

Implementing an Education and Support Program for Families of Students with Disabilities in the High School Setting

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Introduction

- The Center on Secondary Education of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (CSESA) is a school- and community-based education model for high school students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD)
- High schools receive training and coaching to improve transition programming for students with ASD
- Transitioning Together* is an eight-week education and support program for families of teens with ASD. The groups aim to:
 - reduce stress for families
 - improve how families cope with transition
 - help youth prepare to transition out of high school
- The CSESA project includes a version of the *Transitioning Together* program designed for use in a high school setting

Method

Participants: As part of the first year of the pilot phase of the study, families of high school students with disabilities, as well as teachers, were invited to participate in the spring of 2013. Data were collected from:

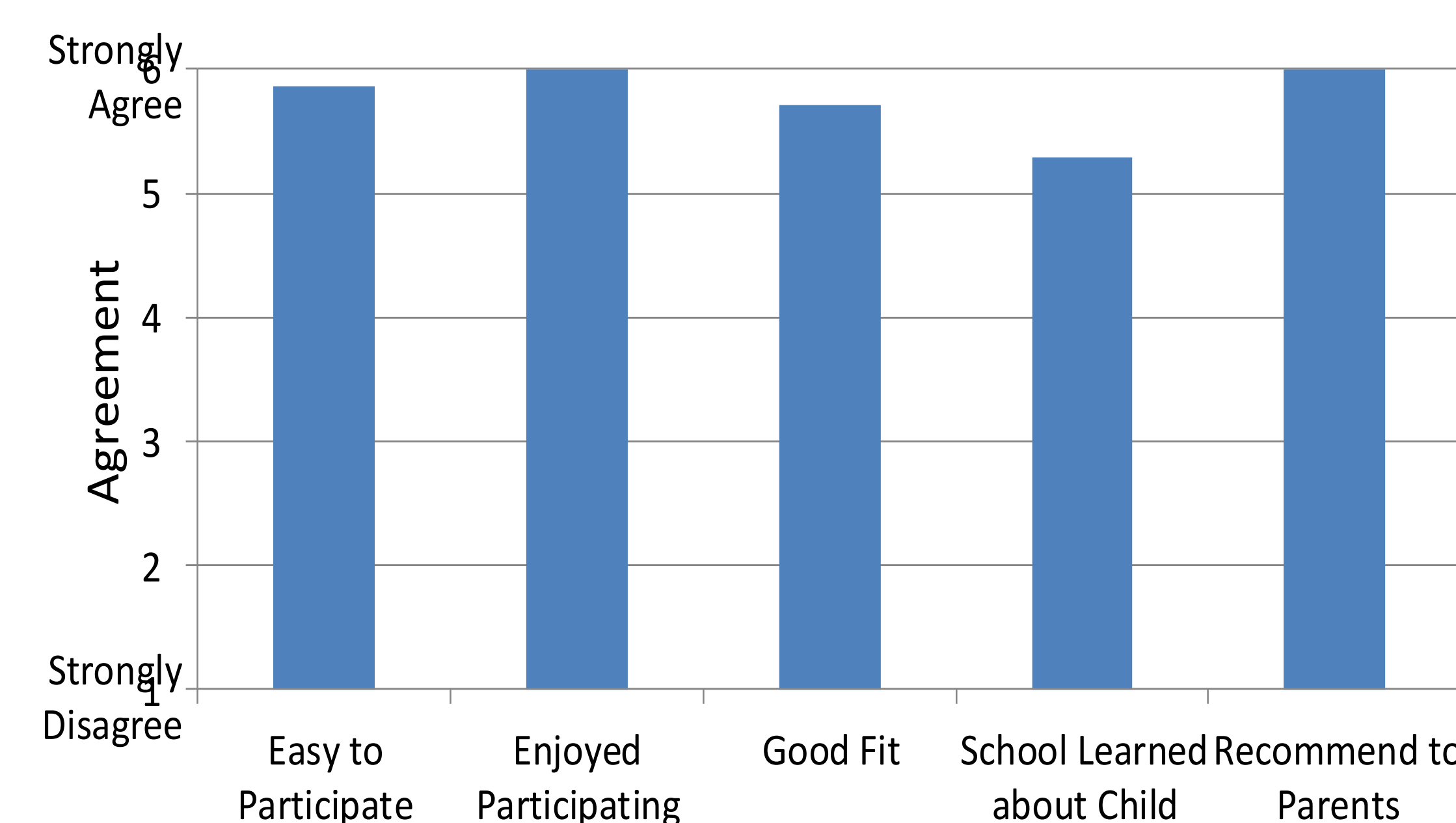
- 5 teens (12-18 years of age)
- 8 parents
- 6 teachers

Procedure: Participants attended:

- Joining sessions, to talk about family goals related to transition (parents and teens only)
- 8 weekly parent group sessions
 - Information on employment and college planning
 - Problem solving
 - Community involvement
 - Legal issues
 - Health and well-being
- 8 weekly teen group sessions focused on social skills and goal setting
- Exit Interviews (all)

Results

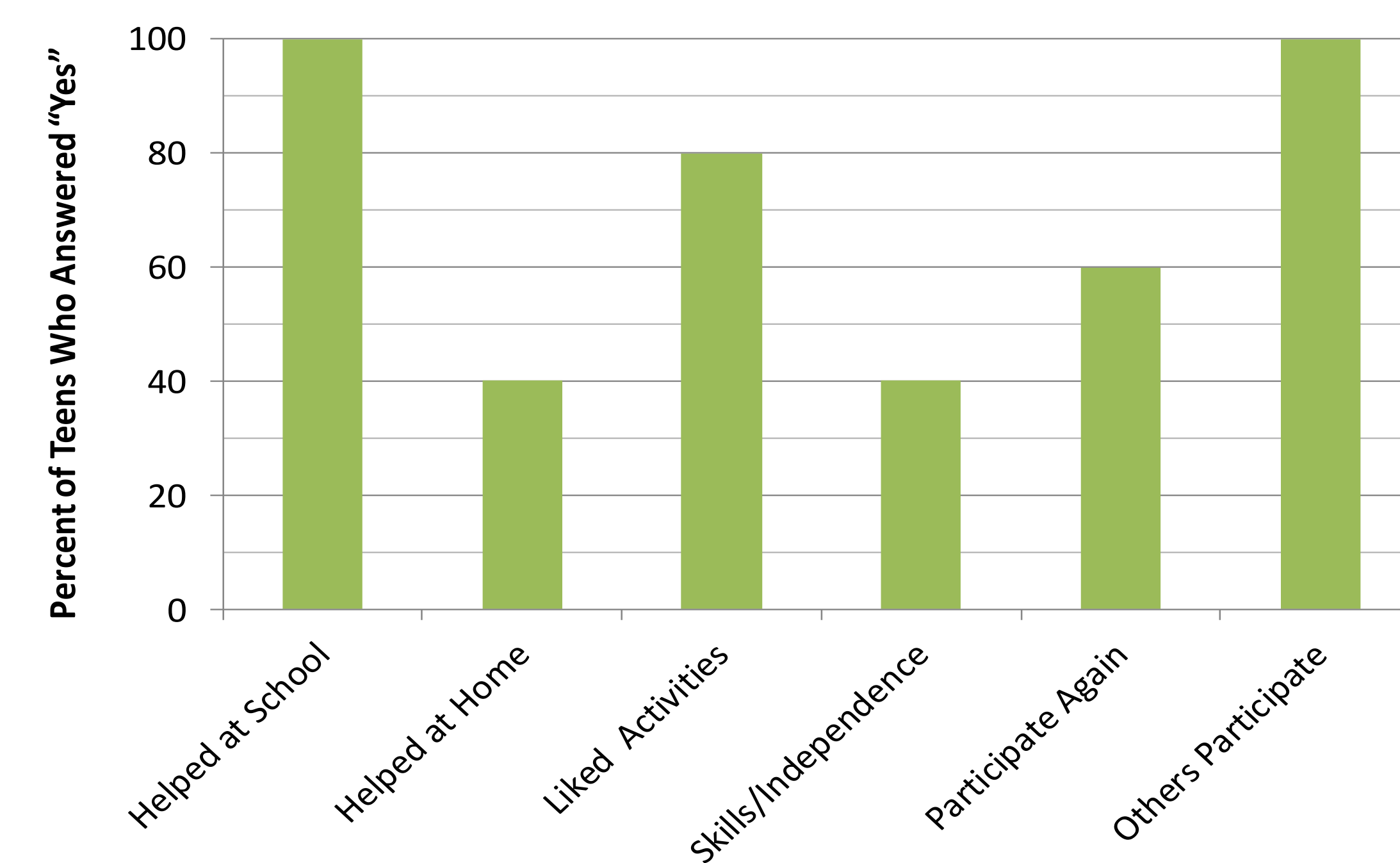
Parent Feedback



Feedback from parents:

- Easy to take part in, enjoyable
- Fitting for their families
- 100% would recommend *Transitioning Together* to other parents

Teen Feedback

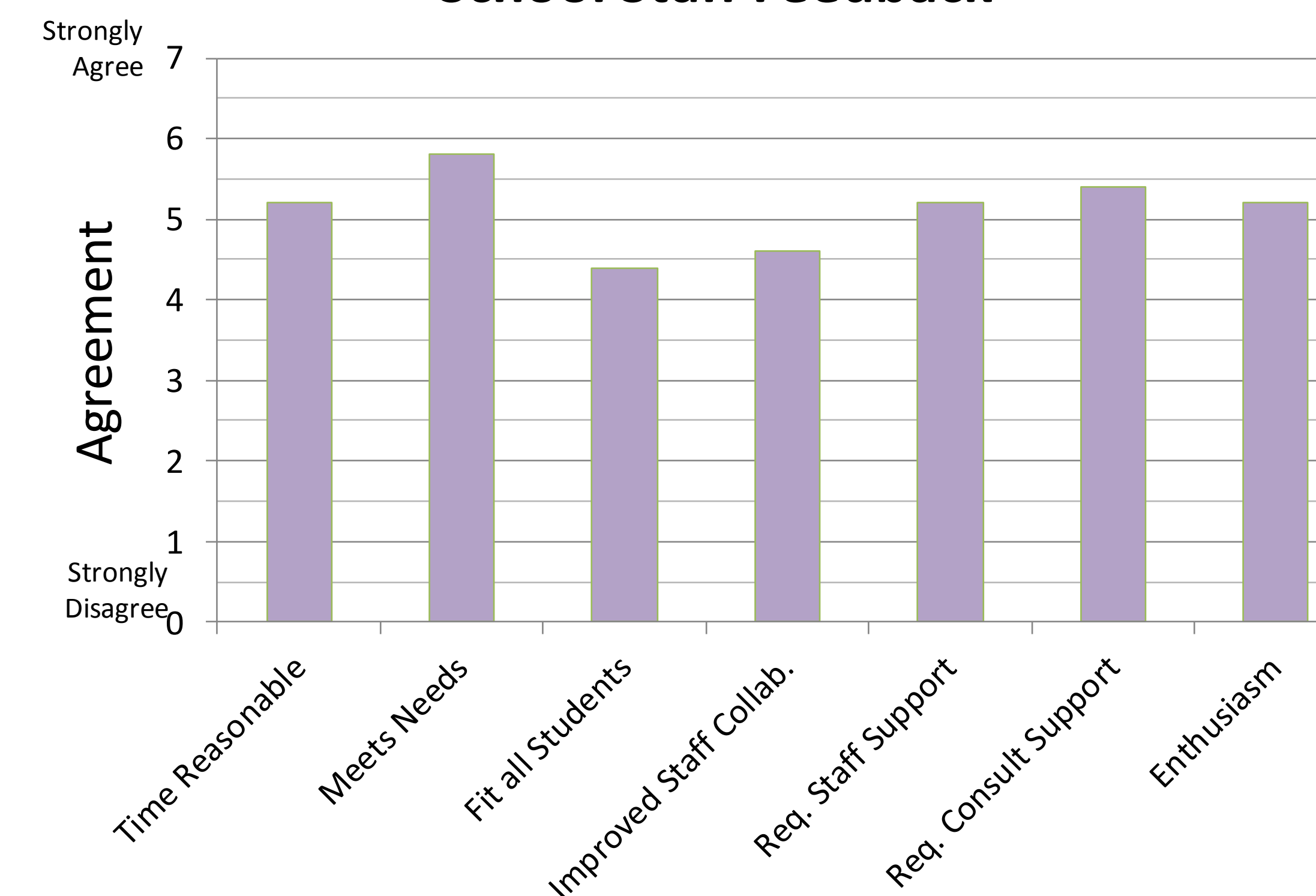


Feedback from adolescents:

- Helpful in school
- 100% would recommend to other teens
- Future group topics could target more activities to foster independence

Results

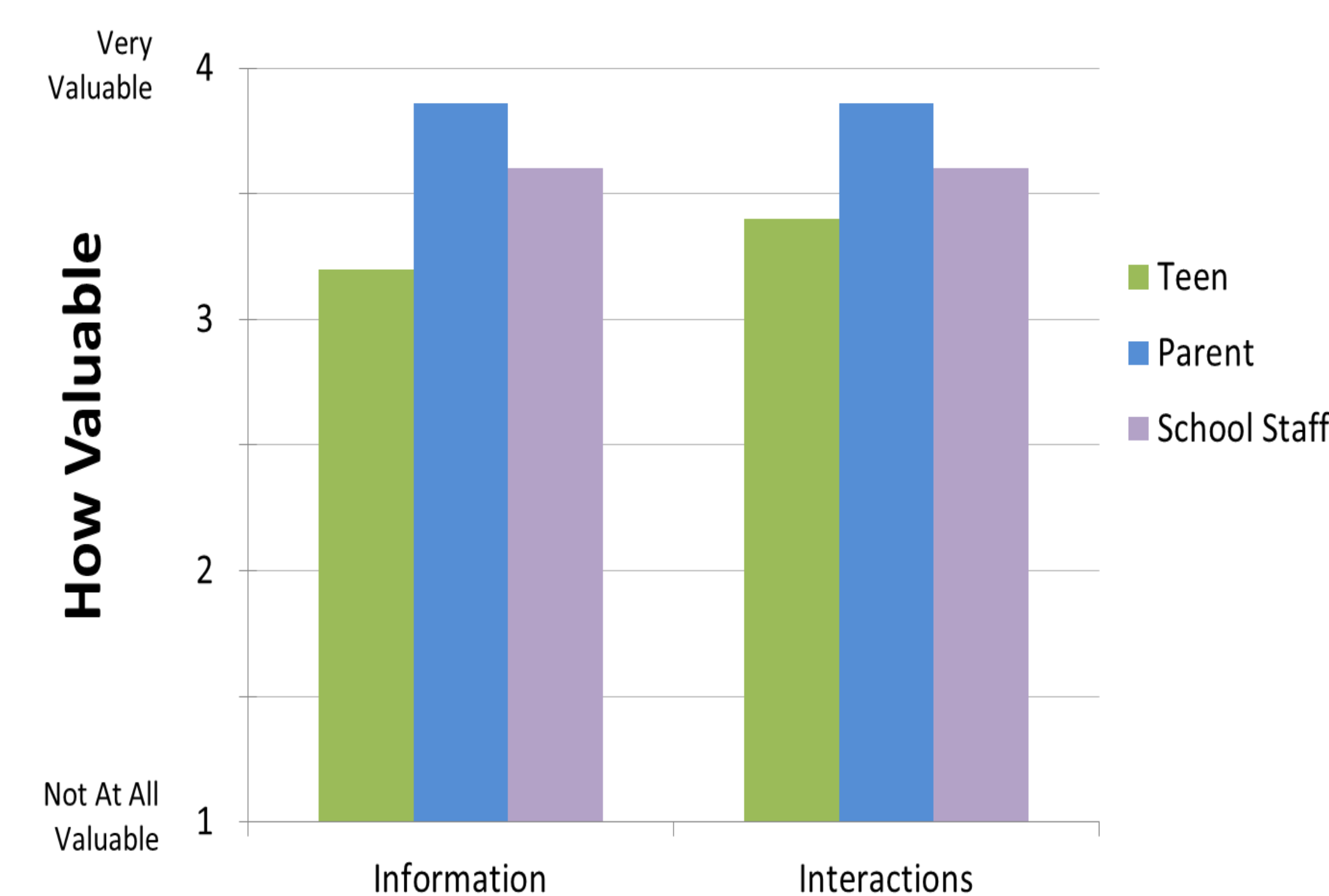
School Staff Feedback



Feedback from school staff:

- Group met needs of families and students
- Time required to run group was reasonable for a school setting
- Staff would need support to implement *Transitioning Together* at their school

Program Evaluation Questions

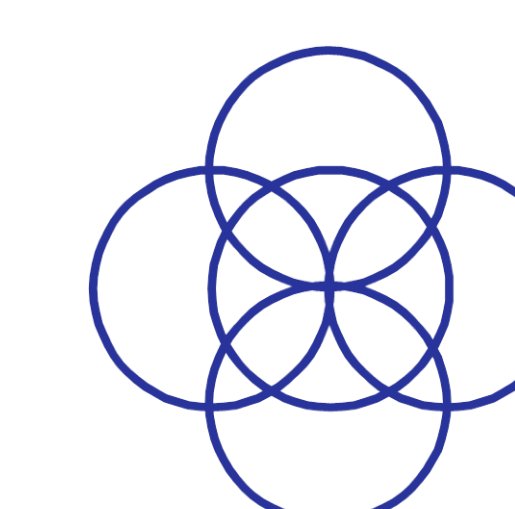


Overall, teens, parents, and school staff found the *Transitioning Together* program valuable, both in terms of the information provided during meetings and the chance to interact with other families. These data suggest that the program provided important social and informational supports that increase existing community resources.

Next Steps

- In the spring of 2014, school staff began implementation of the second year of the CSESA model, including the *Transitioning Together* program. Based on feedback from year one of the project, and in order to plan for sustainability, the following changes to the program were implemented:
 - Both parent and teen sessions were facilitated by school team members with coaching support from the CSESA research team.
 - Speech language therapist (teen group)
 - Parent liaison and school psychologist (parent group)
 - Sessions were targeted to families of students with ASD.
 - To better address ASD-specific concerns during high school transition
 - In larger schools, CSESA might divide family groups by "college bound" versus "career bound" students
 - The school team decided to offer the program for 10 to 15 adult participants.
 - Allows for equal participation in discussion/problem solving
 - Facilitation easier in a medium sized group
 - Dinner was offered to participating families to increase the probability that families attended.
 - Families of incoming freshmen students with ASD were encouraged to attend the teen and parent groups
 - Teen sessions included some aspects of the CSESA transition planning curriculum including the development of a "student snapshot", goal setting for their future, and school mapping.
- In addition to the *Transitioning Together* program, high school students were also offered targeted intervention programming addressing independence and behavior as part of the larger CSESA model.
- The full comprehensive CSESA model will be evaluated in a randomized control trial of 60 high schools over the next three years.

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