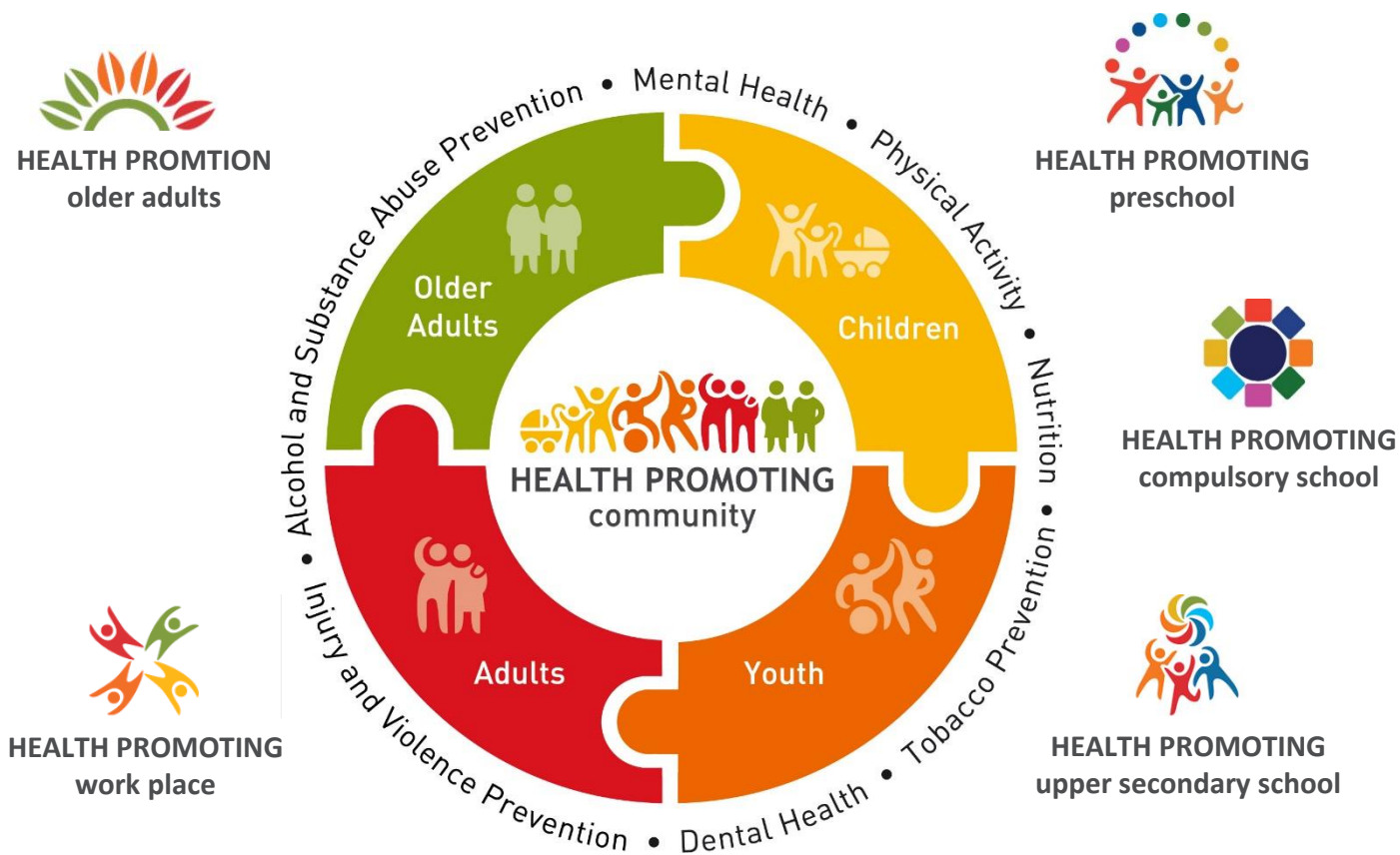# Health Promoting Schools in Iceland

Mental Health Promotion at Schools

Department of Public Health and Wellbeing
Directorate of Health in Iceland (DOHI)

Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir
SHE National coordinator Iceland
Program manager HPS

The Department of Public Health and Wellbeing
at the Directorate of Health in Iceland
is in charge of
the Health Promoting Communities and Schools
Comphrehensive, data driven, settings approach

Participation

93,5 % of the population in Iceland lives in Health Promoting Communities (municipalities)

Participation in HPS program:

- 33% of Preschools (age 2-5 years)

- 67% of Compulsory Schools (age 6-15 years)

- 100% of Upper secondary schools (age 16-19 years)

Health Promoting Schools

HEALTH PROMOTING preschool

HEALTH PROMOTING compulsory school

HEALTH PROMOTING upper secondary school

- **Municipalities run the Pre- and Compulsory Schools.**
- **State runs the Upper Secondary Schools**

Schools are provided:

➢ **Online information and manual**
➢ **Online working area** (www.heilsueflandi.is)
➢ **Guidance, checklists and support**
➢ **Teaching materials and working tools**
➢ **Workshops and conferences**
➢ **HPS Sign - Posters and/or Flag**

After base-line
➢ **Schools choose themes from the check-lists to work with as an action plan**

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Check-lists - heilsueflandi.is

One of the check lists are on **Mental Health Promotion (Geðrækt)**

- Schools draw Base-line
- Prioritise – one check list is chosen to work with during the school year
- Actions are chosen from the check list and progress is listed

According to recent data

- Fewer Upper Secondary School students (16-19 years) assess their mental health as good than before (especially girls).

- Fewer students (13-15 years) in Compulsory Schools also assess their mental health as good than before (more girls than boys).

The trend has been for some time that students are assessing their mental health worse than in previous years, but the jump is considerably more now than in recent years.

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So, what else are we working on
in Iceland to **improve mental health**
at all school-levels?

Icelandic National
Mental Health Policy and
Action Plan 2016-2020
with a special focus
on all schools

Youth well-being

The school as the venue for mental health promotion, prevention and support

Sigrun Danielsdottir, Cand.Psych, M.Sc

Project Manager for Mental Health Promotion

Directorate of Health, Iceland

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- There are two things that are important to keep in mind when we talk about mental health promotion.

- Mental health is not created by the health care system – it is protected and repaired by the health care system, but it develops in our everyday lives, in our families, our schools, workplaces, simply where we work, live and play.

# #1: Mental health is created in everyday life settings

#2: The foundation for good mental health is developed in youth

Why schools?

- Schools are considered an optimal venue for youth mental health promotion and prevention because this is <u>the only</u> venue where all children and adolescents in society can be reached

- Difficulties in behavior, emotional and social skills negatively affect learning *at an individual level*

- Bullying and behavior problems negatively affect learning and school climate *at a school level*
  - Contribute to lower job satisfaction, staff turnover and burn-out

School mental health promotion is not about turning schools into mental health institutions or taking over the role of the health care system, it is about teaching children and adolecents the skills that they need to have a productive and enjoyable life.

Health in the River of Life
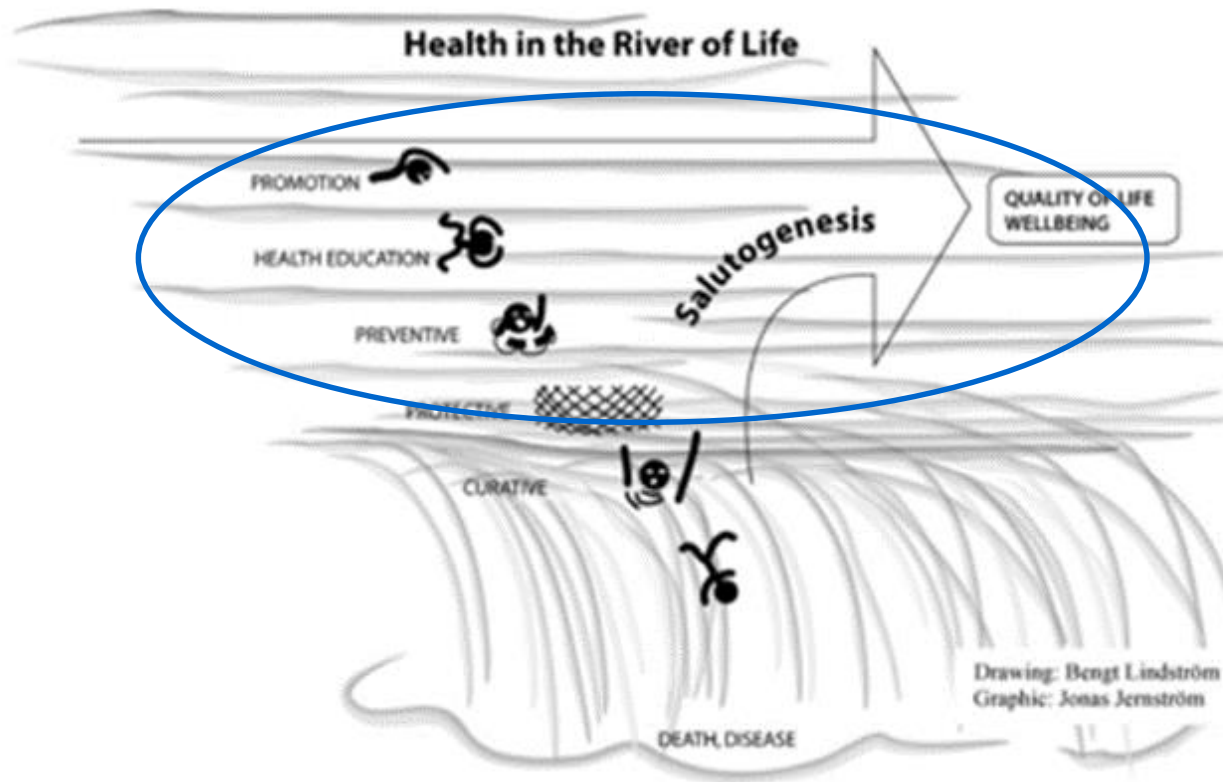
According to Antonovsky, it is not enough to promote health by avoiding stress or by building bridges keeping people from falling into the river. Instead people have to learn to swim (Antonovsky, 1987).

- It is in everyone's interest to pay attention to children's emotional health and teach children the skills and habits they need to manage their feelings, behavior and social interactions.

- We are learning that social and emotional skills are indeed just like any other skills that can be taught, practiced and developed.

What is social and emotional learning?

- *Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.*
  - *Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*

There is much to gain

Meta-analyses including data from 370.000 children and adolescents from preschool to high school show universal SEL curricula to have positive and sustained effects on:

- Positive student behavior
- Social and emotional skills
- Academic performance (11-13% improvement)
- Alcohol and substance use
- Follow-up for 6 months up to 18 years

- Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

There is need for a structure, not only to ensures quality instruction
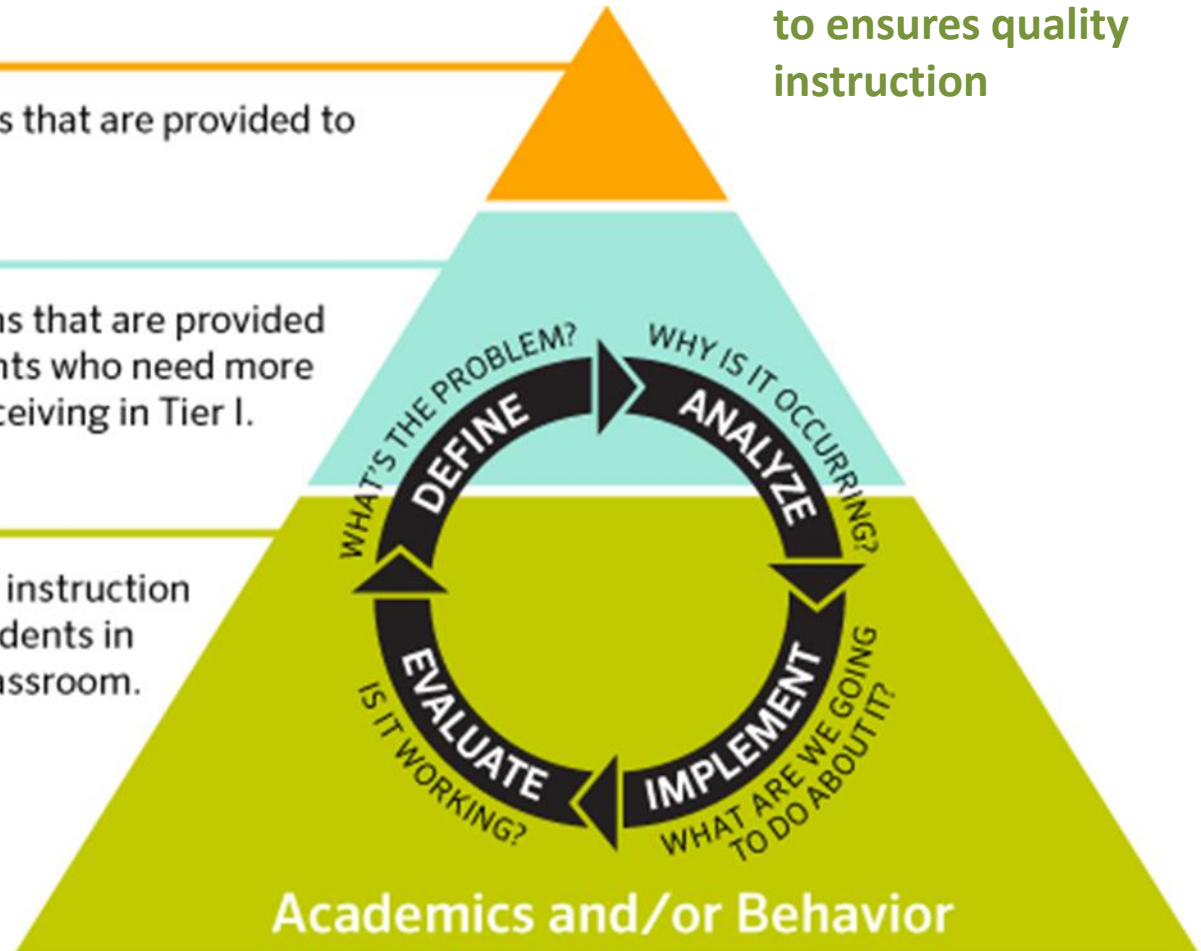
TIER 3 refers to the interventions that are provided to individual students.

TIER 2 refers to the interventions that are provided to small groups of students who need more support than they are receiving in Tier I.

TIER 1 refers to the high quality instruction that is provided to all students in the general education classroom.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? **DEFINE**

WHY IS IT OCCURRING? **ANALYZE**

IMPLEMENT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

EVALUATE IS IT WORKING?

Academics and/or Behavior

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Then we know:

- How important it is to teach these skills to children and construct schools in a way that they support children's wellbeing at all levels

A working group was formed as part of Iceland's National Mental Health strategy tasked with the assignment you can see in the following slides.

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National Mental Health Policy and Action Plan 2016-2020

- Working group for school mental health promotion
  - The Ministry of Health
  - The Ministry of Education
  - The Directorate of Health
  - The Directorate of Education
  - The Icelandic Teachers Association
  - The National Parents Association
  - The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
- Review current status of mental health promotion in Icelandic schools across educational levels
  - Are evidence-based practices being applied?
  - Are we meeting young people's need for support?

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Collaboration

Multi-disciplinary consultation groups across educational levels

National survey on school mental health promotion

- Scientific literature on school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention
- Available national and international guidelines, indicators for effective practice and resources

- Partisipation in survey:
  - 30 Upper Secondary schools (100%)
  - 118 Compulsory (primary) schools (69%)
  - 161 Preschools (68%)

The survey

Principals (head teachers) were asked to assign the task of responding to the survey to a group of teachers and specialist service staff so that the response from the school would be the consensus of a group of people within the school, who have a wide overview of how the school operates on a day-to-day basis. Responses were anonymous so everyone would feel secure in just giving an honest assessment of how things are. The purpose of this, is of course not to name and shame but to figure out, together, what needs to be done to better support schools in protecting and promoting children and young people's wellbeing, and how to do it.

For exemble:
- At our school we have developed a clear vision and policy on school mental health promotion, prevention and early support for students.
- At our school we are able to split students into smaller groups when needed.
- At our school, we regard negative behavior as opportunities to teach appropriate behavior with support and guidance.

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Key Components of School Mental Health Promotion

1. School policy and practices
2. School environment
3. Staff capacity building and support
4. Equality and participation
5. School connectedness
6. Social-emotional learning
7. Positive behavior support
8. Assessment and student support
9. Collaboration with other services
10. Collaboration with parents

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School policy and practices

- Does the school have a clear vision and policy on developing a learning community that supports student and staff wellbeing ?

- Is this vision reflected in everyday activities?

- Is there infrastructure in place (e.g. teams, defined procedures, etc) to support this work?

- Do school administrators regard it as their primary role to promote staff and student wellbeing?

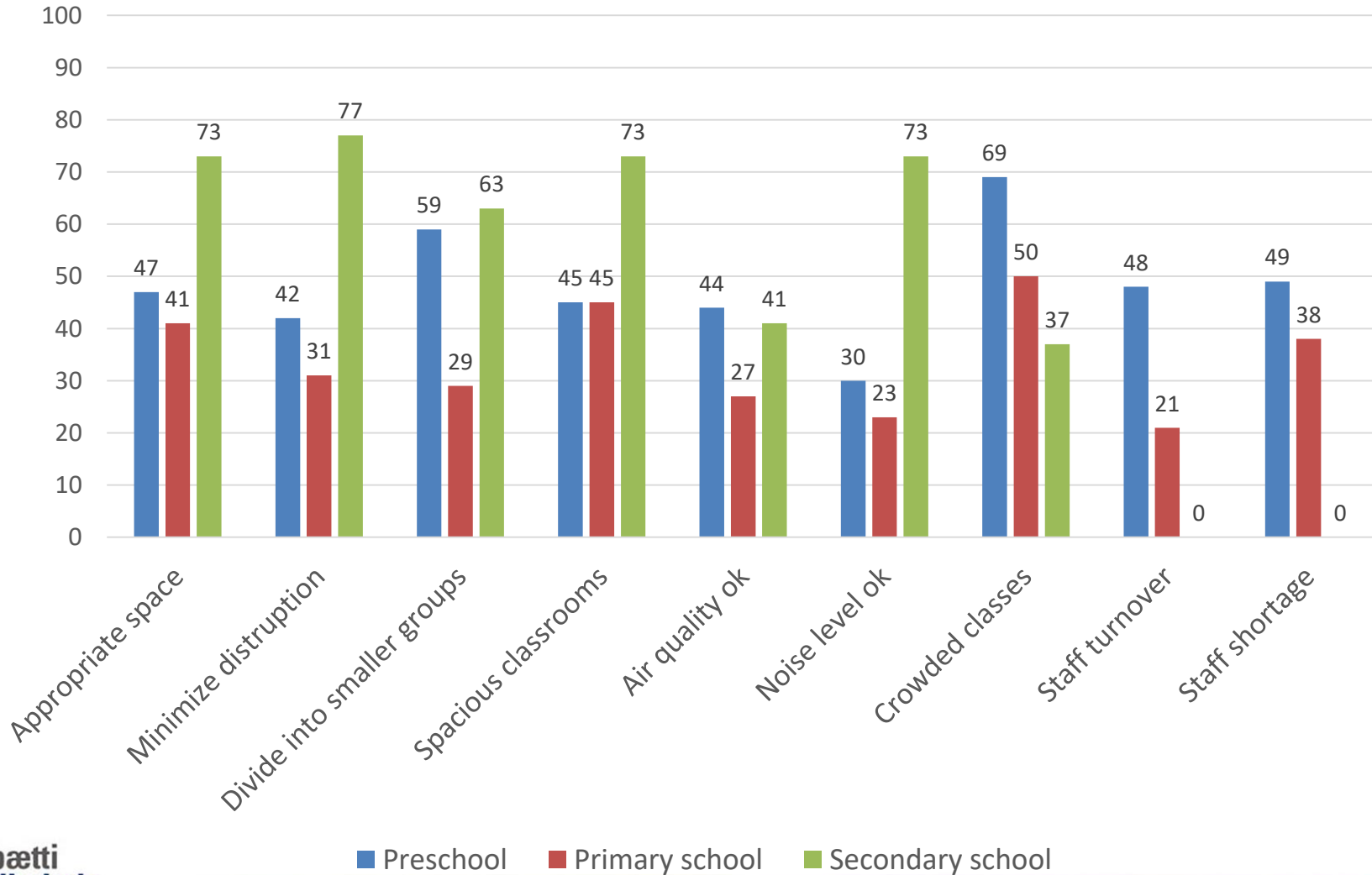- Do they foster a sense of staff collaboration and cohesion to support student wellbeing?

School policy and practices
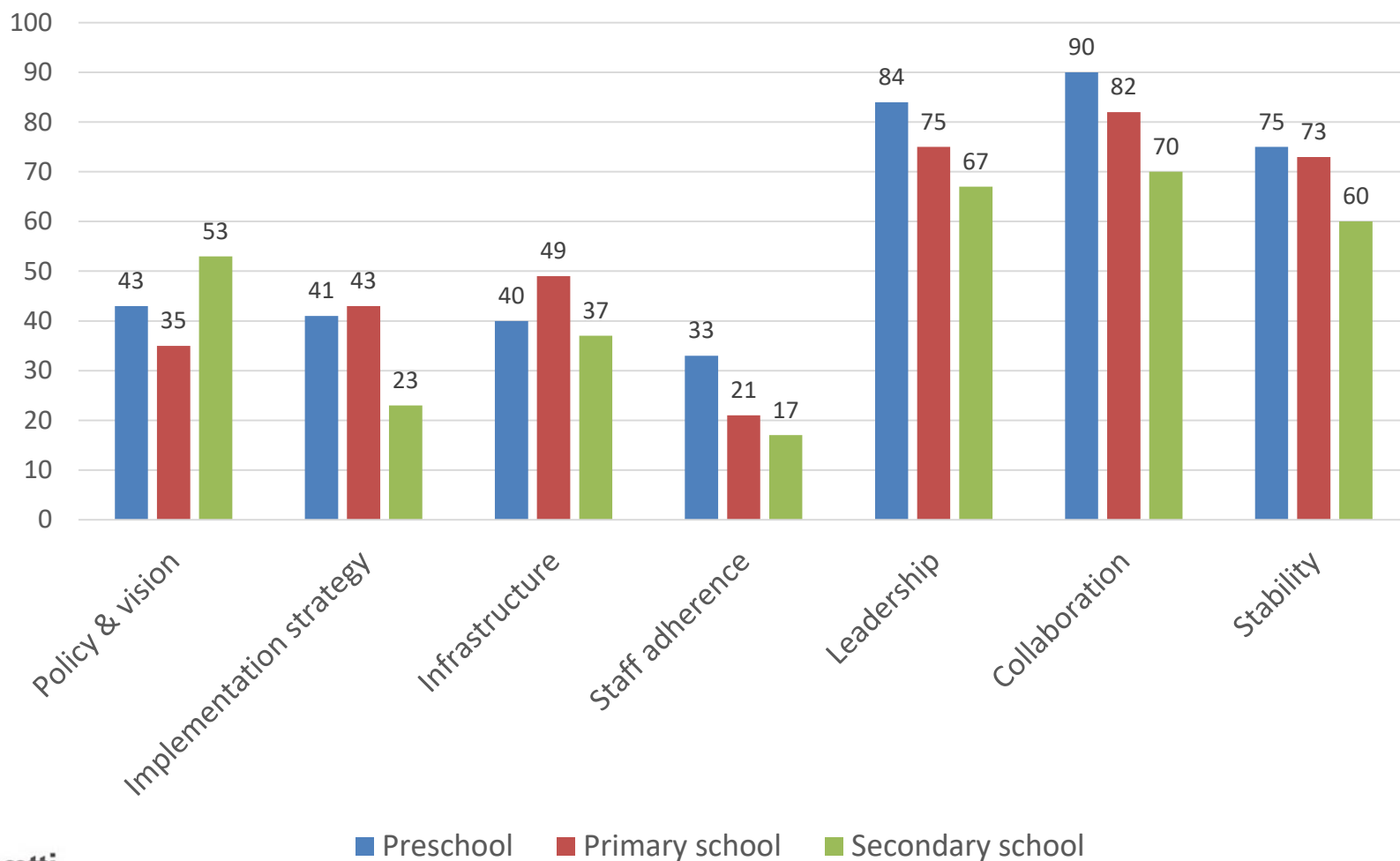
School environment

- How does the school environment support student learning and wellbeing?
  - Classroom space
  - Group size
  - Noise....
  - Stability
  - Staff turnover
 - Shortage of staff...

School environment

	Preschool	Primary school	Secondary school
Appropriate space	47	41	73
Minimize distruption	42	31	77
Divide into smaller groups	59	29	63
Spacious classrooms	45	45	73
Air quality ok	44	27	41
Noise level ok	30	23	73
Crowded classes	69	50	37
Staff turnover	48	21	0
Staff shortage	49	38	0

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Staff capacity building

- Does the school have a comprehensive long-term strategy for staff capacity building to support student wellbeing, positive behavior and social-emotional skills?
  - Regular training
  - Coaching and support
  - Continuing education
  - Speak the same language
  - Walk the talk…..

We Can Do It!

# Staff capacity building
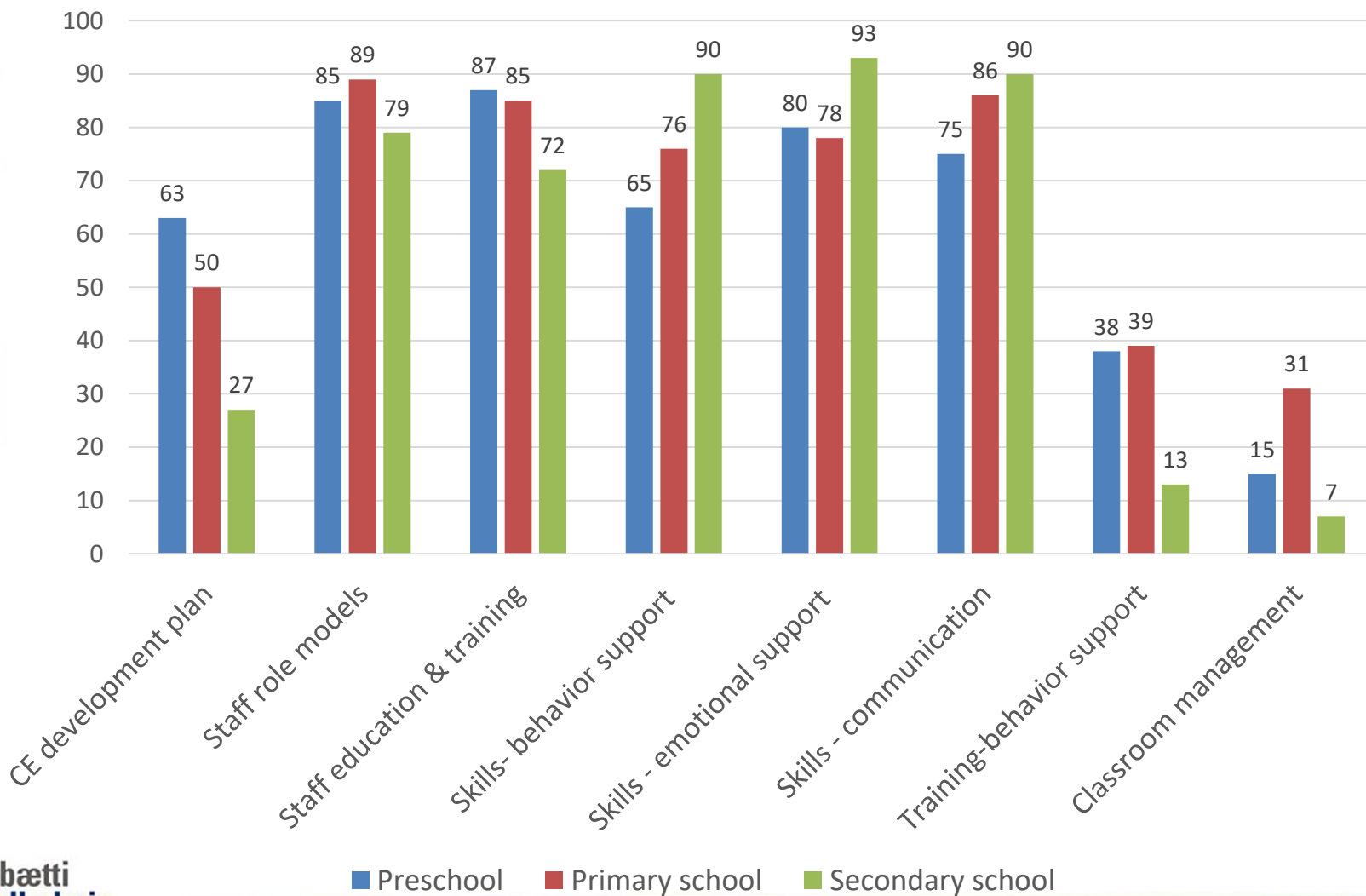
Equality and participation

- Is there room for everyone at our school?
- Does our school allow diverse students to flourish?
- Do school activities allow equal paricipation?
- Is there student democracy?
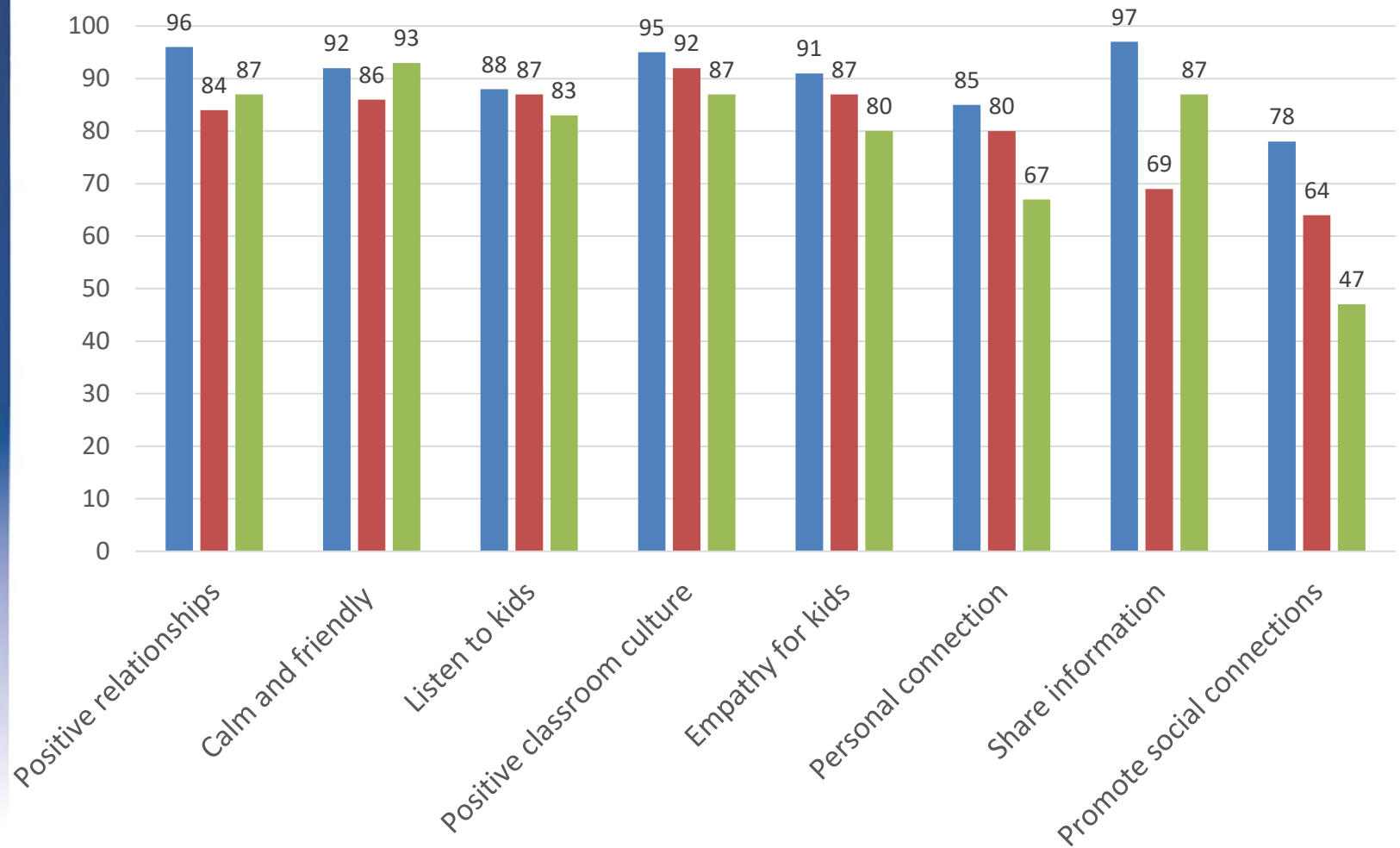- Do school activities and lessons teach and promote respect for diversity?

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Equality and participation
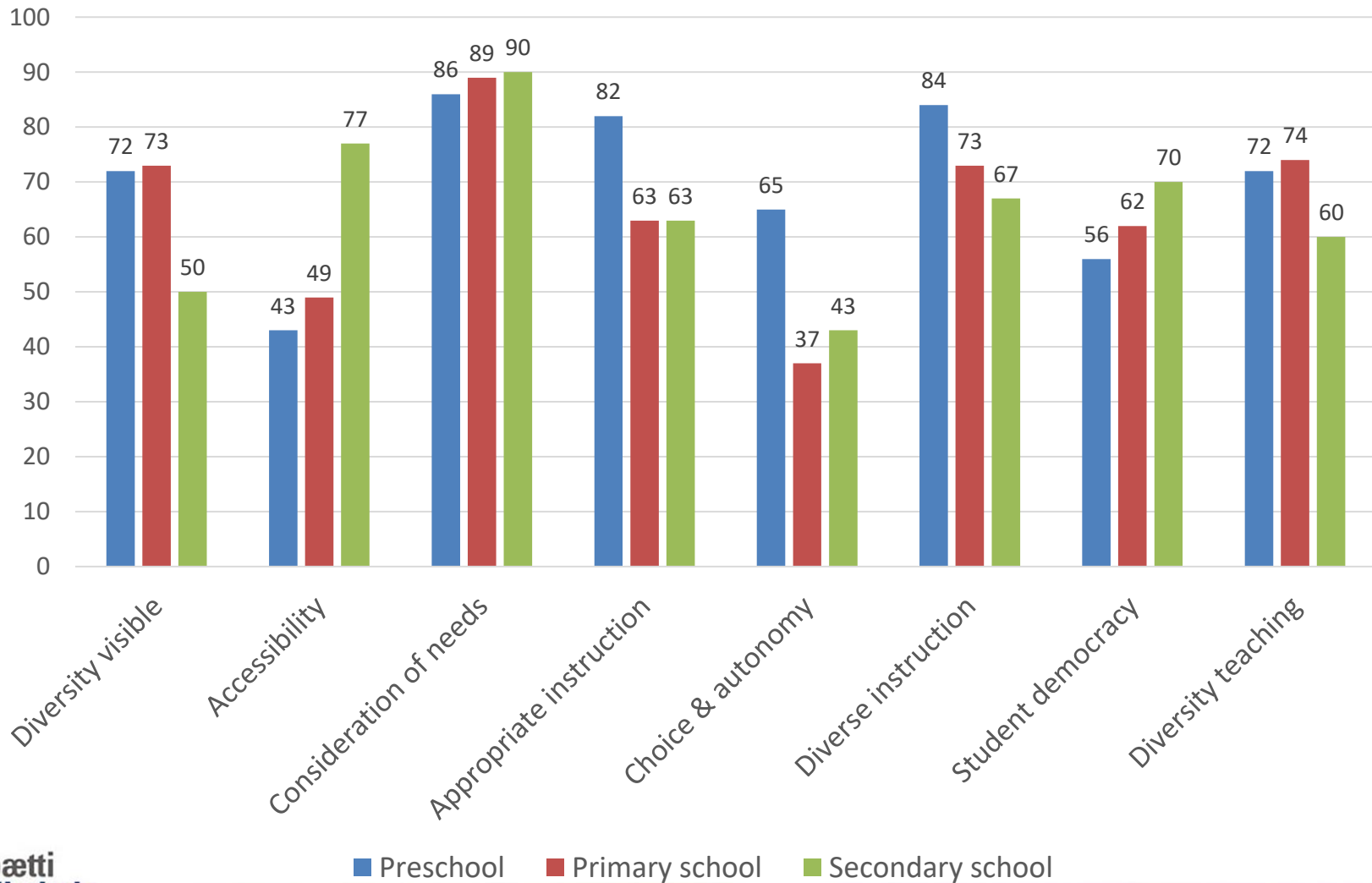
School connectedness

- Does the school make everyone feel welcome?

- Do school practices foster trust and positive relationships among students and staff?

- Are students respected and heard?

- Is school connectedness measured?

School connectedness

Social and emotional learning

- Are students consistently and systematically taught skills that promote
  - Behavior control
  - Emotional skills
  - Communication skills
  - Empathy and friendship
  - Resilience and coping
  - Problem solving and reconciliation
- Do teachers and staff model these skills?

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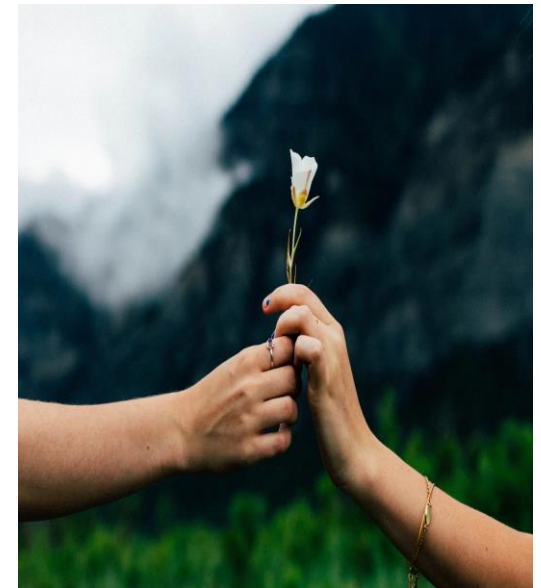
Social and emotional learning
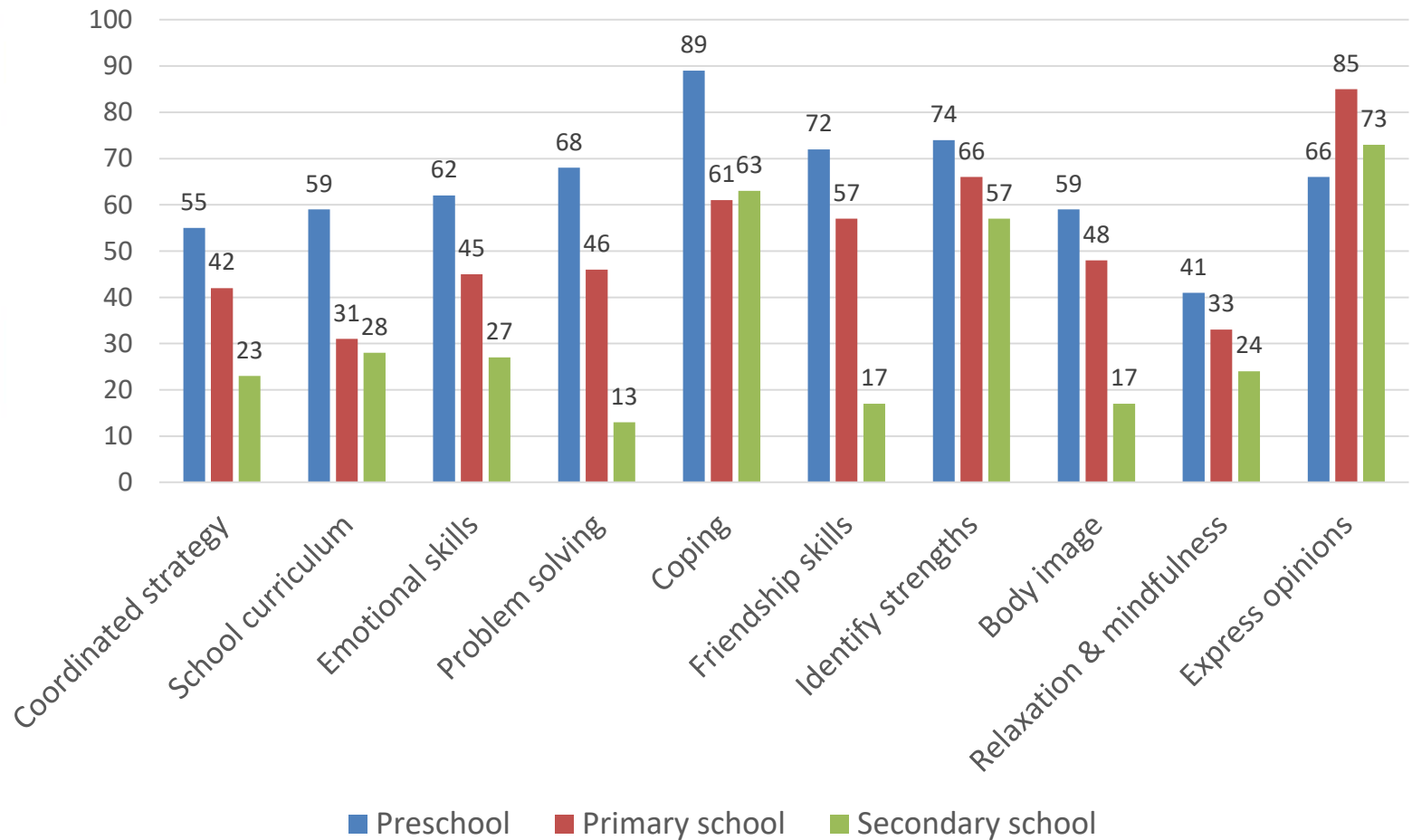
Positive behavior support

- Does the school have a behavior policy?
- Is it preventative or reactive in nature?
- Do staff receive training in implementing it?
- Are staff practices assessed and evaluated?
- Is positive behavior regarded as a skill?
- Simple, visual rules and messages
- Praise and encouragement
- Positive approaches to undesired behavior

Positive behavior support
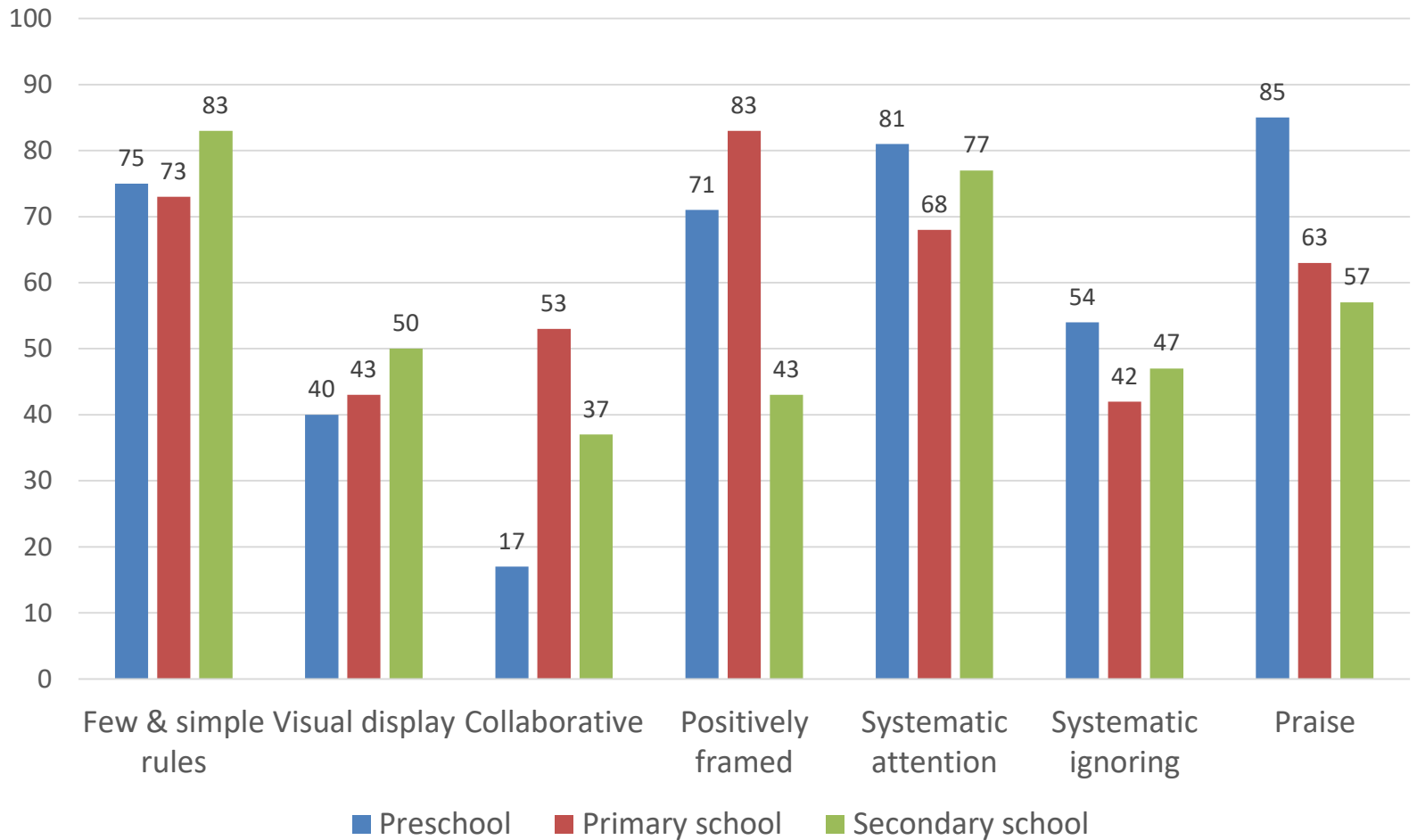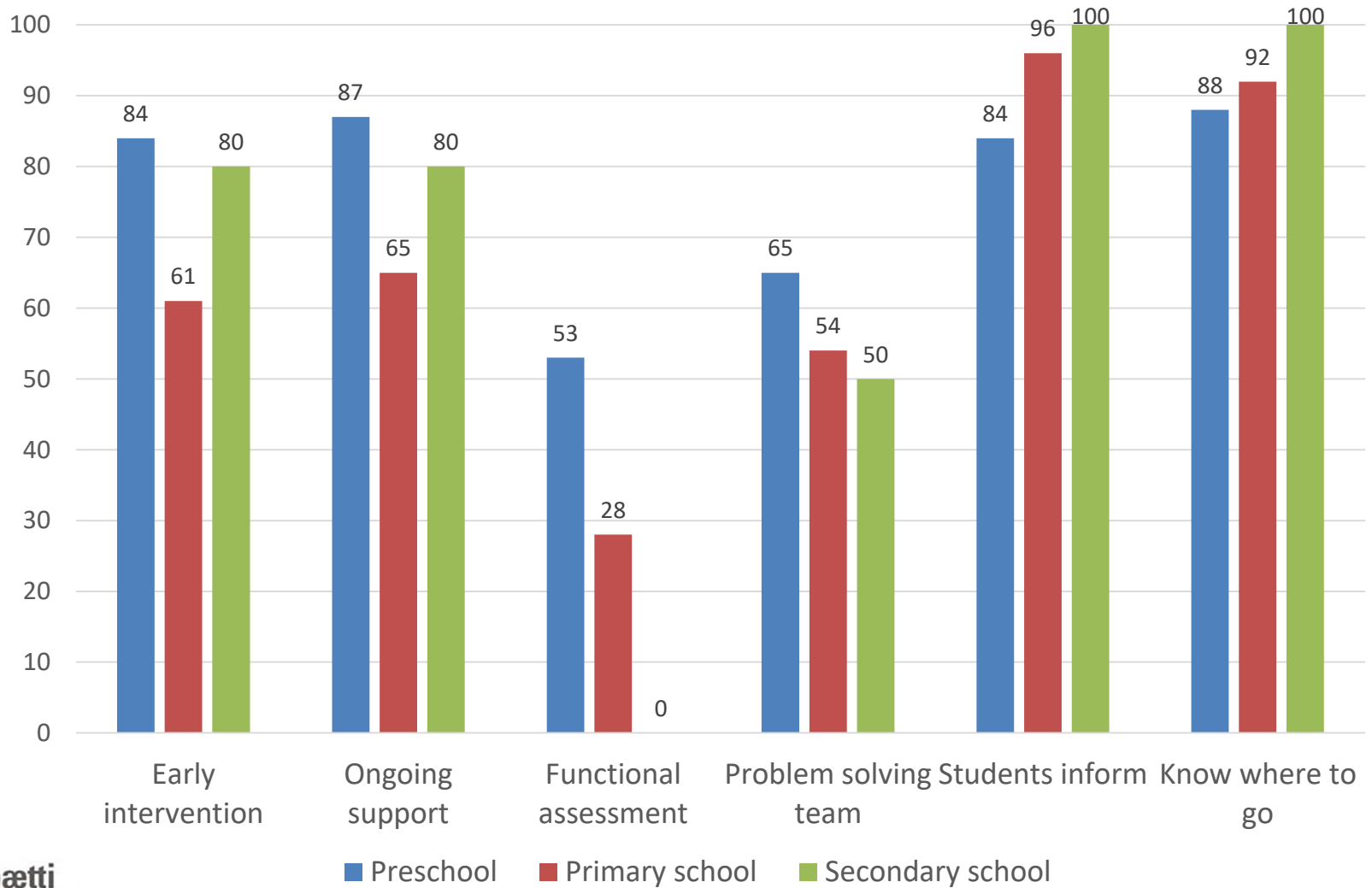
Assessment and student support

- Does the school regularly assess school climate and student wellbeing?

- Does the school use data in a systematic way to make decisions about mental health promotion, behavior issues, school climate etc.

- Does the school have adequate resources for early intervention and support for academic, emotional, behavioral or social difficulties?

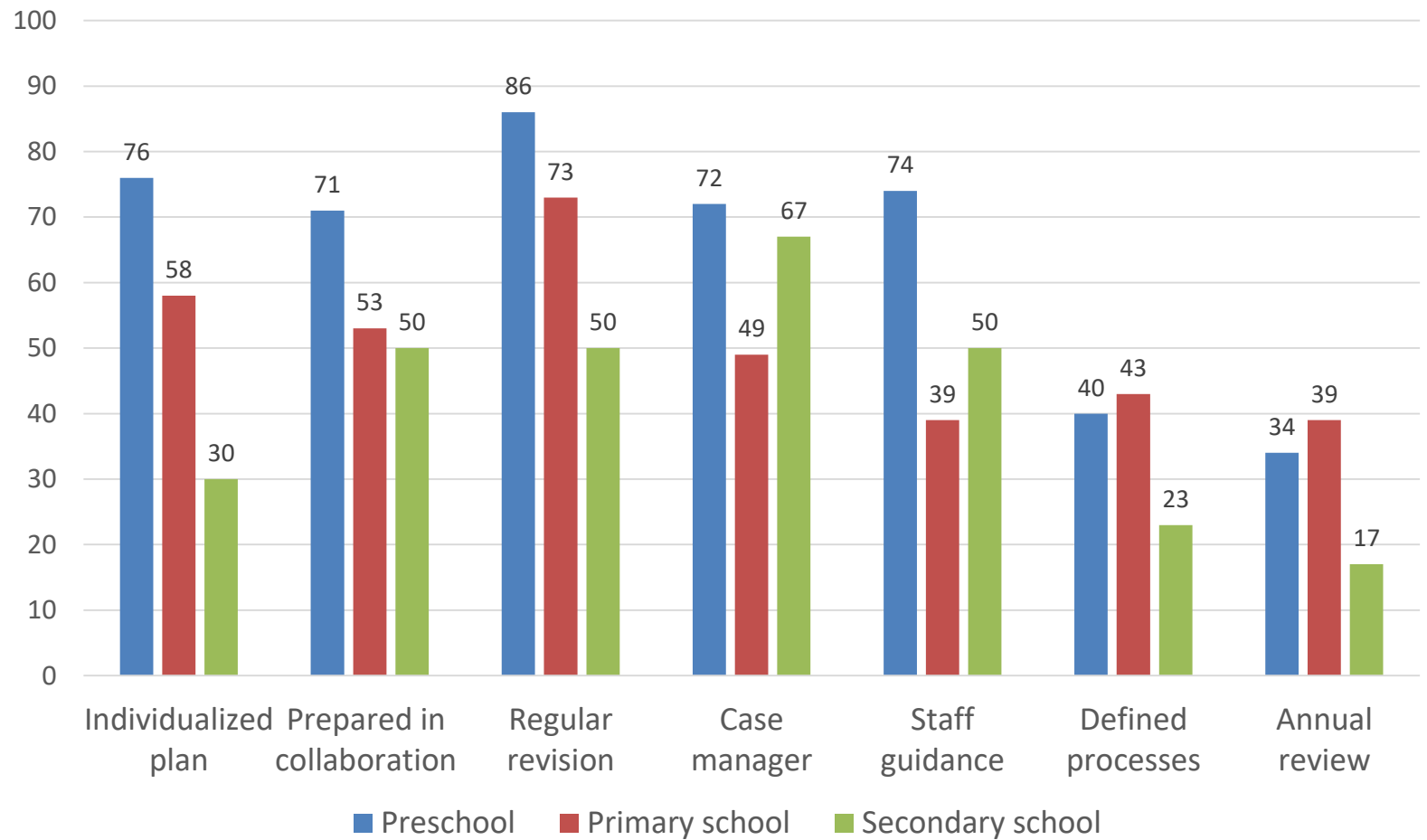- Are the clear procedures for referrals and staff reactions?

Assessment and student support
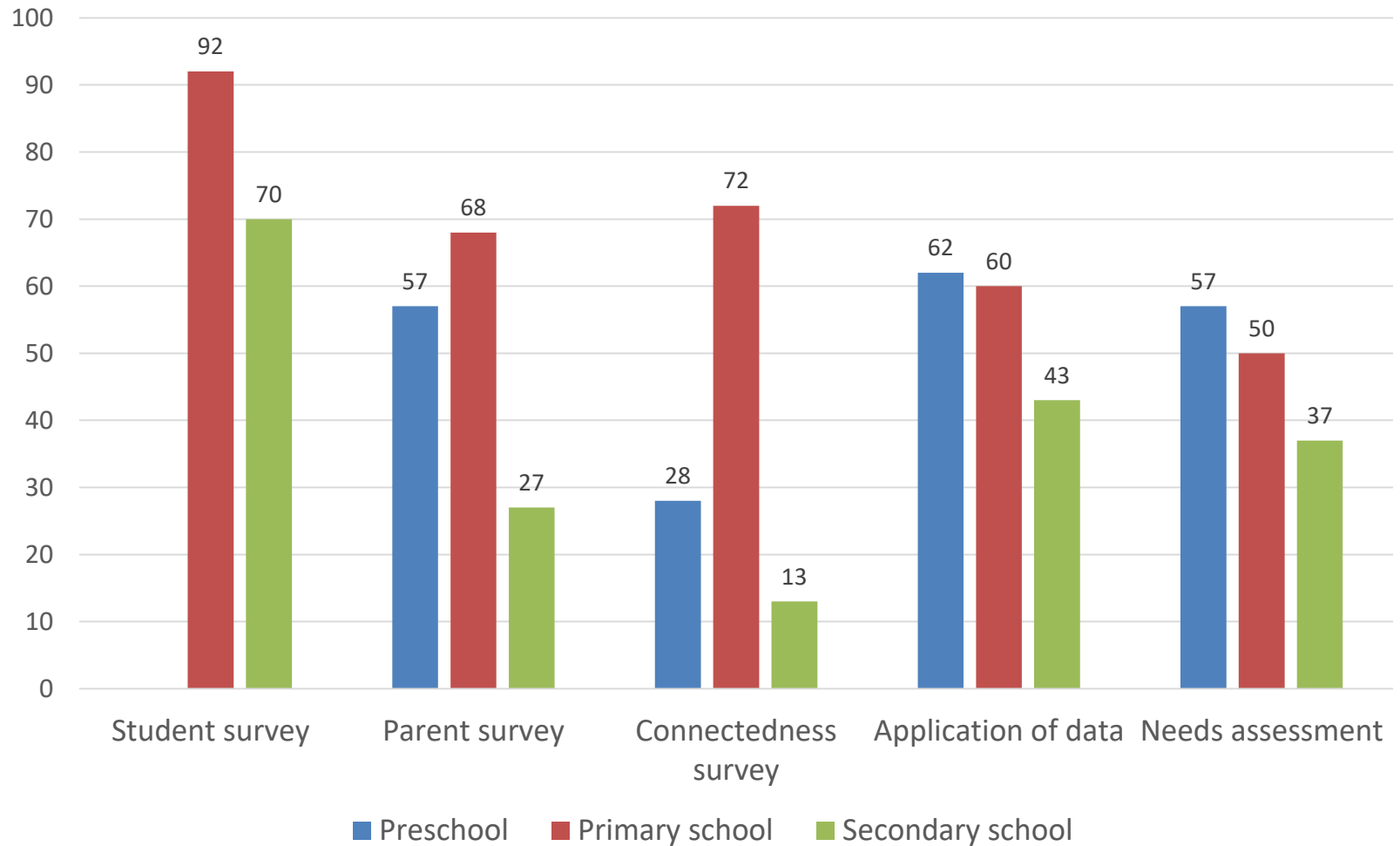
Assessment and student support
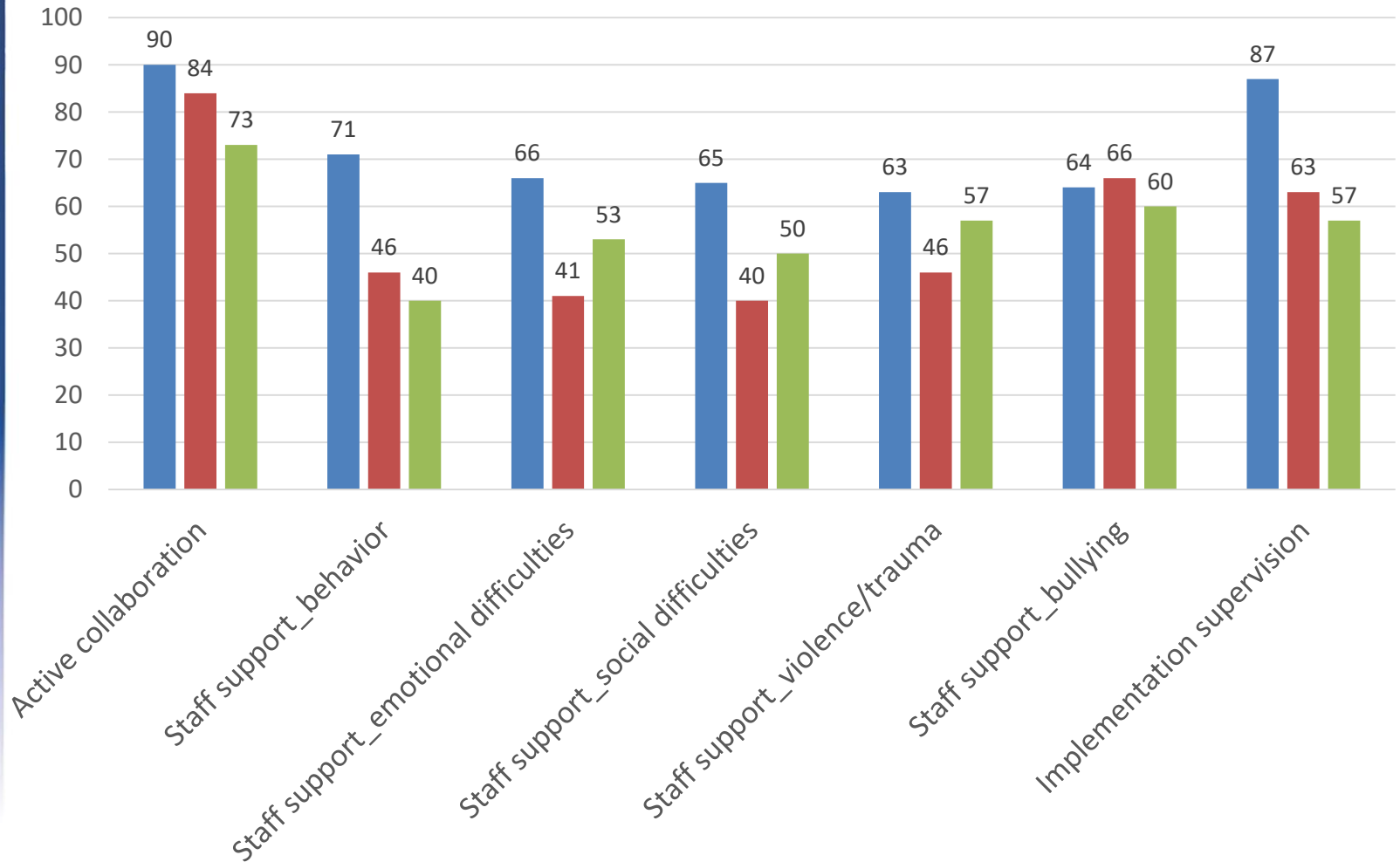
Assessment and student support

Collaboration with parents and services

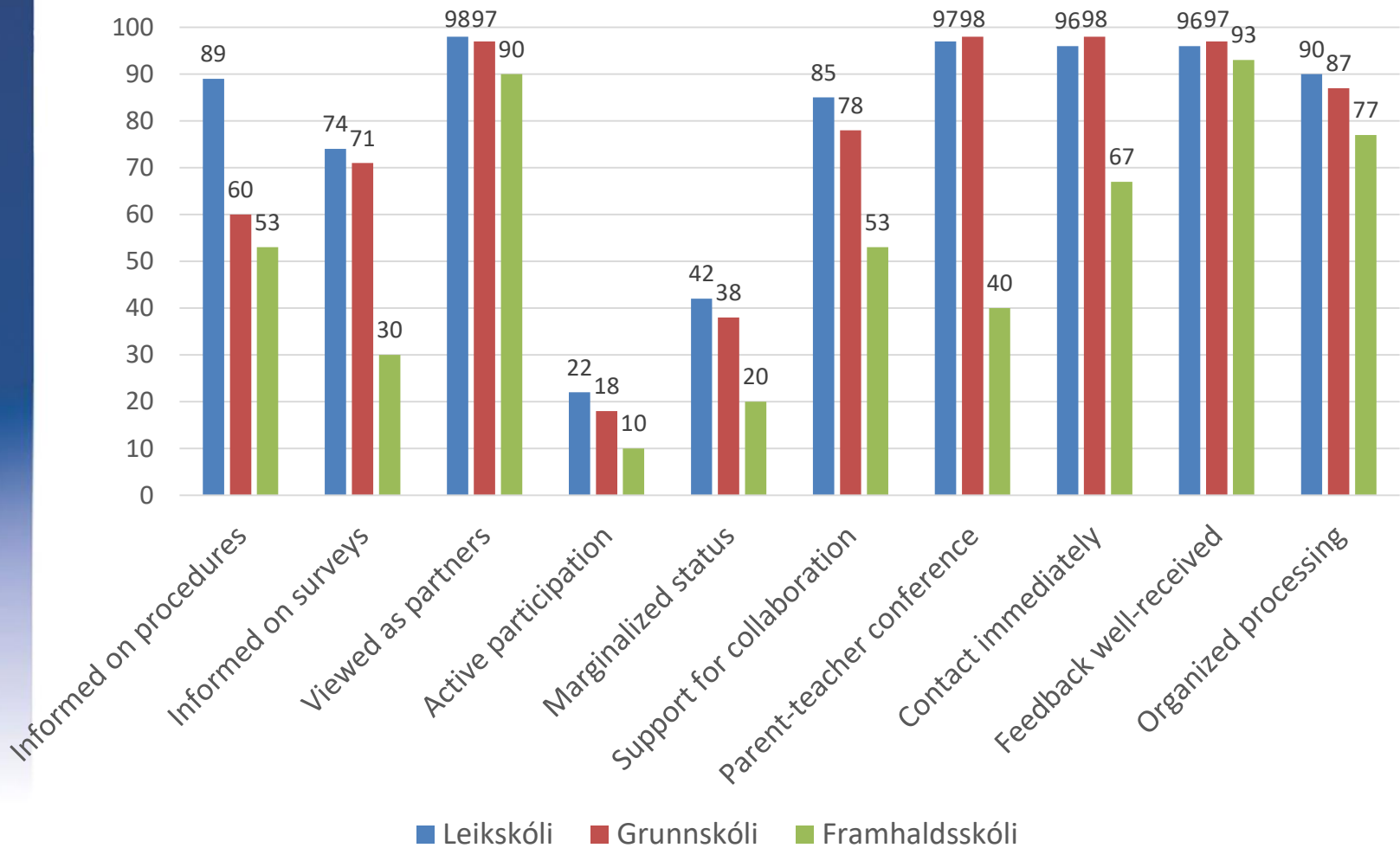- Does the school have easy access to tiered services to support student mental health and wellbeing (e.g. school services, primary health care, specialist services)?

- Do staff receive support according to need?

- Are there defined processes for implementing recommendations from other services regarding student needs?

- Is there active parental collaboration?

- Do parents participate in shaping the work?

Collaboration with services

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Collaboration with parents

Legend: Leikskóli, Grunnskóli, Framhaldsskóli

Categories: Informed on procedures, Informed on surveys, Viewed as partners, Active participation, Marginalized status, Support for collaboration, Parent-teacher conference, Contact immediately, Feedback well-received, Organized processing

Conclusions

1. Strengthen the **infrastructure** of the educational system to support youth mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention
2. Improve **school environment** in pre- and primary school
3. Systematic **capacity building** among staff to support positive youth behavior, emotional development, social skills and mental wellbeing
4. Foster **school connectedness** in upper secondary schools (16-20 yrs)
5. Implement **social and emotional learning** at all educational levels
6. Ensure evidence-based practices for **behavior support** in schools
7. Improve organization, provision and supervision of **student support**
8. Improve organization, provision and supervision of **staff support**
9. **Data-based decision making** and regular progress monitoring
10. Make better use of the strengths involved in **parental collaboration**, especially in upper secondary school

For this to happen

- Cross-sectoral collaboration is imperative
- Mental health promotion and prevention, by definition, reaches across sectors and systems
- **Youth affairs is everyone's affair**

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Thank you

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