

The Link

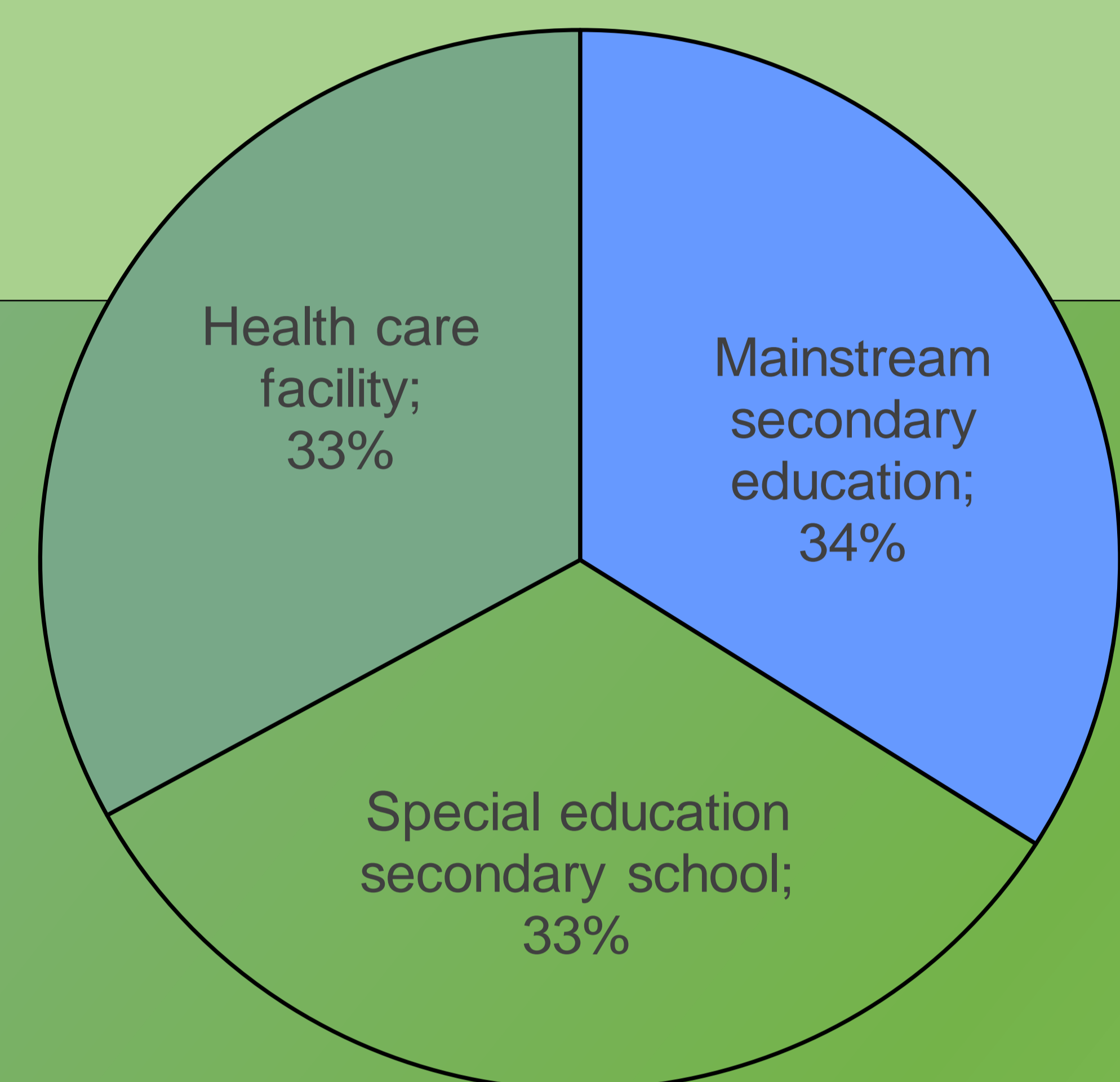
An Educational Intervention for Youths Displaying School Refusal

What is it about

The Link is an alternative educational intervention in the Netherlands that helps youths displaying school refusal, to reengage with schooling. Often, these adolescents display chronic and severe school refusal, meet criteria for anxiety or depressive disorders, and are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. The Link program focuses on reducing school-related anxiety and normalising school attendance (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019).

Data from recent schoolyears

- In most cases the adolescent participated in the Link for a period of 9 to 12 months.
- This period is used to observe the educational needs and find an appropriate (educational) setting to reengage with after the Link.
- Look for outflow 2021-2022 chart below.



Three Key Elements of The Link Program (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019).

1. Adapted educational setting

Characteristics of the setting redress a range of school-related factors associated with the development and maintenance of school refusal.

For example:

- own facilities with own entrance
- maximum of 12 students per class and fixed classrooms
- high degree of predictability
- adapted curriculum from the students original school
- adolescents start with reduced school-time (usually one hour per day), increasing weekly
- teachers foster social interaction
- consistency in teaching staff

2. Elements of CBT

CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) principles inform the way in which members of the Link expertise team approach their work with the adolescents.

For example:

- psychoeducation about school refusal
- graded exposure
- gaining success experiences
- continuous coaching role teacher during the day
- group offer for students as well as meetings for parents

3. Collaborative approach

Collaboration is inherent to the Link program. The adolescent, parents, Link staff, staff from the original school, therapist, and regional student attendance officer work together on the goal of re-engaging the adolescent with schooling. This requires considerable coordination.

For example:

- before start: home visit by school social worker.
- teachers maintain weekly contact with parents
- weekly consultation between teachers en psychologist
- intensive cooperation with all those involved with the student: six-weekly multidisciplinary evaluations
- psychosocial treatment via external facility continues during Link program