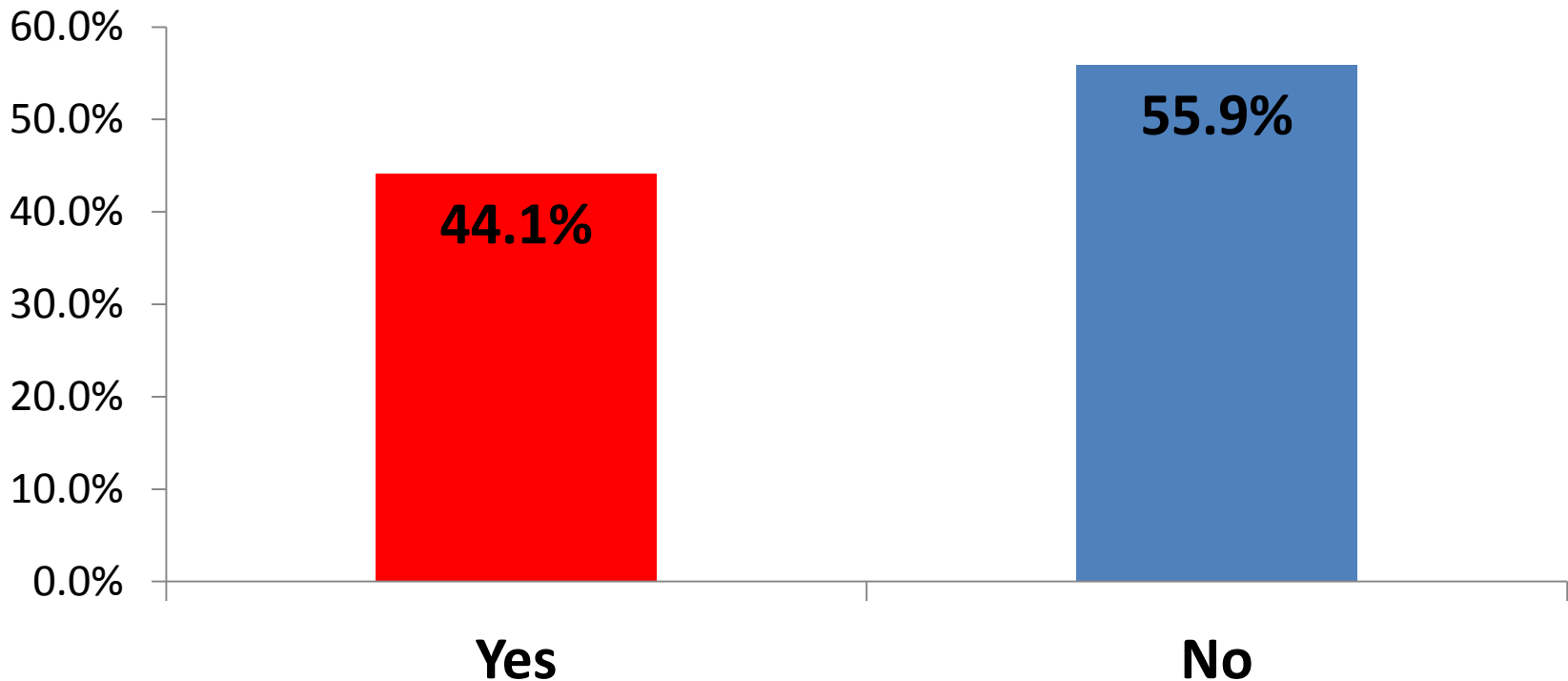


**Perceived Helpfulness**

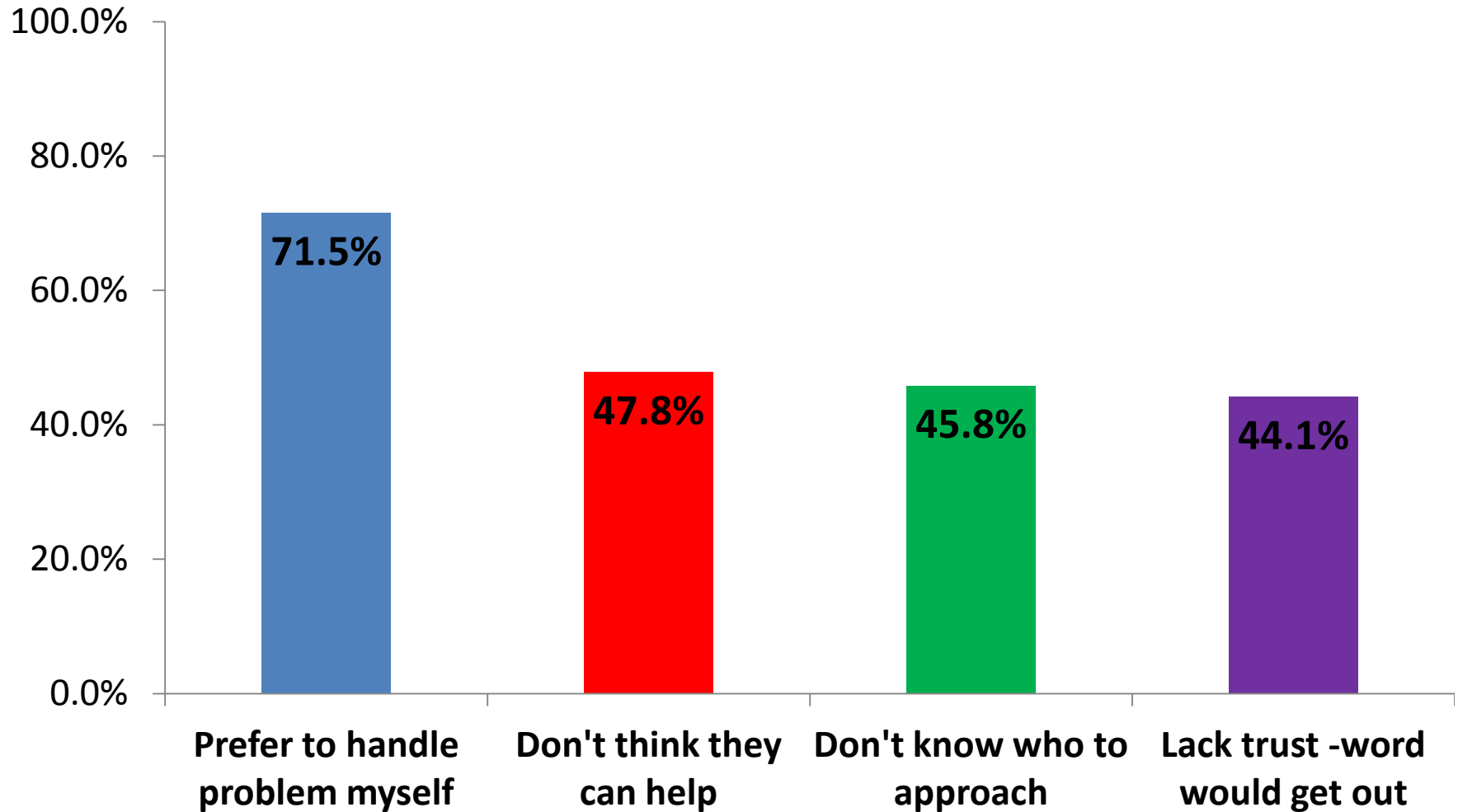


# Barriers to Accessing Help at School

**If you felt you needed help for MH concerns, would you speak to someone at school about these concerns?**

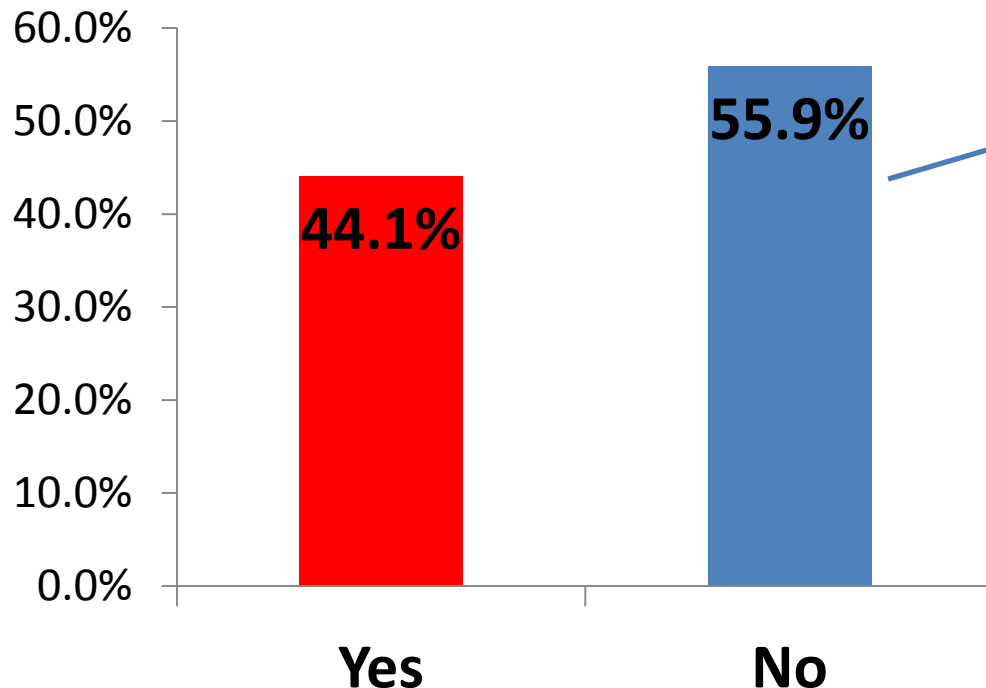


# Perceived Barriers



# Barriers to school services BUT still may be accessing mental health services

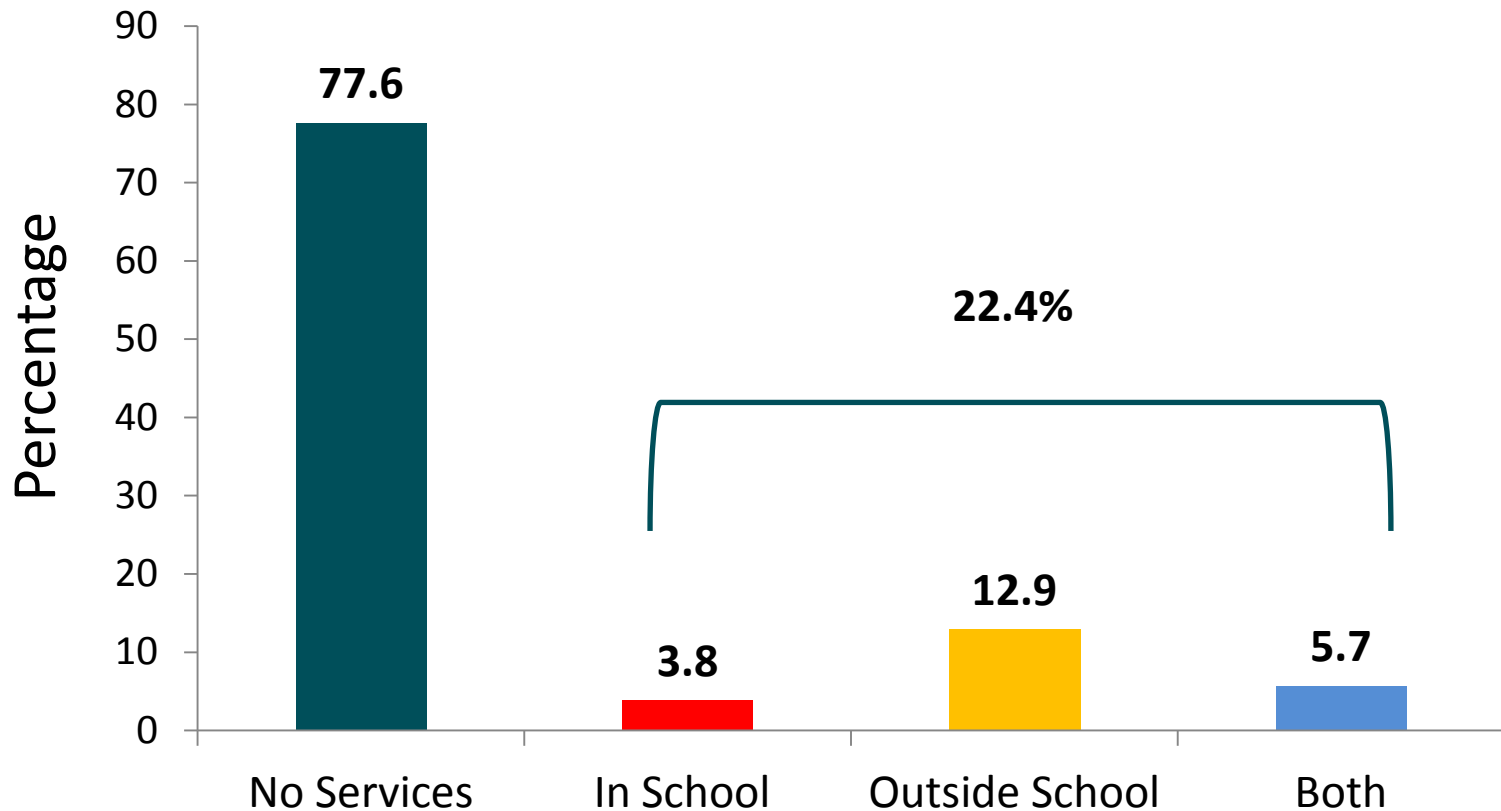
**If you felt you needed help for MH concerns, would you speak to someone at school about these concerns?**



~7.7% report receiving MH help at school  
~17% report receiving MH help in the community

# MH Service Use: School & Community

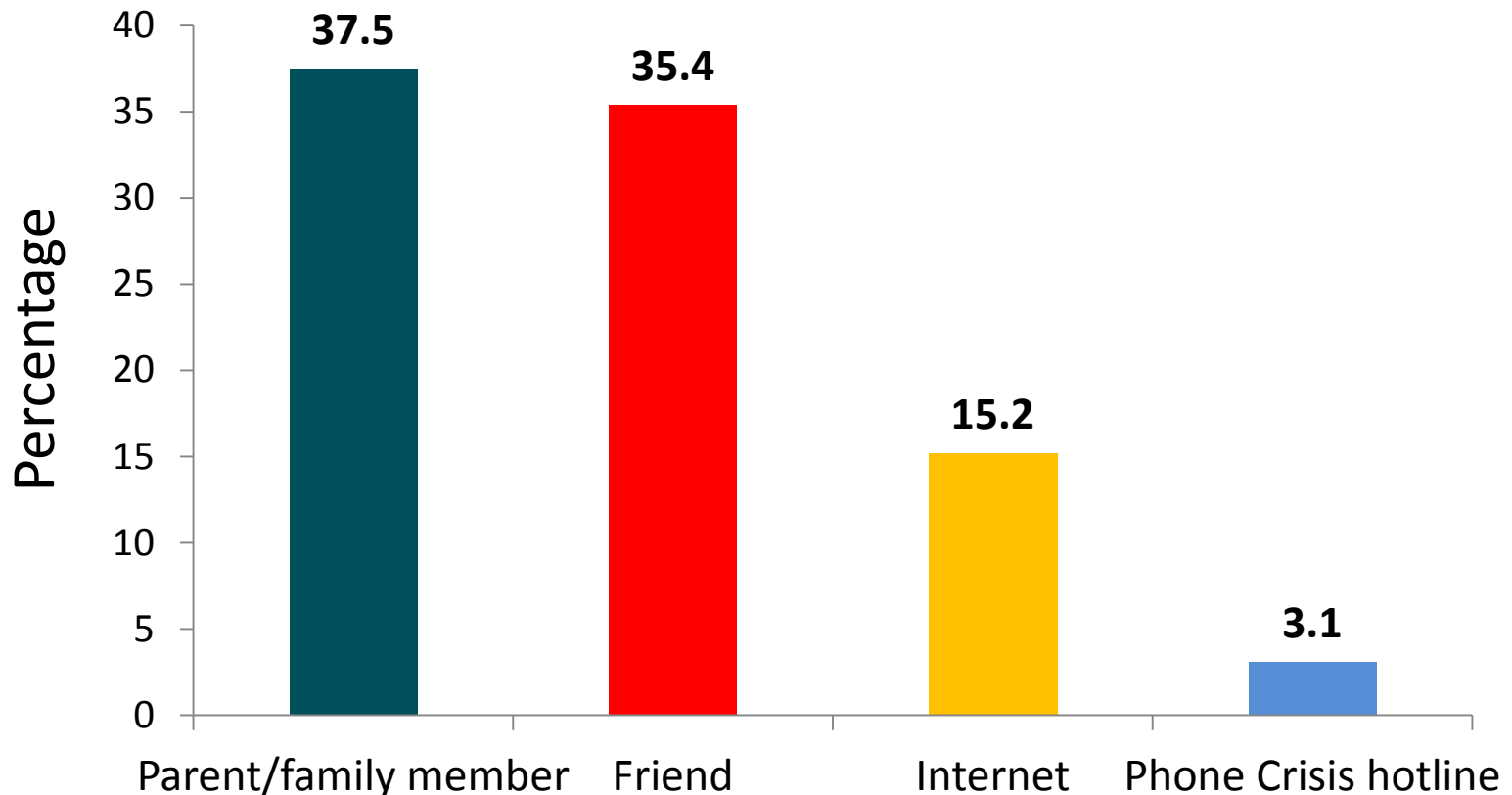
What % of students report receiving services for MH concerns in the past 6 months?





# Informal Sources of Support

What % of students report receiving help or advice from informal sources for MH concerns in the past 6 months?





# Summary & Implications: School/Class

- Schools and classrooms exert moderate-strong influences on mental health →→ where to intervene
- Between school and classroom differences are partly accounted for by student composition (SES & demographics) but also by modifiable variables within the school and class context →→ intervention targets
- Specific targets: socio-emotional learning, fostering sense of belonging in school, fostering positive emotional climate in the classroom, and co-operative learning opportunities characterized by mutual respect and understanding
- Magnitude of SES inequalities in student mental health varies between classrooms ('resilience') →→ opportunities for reducing inequalities by targeting emotional climate in classrooms and quality of student interactions



## Summary & Implications: Individual

- ~22.4% of students report receiving help for mental health concerns
- Student are seeking help at school and outside of school →→ co-ordination of care and preparedness across settings
- Perceived barriers to accessing help at school can be addressed through education, resources and professional development

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- **School Boards, Schools, Students, Educators and Principals**

