Taking a system-wide approach to measuring the wellbeing of Australian school students

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Telethon Kids Institute
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Government of South Australia
Department for Education and
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Overview of the project

- Current indicators within the Australian Education System
    - Standardised tests of literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN)
    - School attendance and school completion rates
    - Rates of behavioural problems (e.g. suspension for fighting)

- Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians
    - *Confident and Creative Individuals* - individuals who have a sense of self-worth, confidence, self-awareness, optimism, resilience, empathy, respect for others and the skills to relate well to others, and to form and maintain healthy relationships.

- Need additional indicators to monitor progress towards these 21st century educational goals

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Student wellbeing indicators

- Social and emotional wellbeing assessed at school entry once every three years through the Australian Early Development Census (2009, 2012, 2015, 2018)

- No systematic collection of student wellbeing for older children/adolescents

- Some individual schools in Australia measure social and emotional wellbeing of their students
  - Most schools do not
  - More affluent schools have higher ability to fund wellbeing programs monitor student wellbeing
  - Different instruments are used across different schools and over time

Project aims

- To measure student wellbeing for *all* students (i.e. census) within the education system during the transition from primary to high school

- To provide all schools with information on their student's wellbeing and embed this data within the Department for Education's reporting frameworks

- To produce a series of indicators that can be used to track student wellbeing for different cohorts over time, and to monitor the impact of policies and programs on student wellbeing

- To link student wellbeing data to other administrative data within the Department for Education to answer key policy questions

Method: Student wellbeing instrument

- Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI)
  - Developed at the University of British Columbia
  - Designed to provide schools and communities with pragmatic data to inform practice

- The MDI provides information on five areas of children's lives
  - Social and emotional development
  - Connectedness to adults and peers
  - School experiences
  - Physical health and wellbeing
  - Use of after-school time

Method: Sampling and data collection

- 2013: Trial in four specific regions of South Australia
  - Trial in Year 6 students
  - 169 schools across four regions

- 2014, 2015 and 2016: Full census design
  - All primary schools and high schools across South Australia were invited to participate in the student wellbeing collection
  - Government, Independent and Catholic schools invited (Year 6-9)

- Data collection
  - On-line data collection system, students complete at school
  - Opt out parent consent procedures, active student consent procedures

Results

- **To measure student wellbeing for *all* students (i.e. census) within the education system during the transition from primary to high school**

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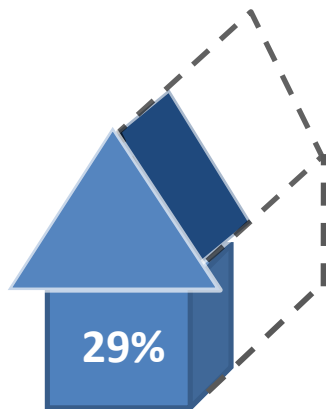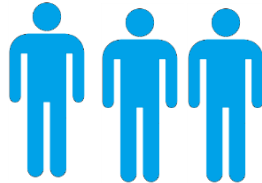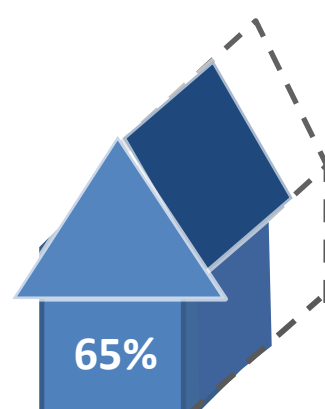
2013　2014　2015　2016

5,100 students　**17,600 students**　**29,500 students**　**43,000 students**

29%　**65%**　**89%**
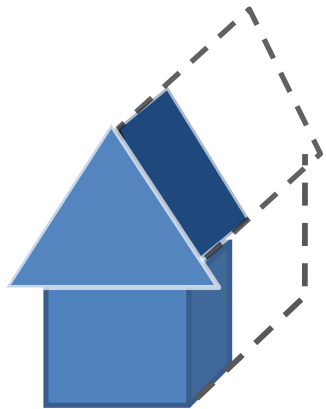
169 schools

153 government (29%)
26 Catholic (25%)
10 Independent (11%)
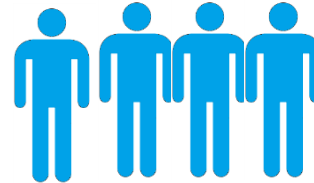
337 government (65%)
19 Catholic (18%)
12 Independent (13%)
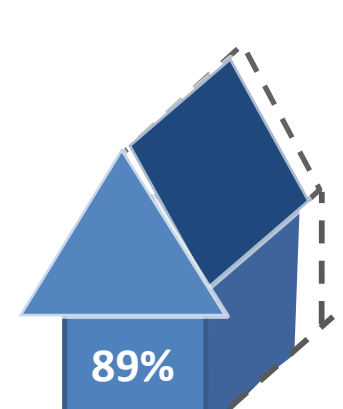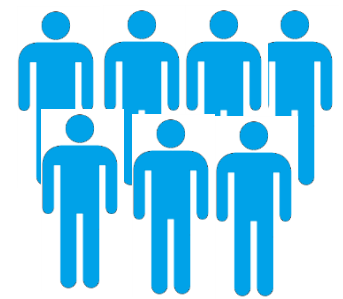
466 government (89%)
29 Catholic (25%)
8 Independent (9%)

Results

- To measure student wellbeing for *all* students (i.e. census) within the education system during the transition from primary to high school

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Results: School reports

Students' Wellbeing: Results from the Middle Years Development Instrument

MDI School Report

Government

MDI
MIDDLE YEARS DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT AUSTRALIA

Example

Year 6/7
(2014 cohort)

Key Demographics

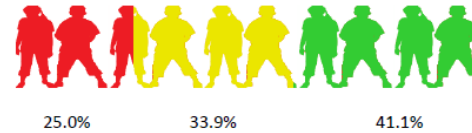SA cohort participation:
Year 6/7   8903

School participation: 54

Sex: Boys   29   (53.7%)
Girls   25   (46.3%)

Language spoken at home:
(More than 1 language can be selected)
Aboriginal: 0   (0.0%)
English: 53   (98.1%)
Arabic: 0   (0.0%)

2. Wellbeing in summary

The figures below summarise the wellbeing of students at this grade in your school.

Happiness

25.0%   33.9%   41.1%

Low	14	students
Medium	19	students
High	23	students

Optimism

32.1%   35.7%   32.1%

Low	18	students
Medium	20	students
High	18	students

Life satisfaction

21.4%   33.9%   44.6%

Low	12	students
Medium	19	students
High	25	students

Perseverance

26.8%   35.7%   37.5%

Low	15	students
Medium	20	students
High	21	students

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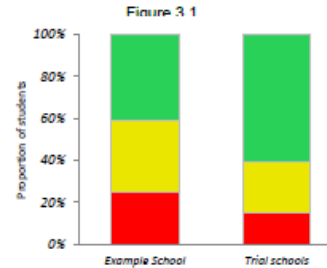TELETHON KIDS INSTITUTE
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Results: School reports

Stacked bar chart reflecting school results compared to all participating schools.

Questions for the construct included to provide direct insight into areas on which focus required.

Number and percentage of students.

Happiness

Figure 3.1

Optimism

Figure 3.2

		Your school		Trial schools	
		n	%	n	%
Happiness	High	23	41	421	61
	Medium	19	34	169	24
	Low	14	25	102	15

		Your school		Trial schools	
		n	%	n	%
Optimism	High	18	32	340	49
	Medium	20	36	227	33
	Low	18	32	127	18

Happiness is a general feeling of happiness, cheer, and contentment with life. You might not feel happy all the time, but you tend to feel generally content with life.
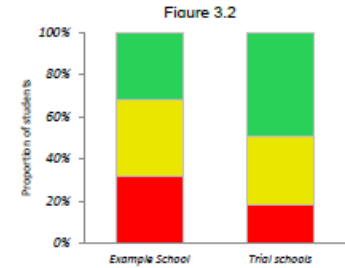
....

Happiness

I feel happy.

I have a lot of fun.

I love life.

I am a cheerful person.

Optimism refers to the mindset of having positive expectations for the future.

....

Optimism

I am optimistic about my future.

In uncertain times I expect the best.

I think good things are going to happen to me.

I believe that things will work out, no matter how difficult they seem.

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Results: Partnership reports

- **Two schools with similar SES and student profiles.**
- **Green shading indicates more favourable results compared to all other primary schools.**

	School A	School B
Social and emotional development		
Optimism	74%	46%
Self-esteem	85%	75%
Happiness	63%	50%
Empathy	85%	42%
Prosocial behaviour	56%	25%
No worries	35%	39%
No sadness	56%	67%
Perseverance	26%	33%
School experiences		
Academic self-concept	82%	75%
School belonging	77%	38%
School support	59%	38%
Social support		
Adults in neighbourhood	59%	58%
Adults at school	70%	65%
Adults at home	96%	75%
Friendship intimacy	82%	79%
Peer belonging	74%	79%

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Results: Indicators to track wellbeing

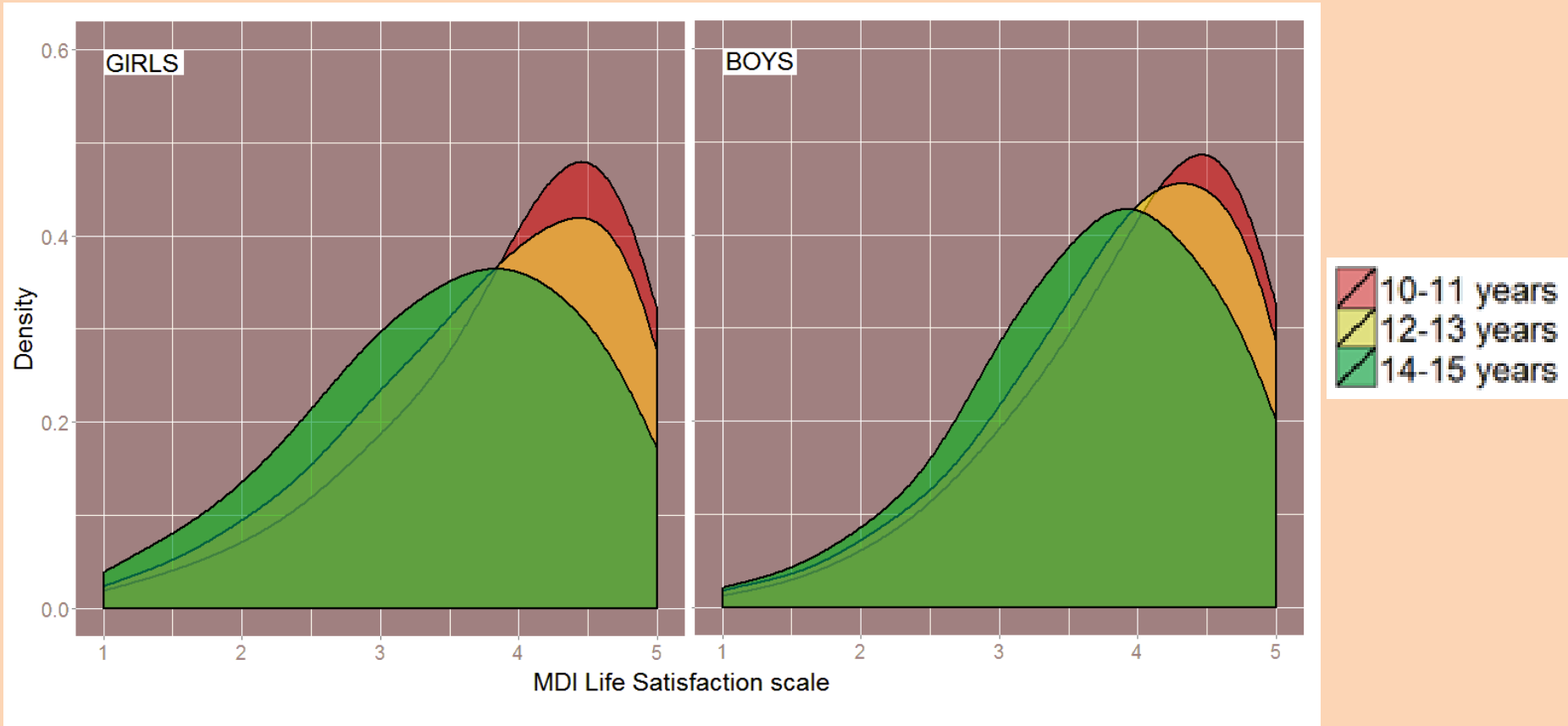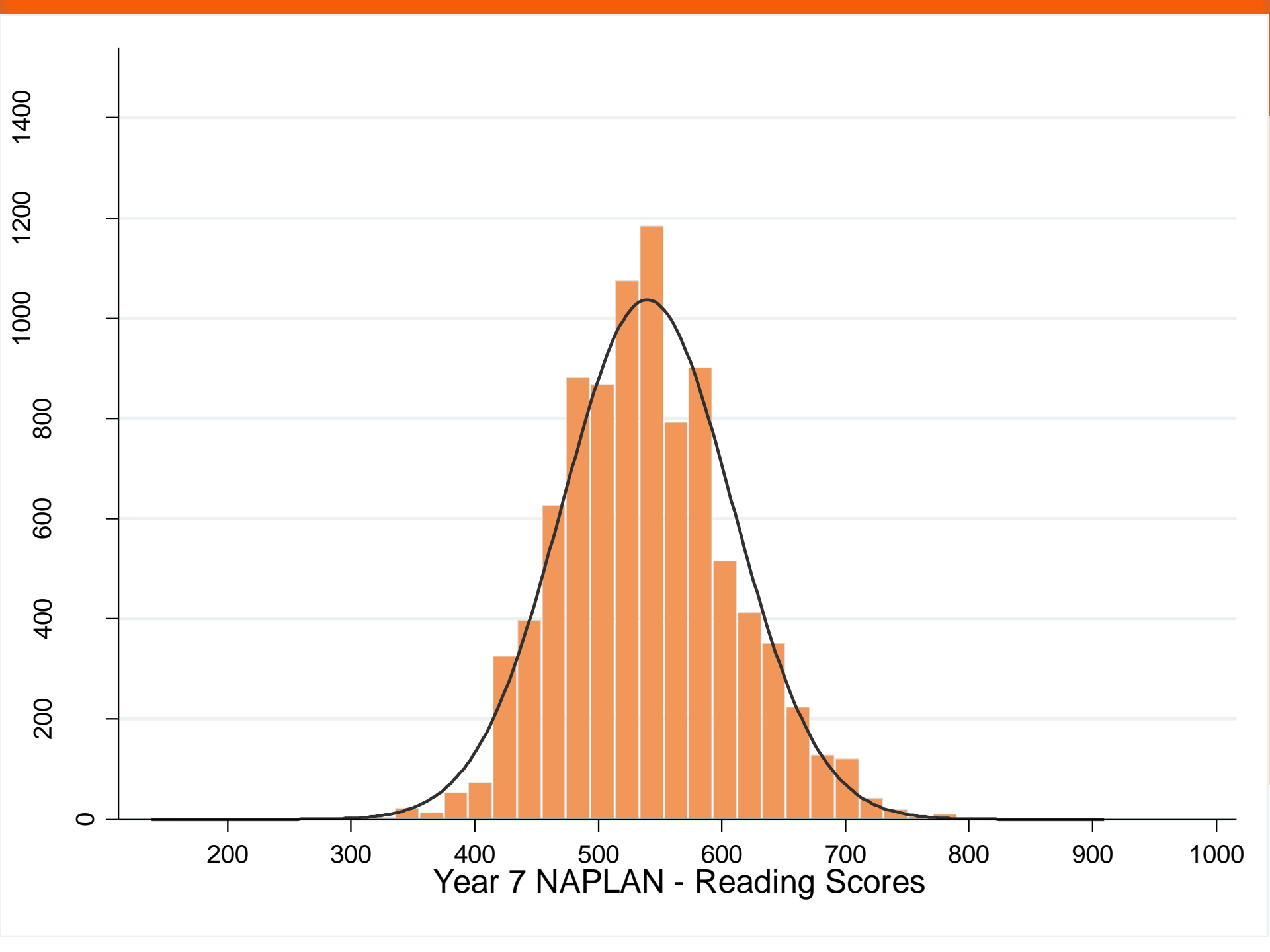|	
Social and emotional wellbeing	Empathy
	Optimism
	Self-esteem
	Sadness
	Worries
	Life Satisfaction
	Prosocial behaviour
	Summary wellbeing index
Connectedness to adults and peers	Connectedness to adults at school
	Connectedness to adults in the community
	Connectedness to adults at home
	Peer belonging
	Friendship intimacy
School Experiences	Academic self-concept
	School Climate
	Victimisation (Bullying)

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Year 7 NAPLAN - Reading Scores

Results: Indicators to track wellbeing

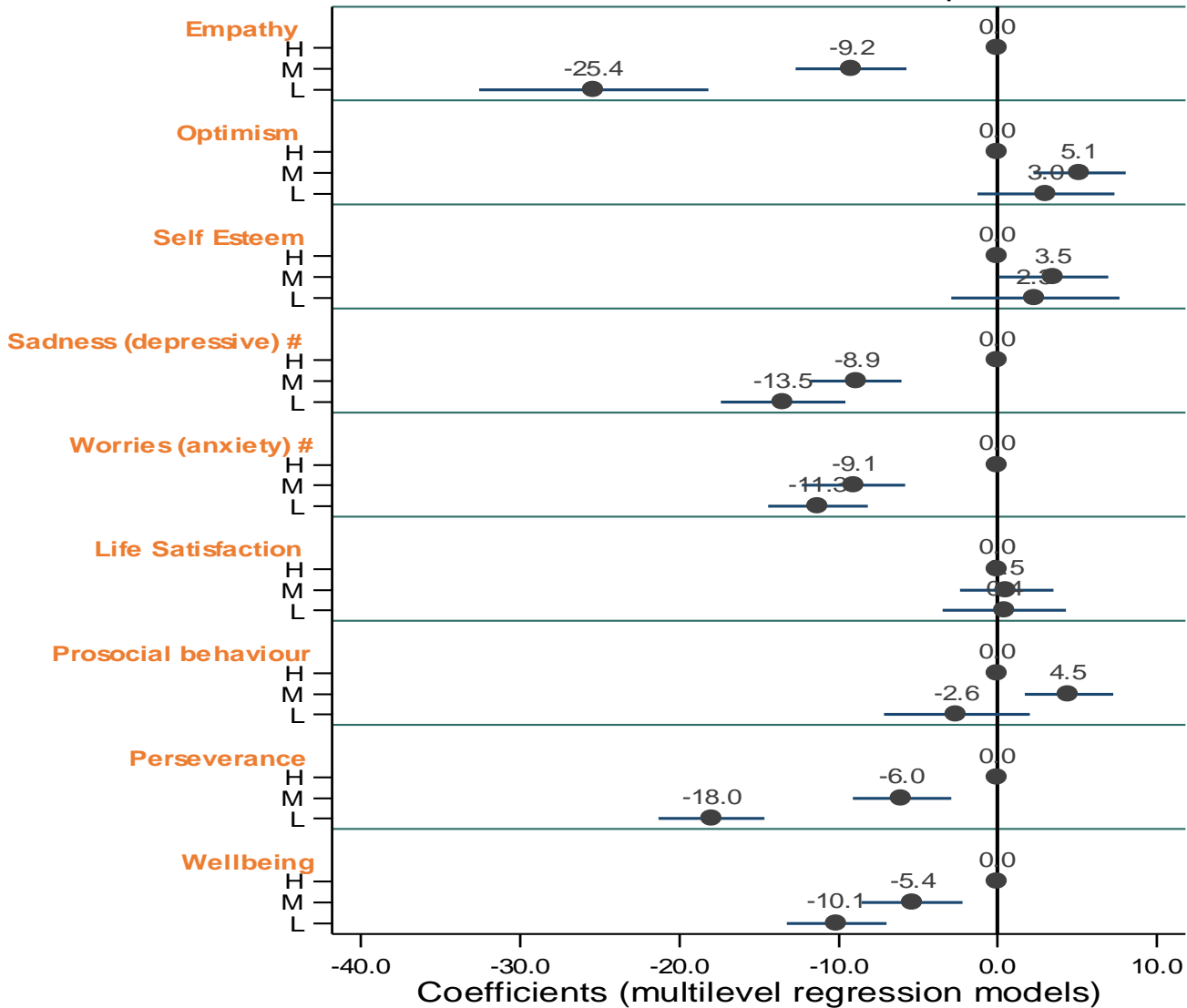|	
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Year 7 Literacy, Year 6 MDI
Social and Emotional Development

Empathy
H: 0.0
M: -9.2
L: -25.4

Optimism
H: 0.0
M: 5.1
L: 3.0

Self Esteem
H: 0.0
M: 3.5
L: 2.

Sadness (depressive) #
H: 0.0
M: -8.9
L: -13.5

Worries (anxiety) #
H: 0.0
M: -9.1
L: -11.3

Life Satisfaction
H: 0.0
M: .5
L: 0.4

Prosocial behaviour
H: 0.0
M: 4.5
L: -2.6

Perseverance
H: 0.0
M: -6.0
L: -18.0

Wellbeing
H: 0.0
M: -5.4
L: -10.1

Coefficients (multilevel regression models)
-40.0   -30.0   -20.0   -10.0   0.0   10.0

Note.
Preliminary findings

Predictive validity of social and emotional development in Year 6 on literacy scores in Year 7

Year 7 Literacy, Year 6 MDI
Connectedness

Adults at School
H — 0.0
M — -3.9
L — -4.6

Adults in Neighbourhood
H — 0.0
M — 6.7
L — 12.7

Adults at Home
H — 0.0
M — -11.6
L — -9.9

Peer Belonging
H — 0.0
M — -3.9
L — -1.7

Friendship Intimacy
H — 0.0
M — -0.5
L — 0.9

-40.0   -30.0   -20.0   -10.0   0.0   10.0

Coefficients (multilevel regression models)
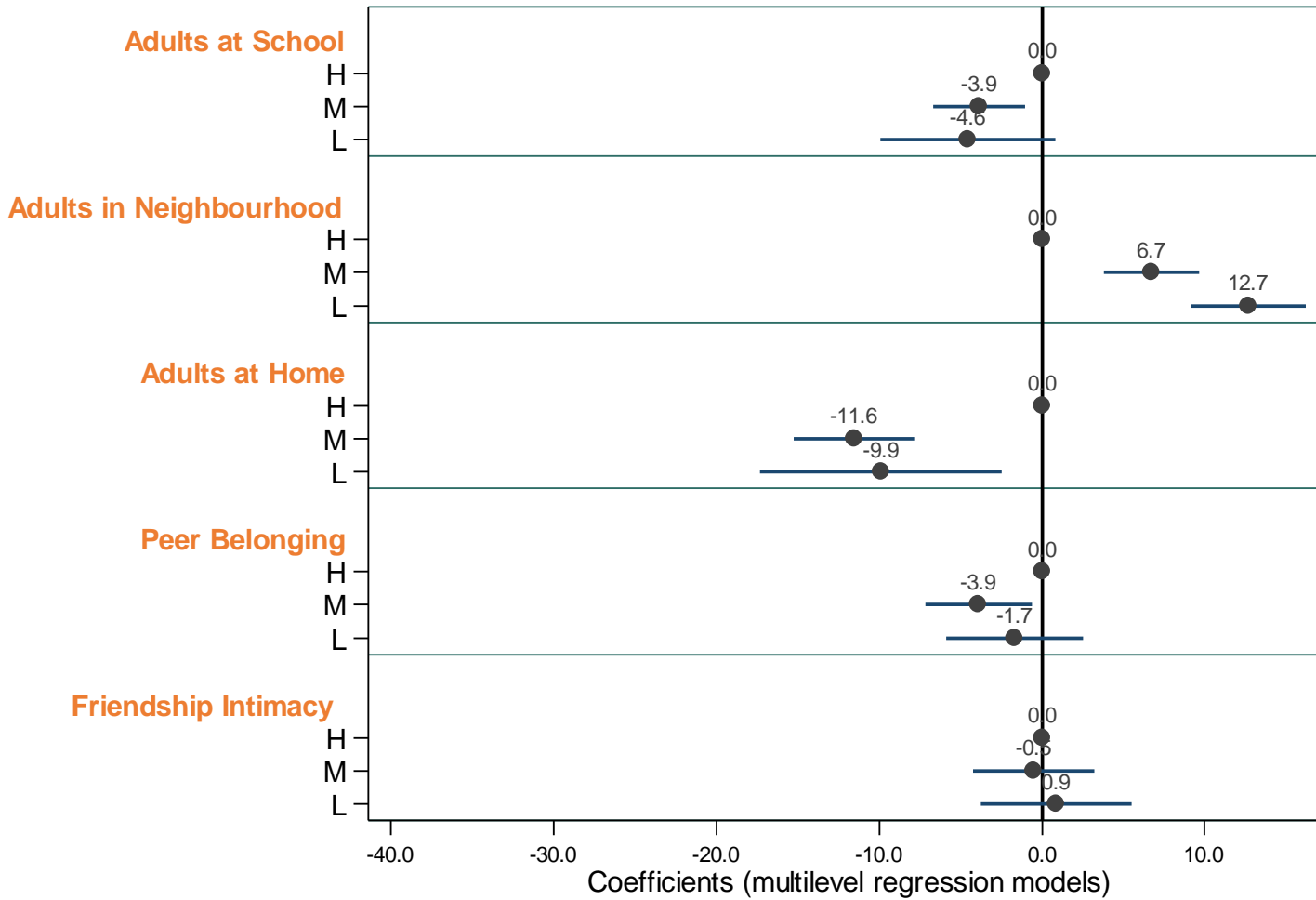
Note. Preliminary findings

Predictive validity of connectedness in Year 6 on literacy scores in Year 7

Year 7 Literacy, Year 6 MDI
School Experiences
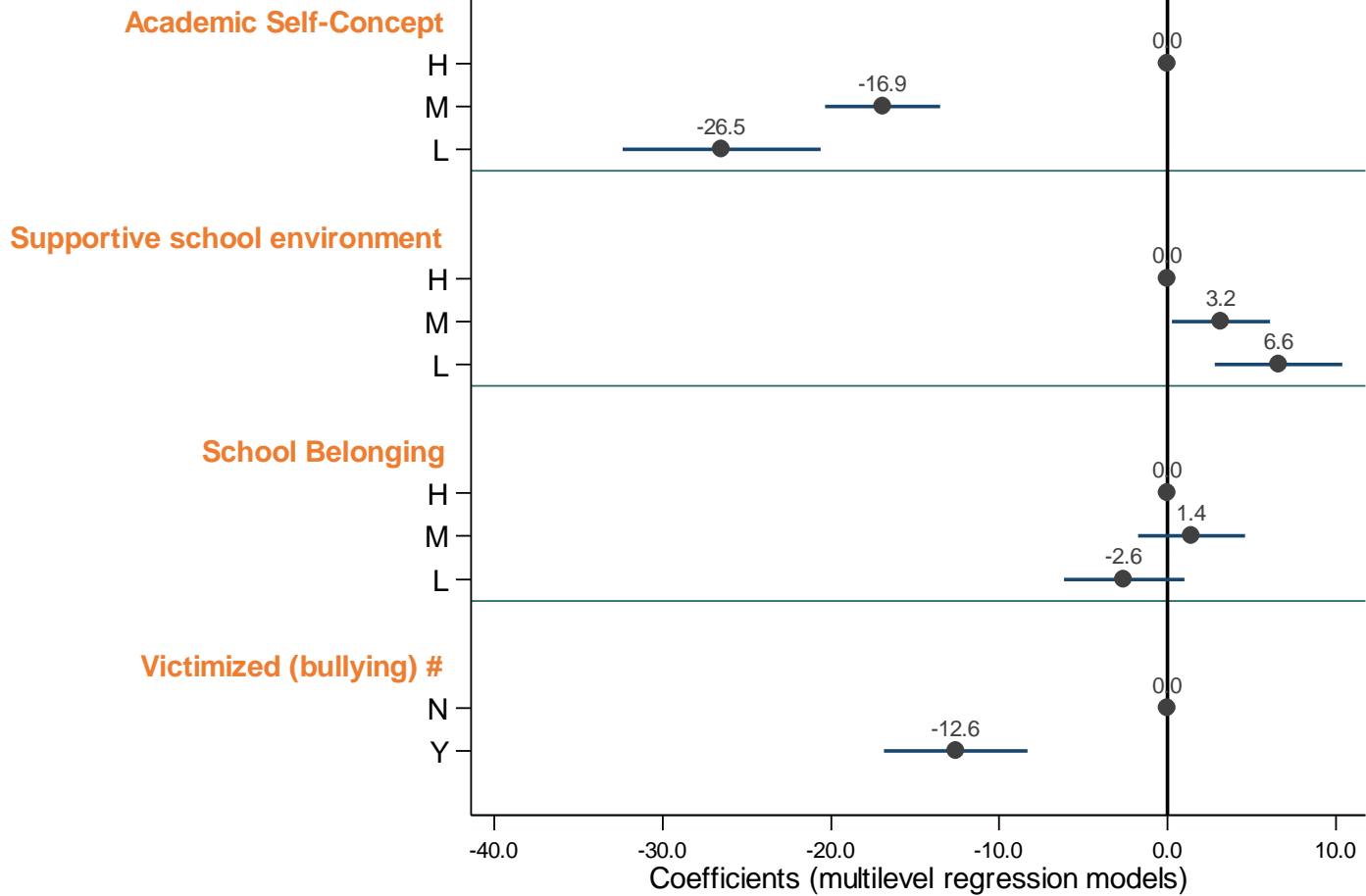
Note. Preliminary findings

Predictive validity of school experiences in Year 6 on literacy scores in Year 7

Conclusions

- Achieved almost 90% participation in Government schools

- Work needed in Catholic and Independent sector to achieve census for the state

- Schools reports provided to 500 schools in 2016

- Student wellbeing embedded in DECD partnership planning processes

- Have a series of indicators that are sensitive to changes in wellbeing with age

- Early data linkage findings show some key wellbeing indicators are predictive of literacy and numeracy skills

Thank you

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