

ESSER Funding and the Post-Pandemic Experiences of Montana Schools

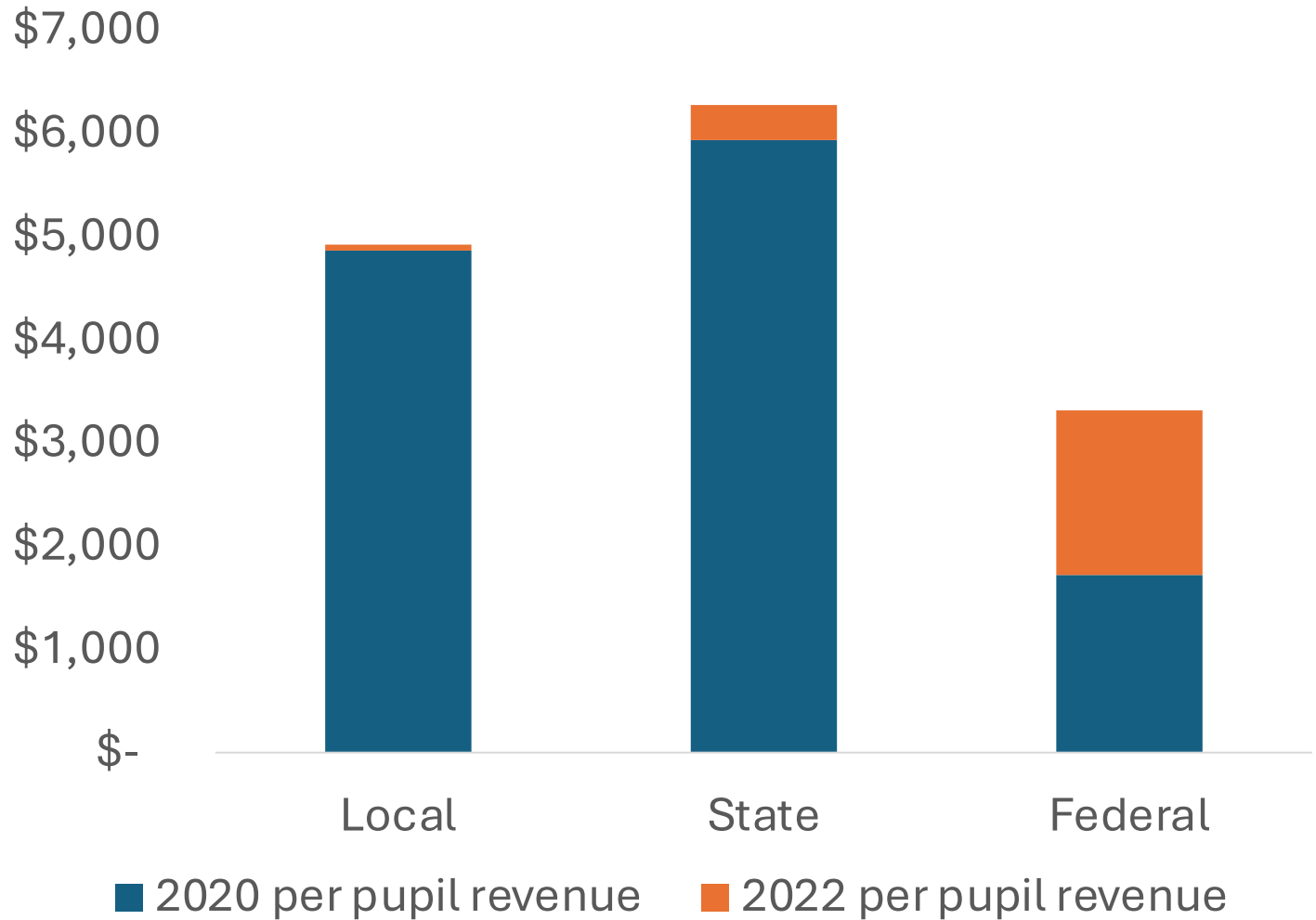
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Economics at Montana State University



The federal COVID relief funds infused significant funds into public schools in Montana

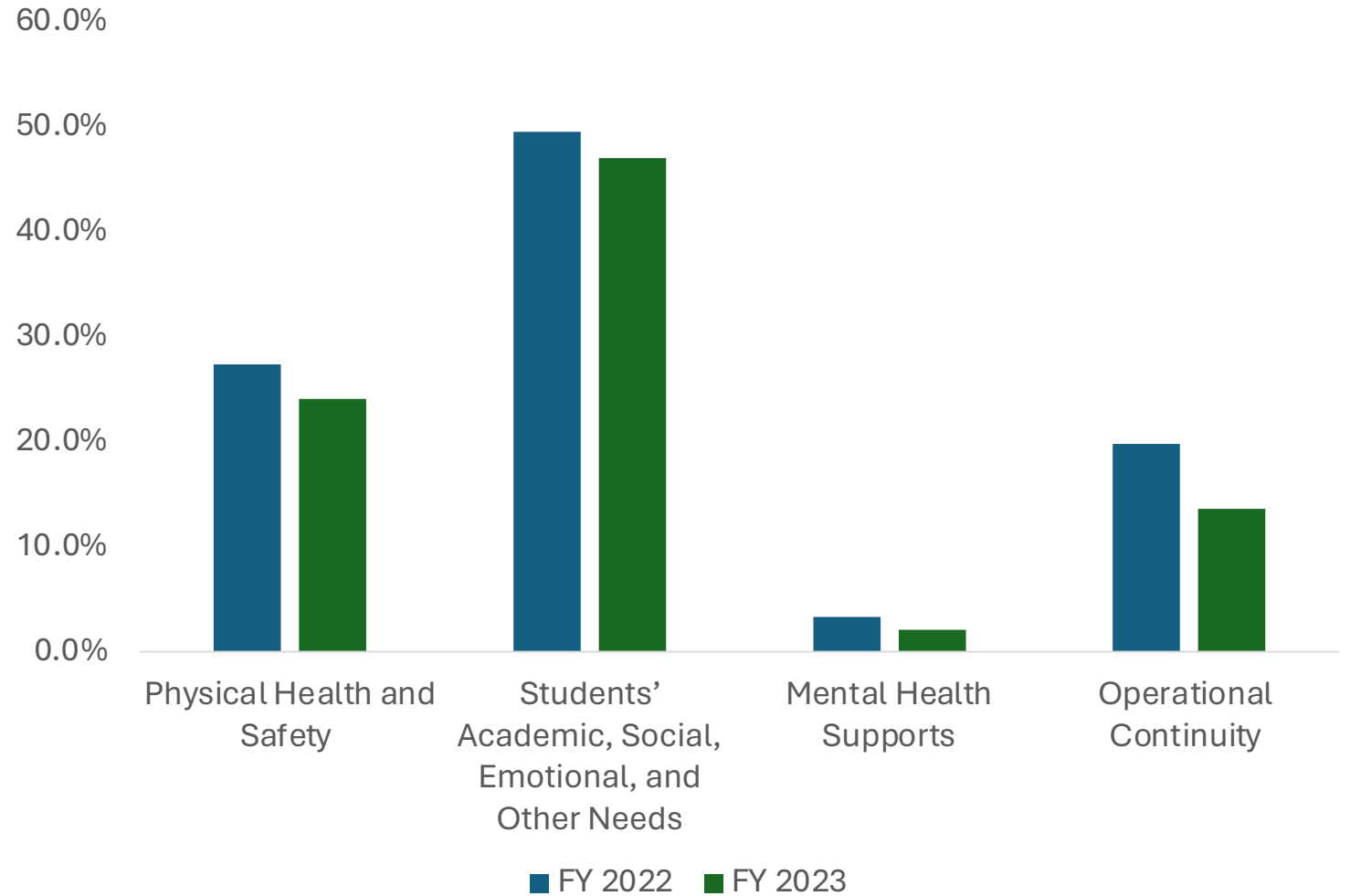
	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023
Total awarded	\$41,295,230	\$170,099,465	\$239,803,994
Total spent	100%	100%	62.8% as of May 2024 Available through Sept 2024

Federal revenues per pupil rose sharply, but did not replace state or local revenue

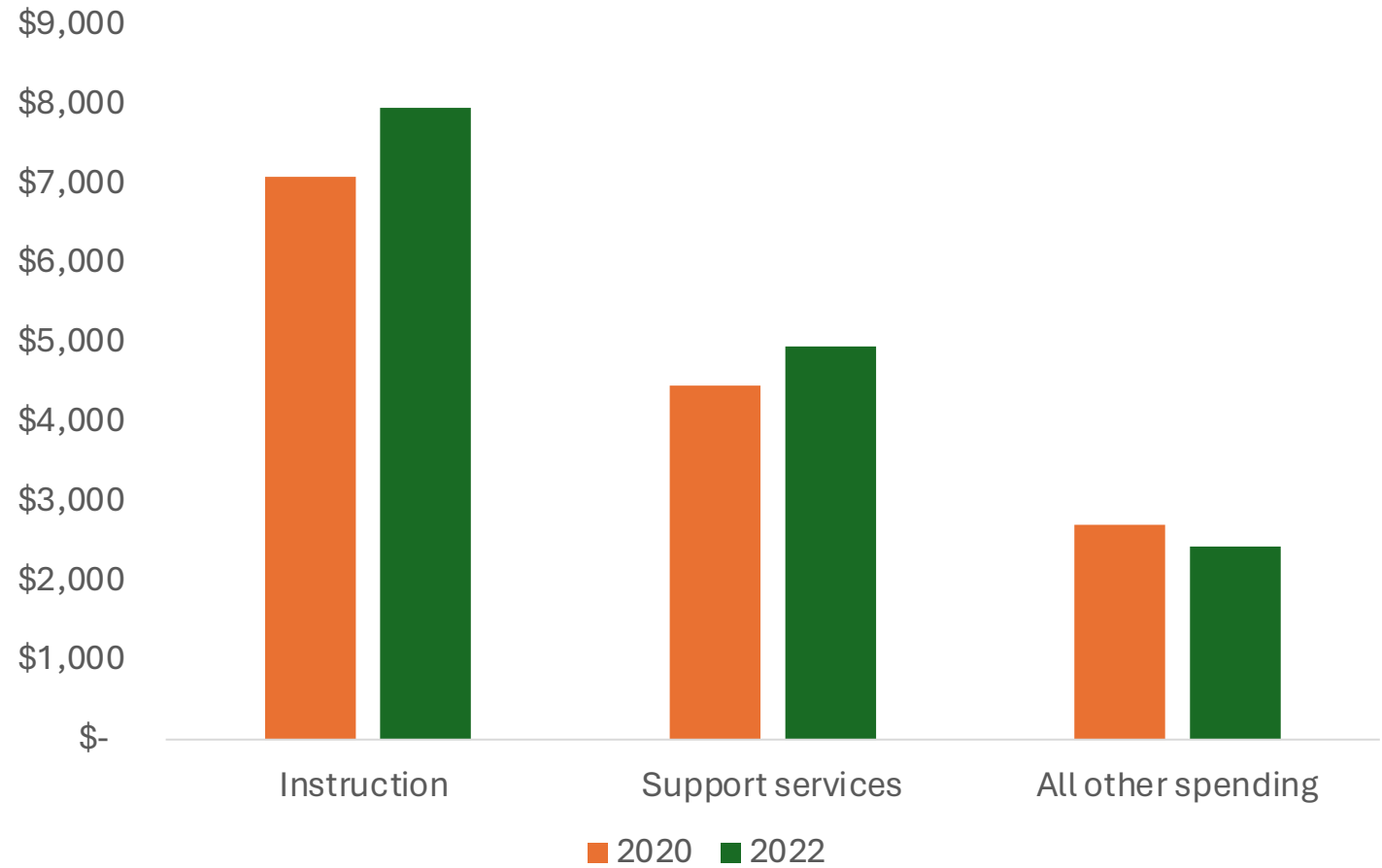


About half of funds were used for “Student academic, social, emotion needs”

Another 25% used for “Physical health and safety”



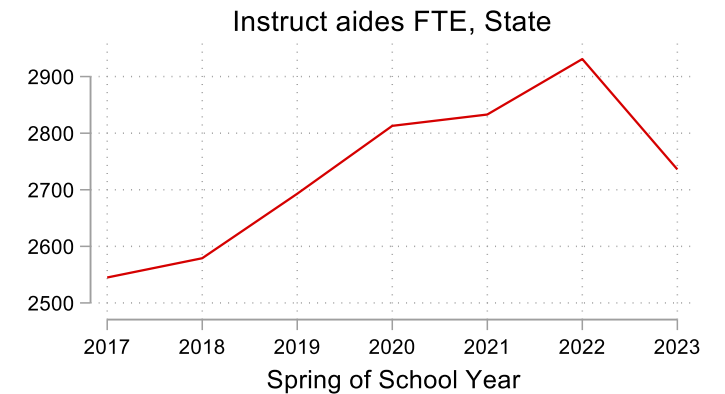
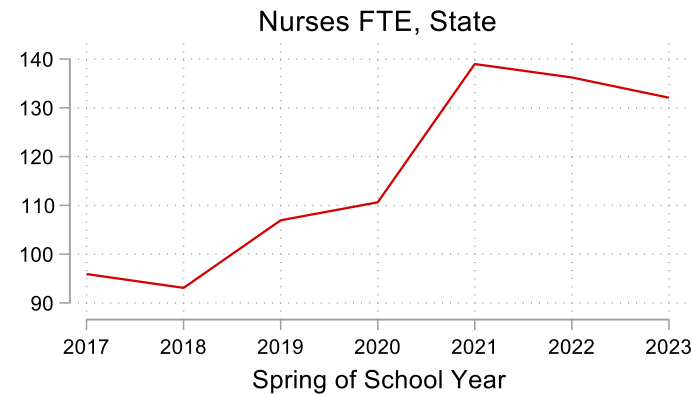
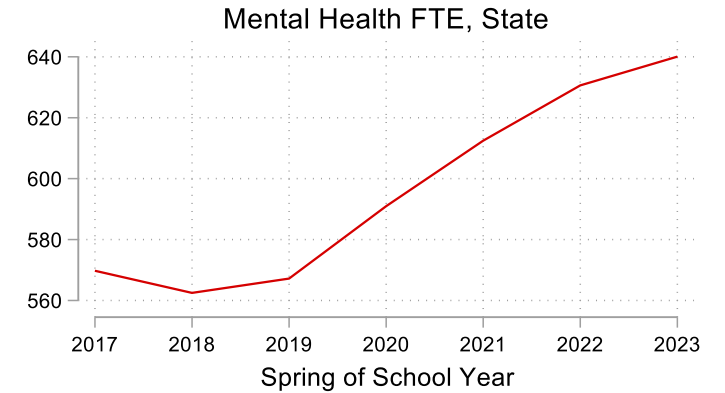
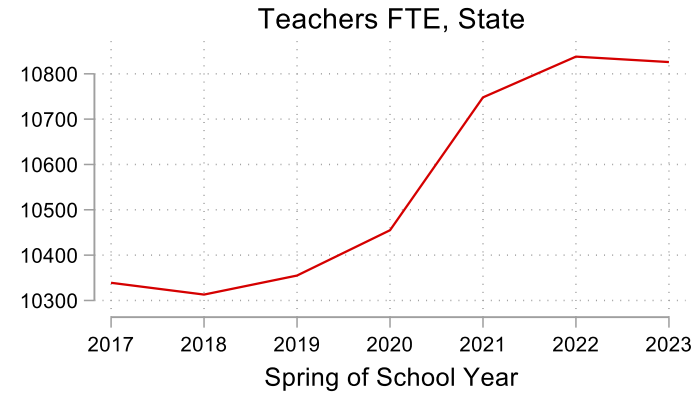
Expenditures rose for instruction and support services but fell for other areas.



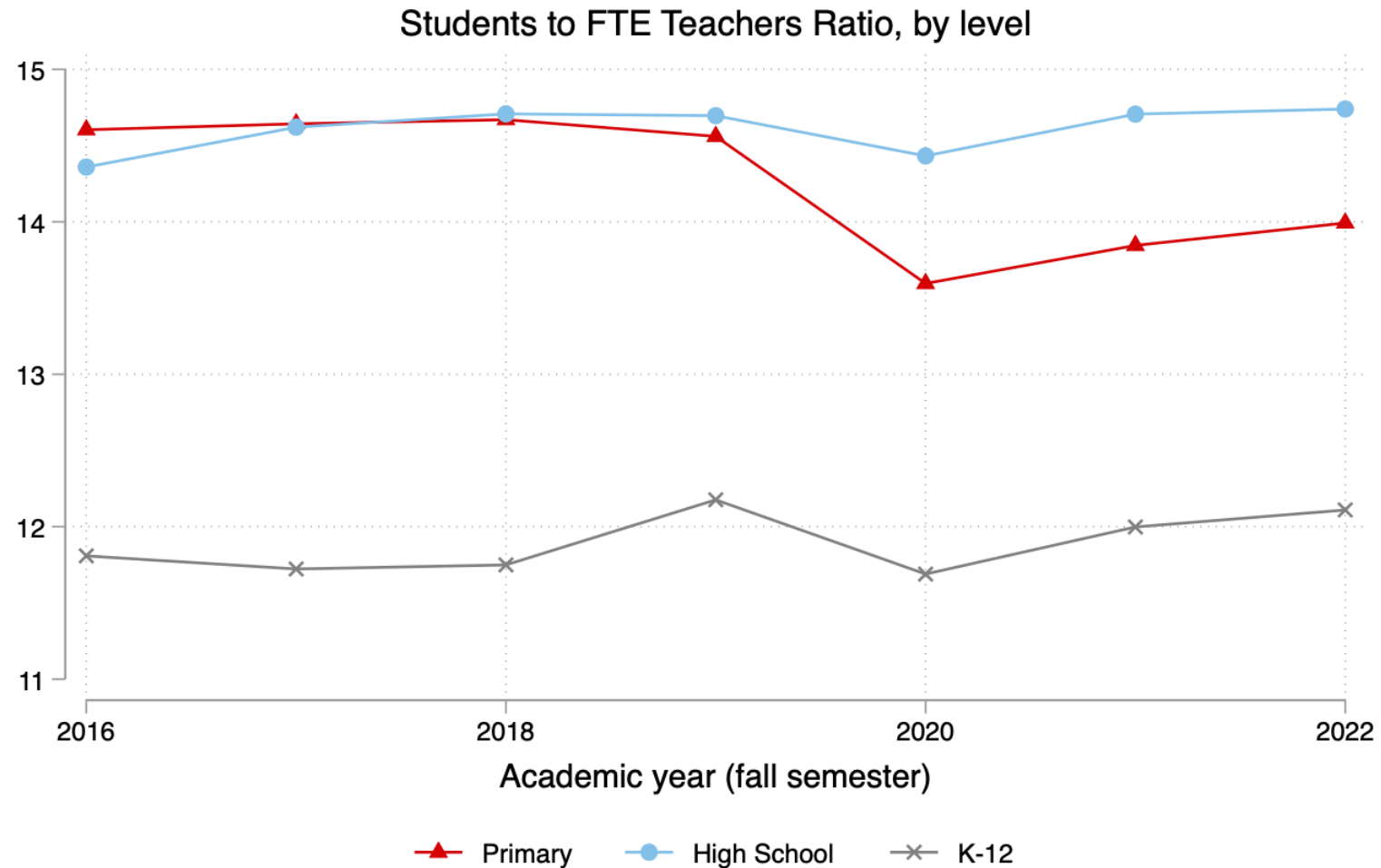
Districts rapidly added teachers, mental health professionals, nurses, and instructional aides (esp 2021-2022 AY).



Trends in Staffing

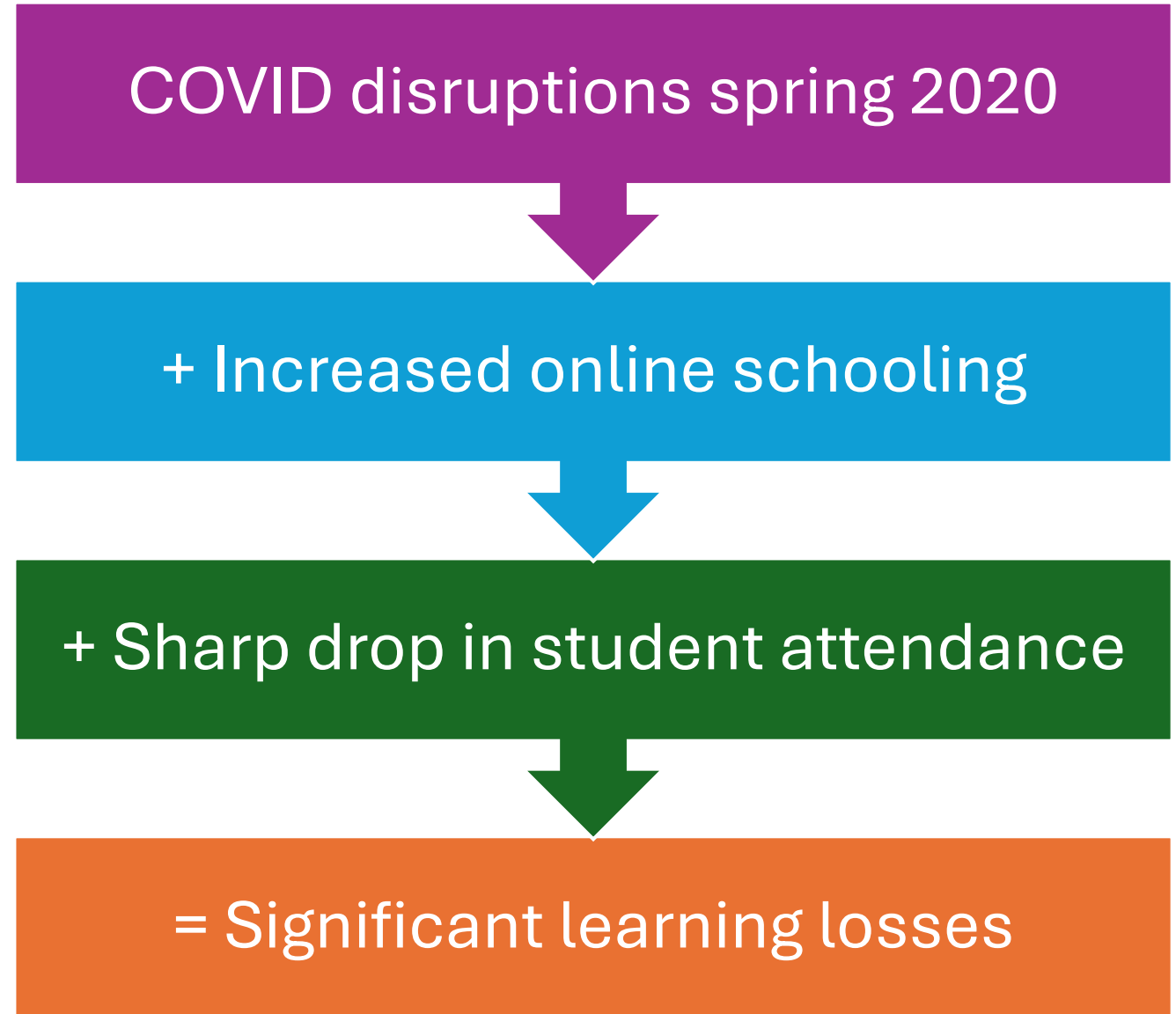


Student to FTE teacher ratios fell, particularly in elementary schools.

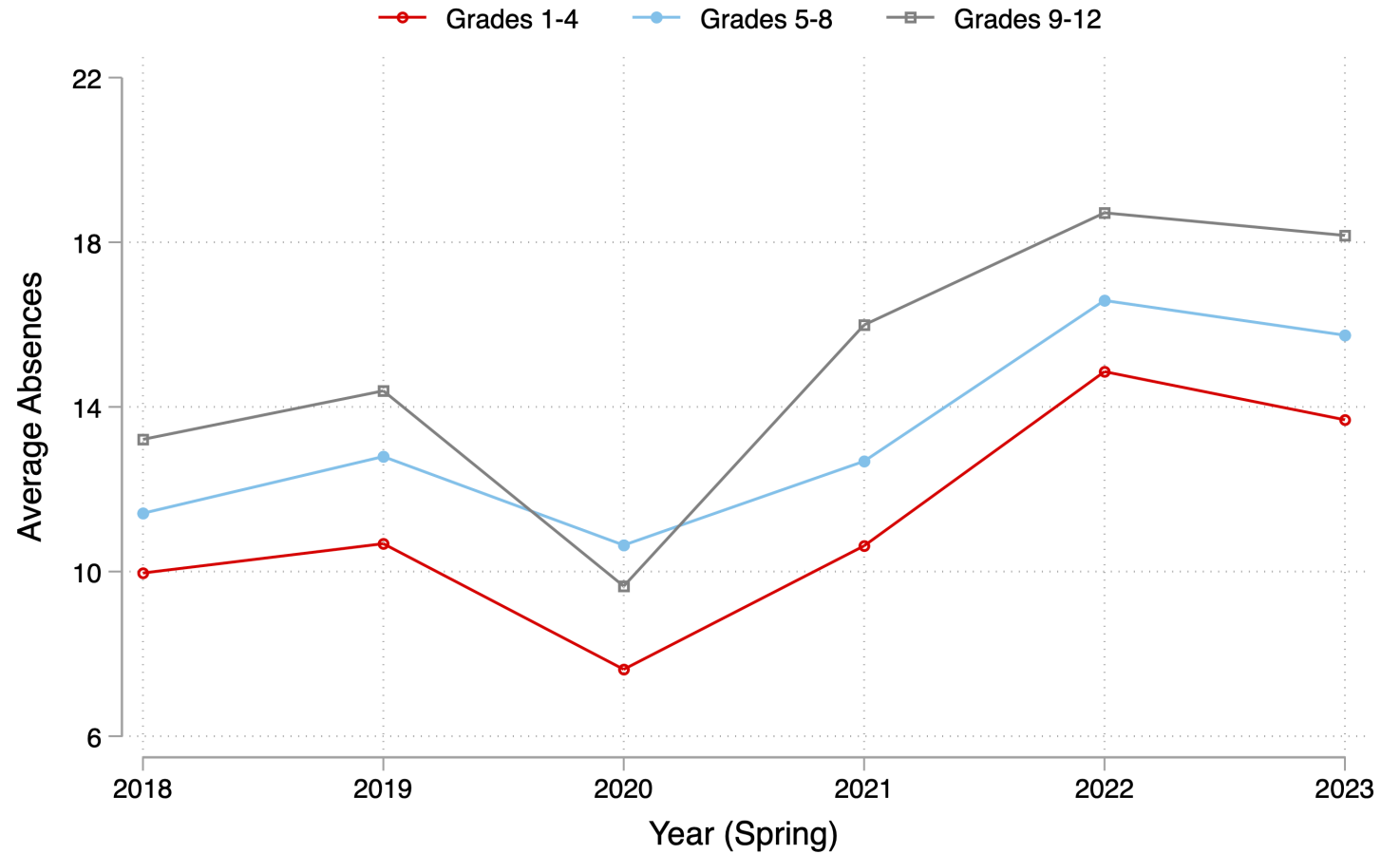


What was the impact of the spending?

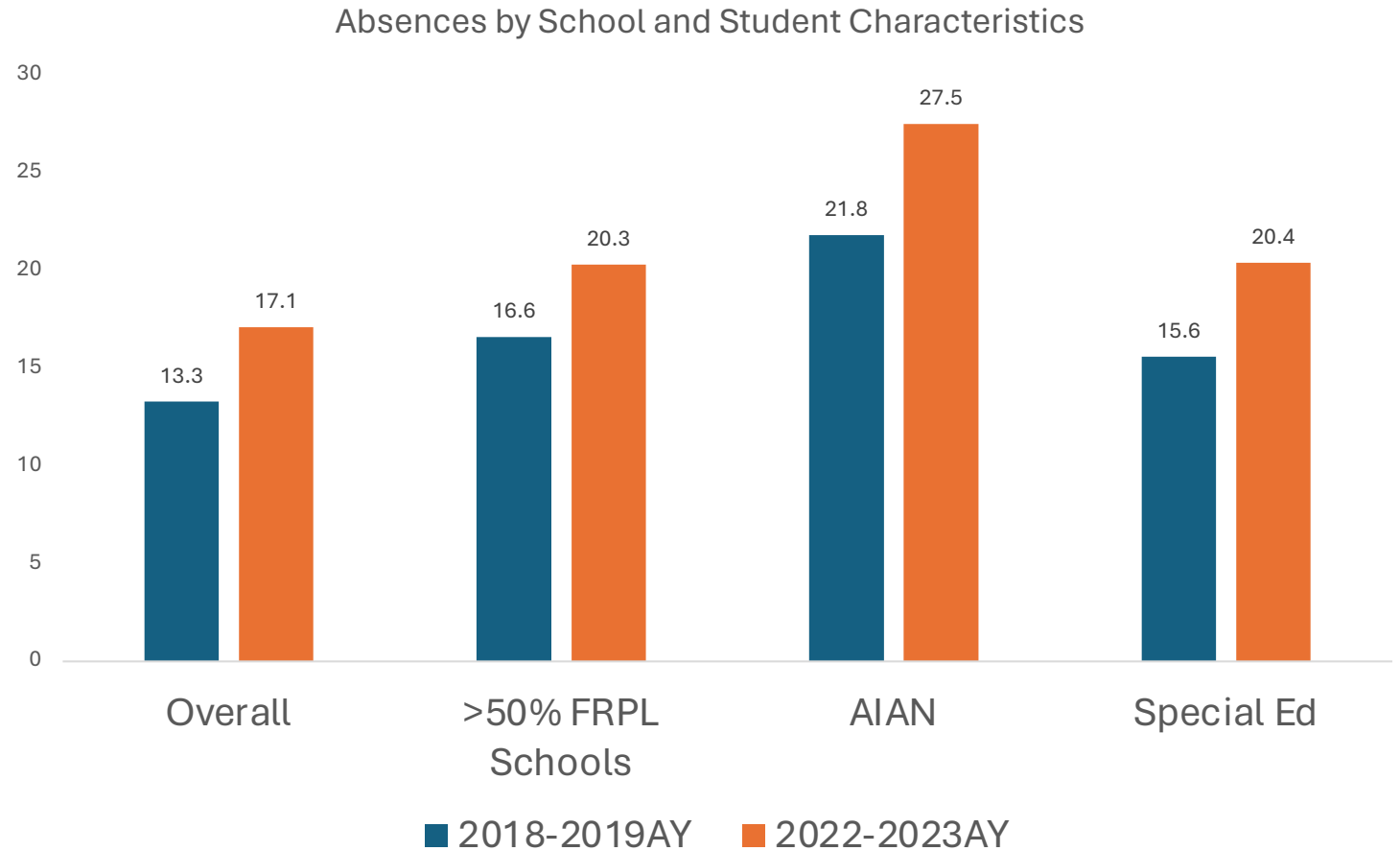
The education context matters!



The pandemic brought a sharp and persistent decline in student attendance.



High School absences particularly increased for the most vulnerable students from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

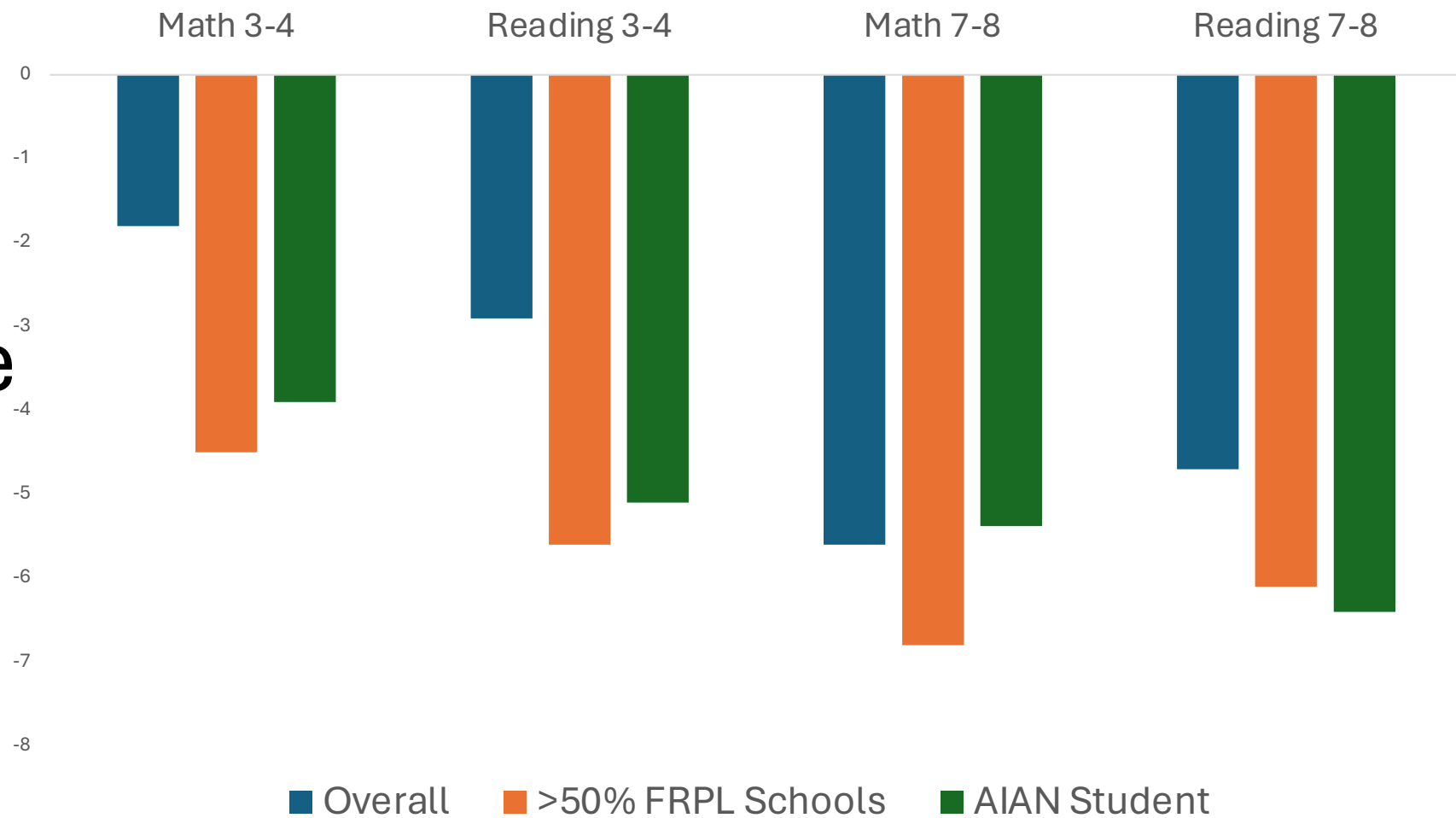


Learning losses were significant, but show some improvements by 2023



COVID learning losses were greatest for the most vulnerable students.

Percentage Point Decline in Percent Proficient by Group

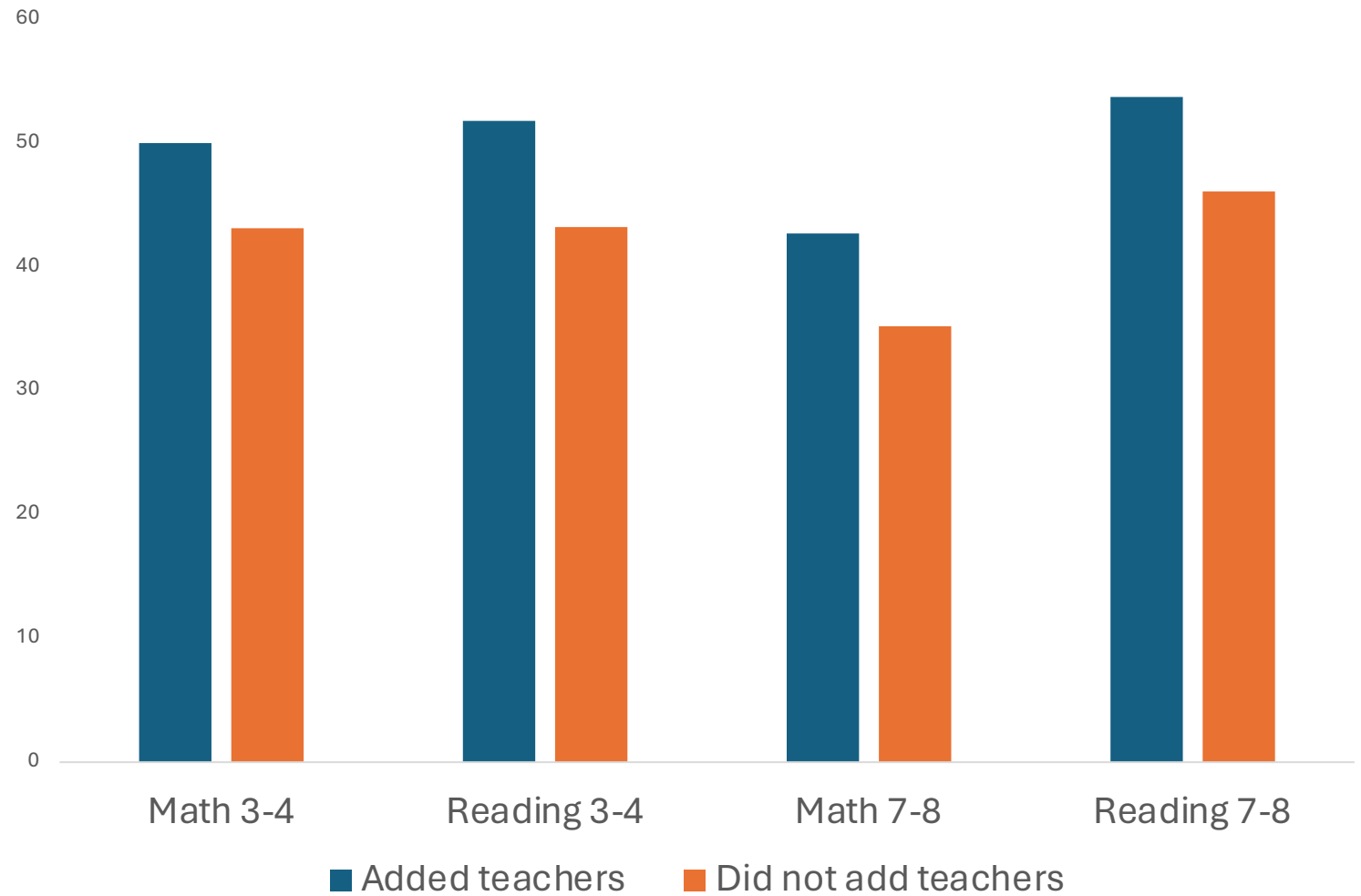


How did the
style of ESSER
spending
correlate with
learning losses?



2019: Schools that Added Teachers during COVID had Higher Proficiency pre-COVID

Percent Proficient, Schools that did and did not Add Teachers



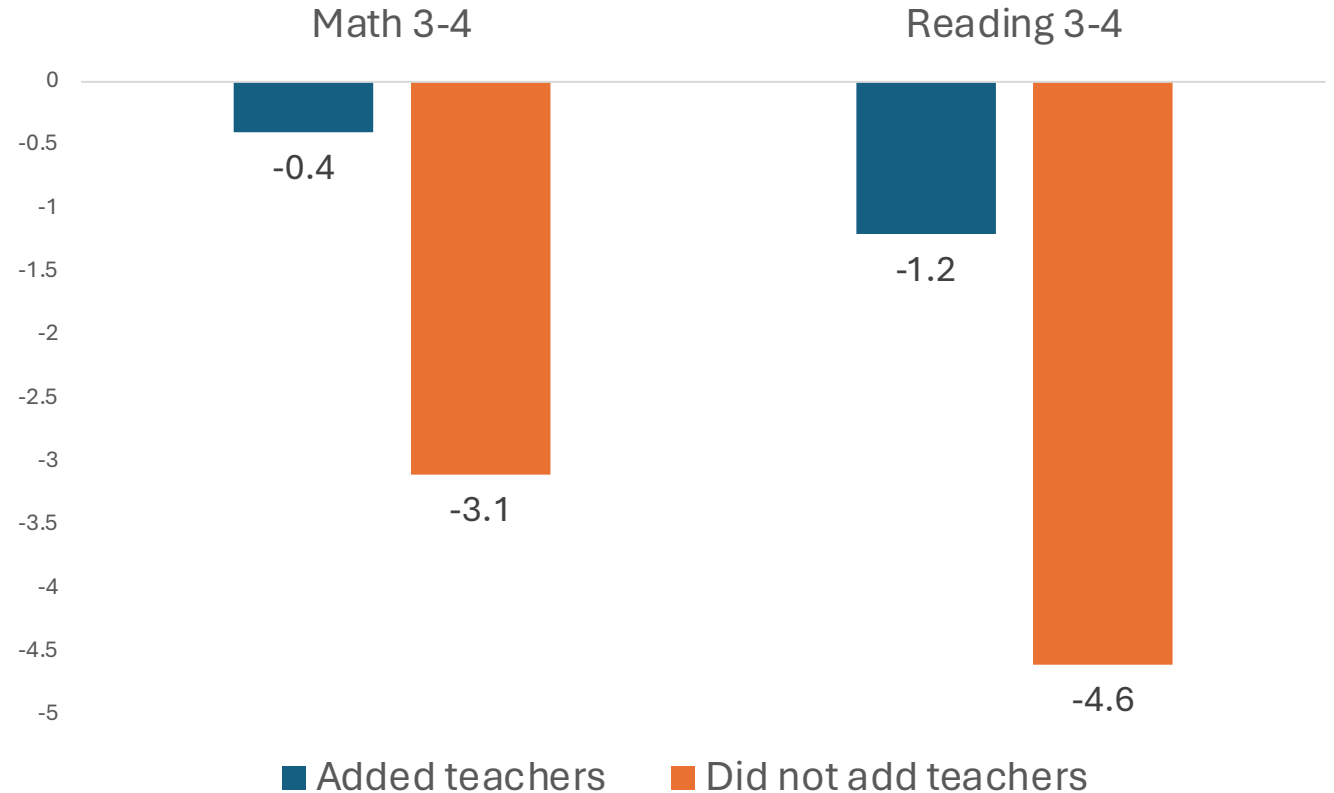
By 2023,
schools had
different
trajectories



→ Elementary schools that added teachers mostly returned to pre-pandemic levels.

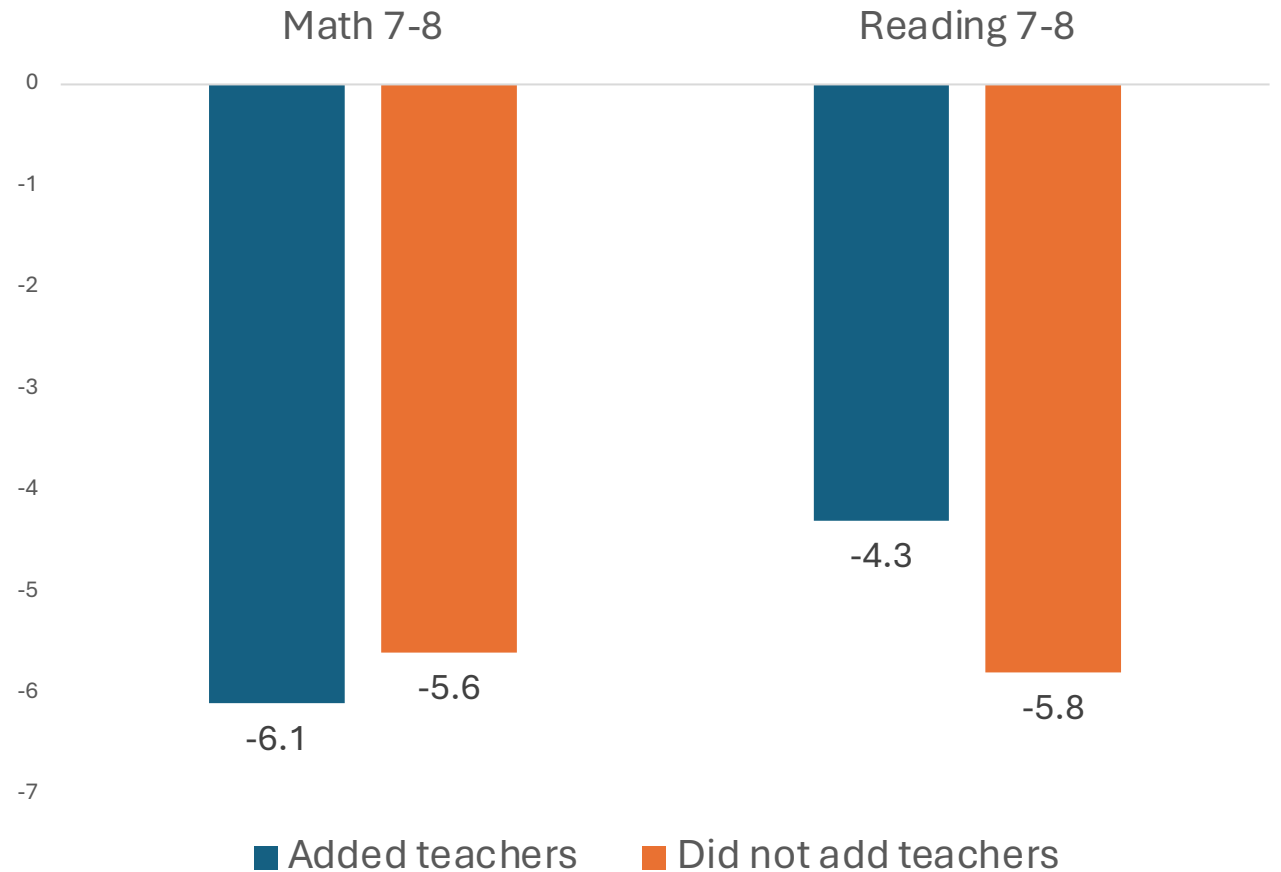
→ Elementary schools that were unable to add teachers continued to lose ground.

2019-2023 learning losses in schools that did and did not add teachers



Middle schools struggled more to rebound, potentially related to smaller reductions in class sizes than elementary schools.

By 2023, learning losses were smaller in schools that added teachers



Districts unable to add teachers had other significant needs



Some districts spent the ESSER aid on immediate health-related facility upgrade needs.

- Updating HVAC
- Mold removal
- Asbestos mitigation
- Replacing carpet with easier-to-clean flooring



Other districts may have had difficulty hiring in tight labor market conditions.



These problems were isolated to a smaller set of districts. Aggregate statewide capital, operations, and maintenance spending did not substantively change.

Districts that added teachers tended to be those already starting with higher proficiency levels



This highlights how unmet health-related infrastructure needs may be related to lower performance.



Research shows impacts of health-related infrastructure on long run student performance. In the short run, these high-need districts may not have been able to spend as much on instruction to mitigate learning losses.

Policy Recommendations



Do regular health and safety-related school **facility assessments**.



Fund **health-related upgrades**.



Closely **monitor student proficiency**. Focus on schools and student groups that have not recovered from learning losses and for schools losing significant ESSER resources



Targeted support for schools with ongoing pandemic-related learning losses.



Monitor student attendance rates. Provide **support to increase student engagement**.

Thank you!



Contact us for more details



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