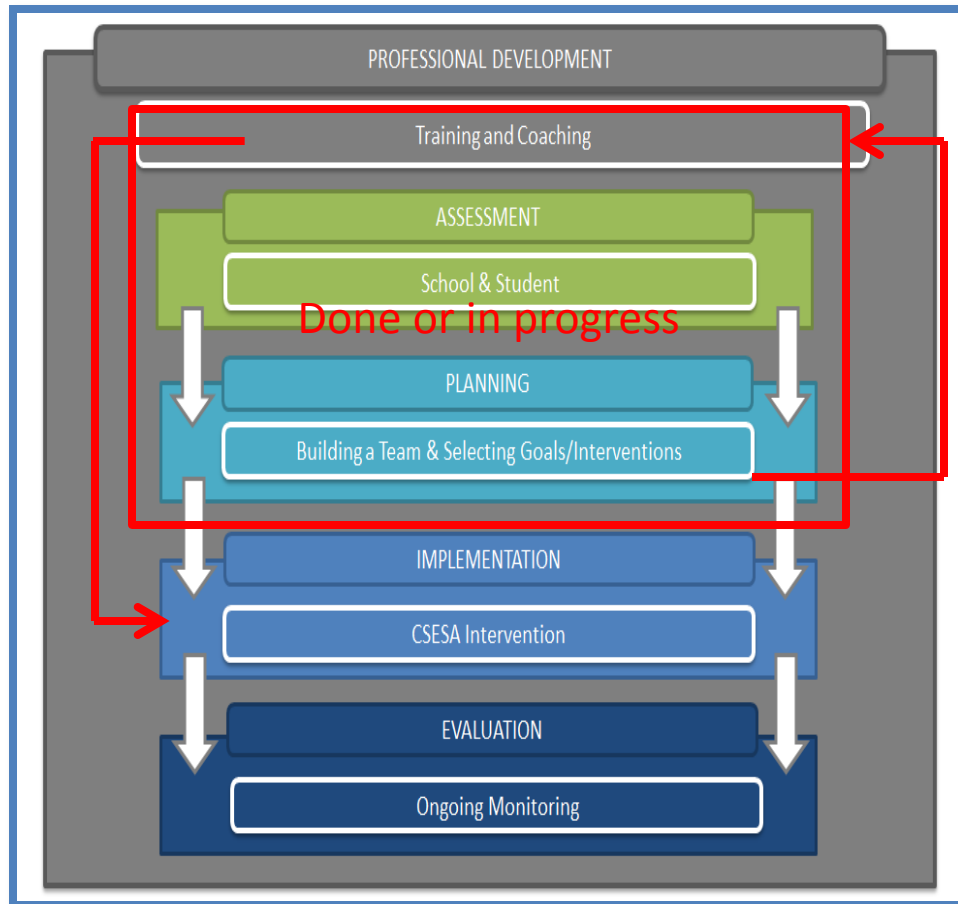


Peer Network Training



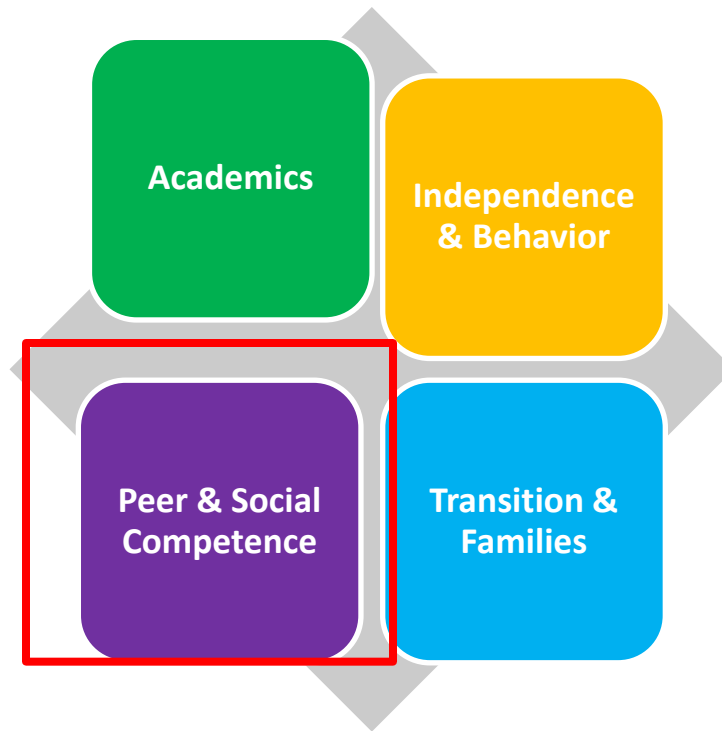
The creation of these materials was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education through Grant R324C120006 awarded to UNC-Chapel Hill. The content expressed represent those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

Reminder of the CSESA Process

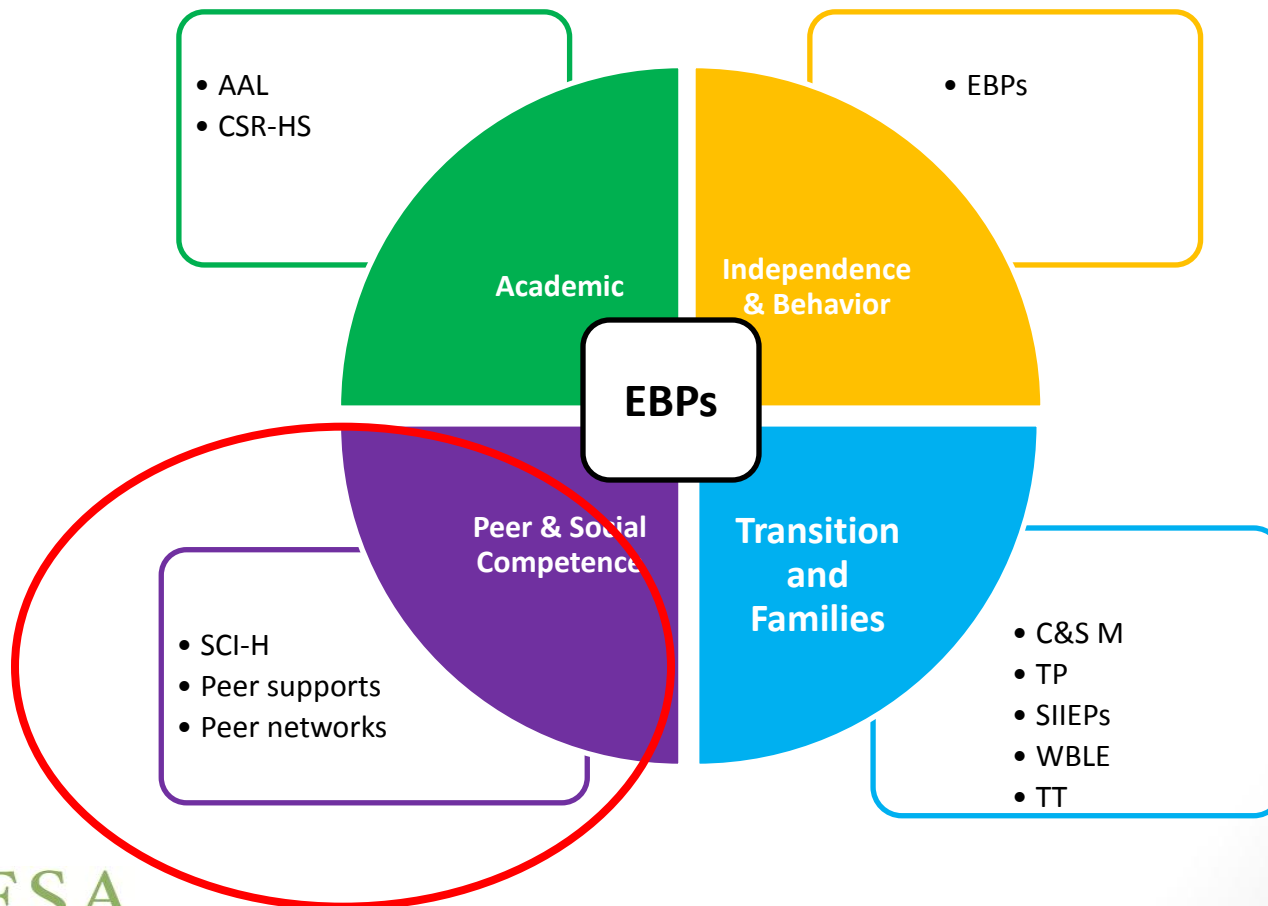


- We've already assessed and started planning
 - Used SSS-C, IEPs, current data
- We already have social related GAS goals for students
- Now, it's time for some training related to implementing interventions!

CSESA Domains

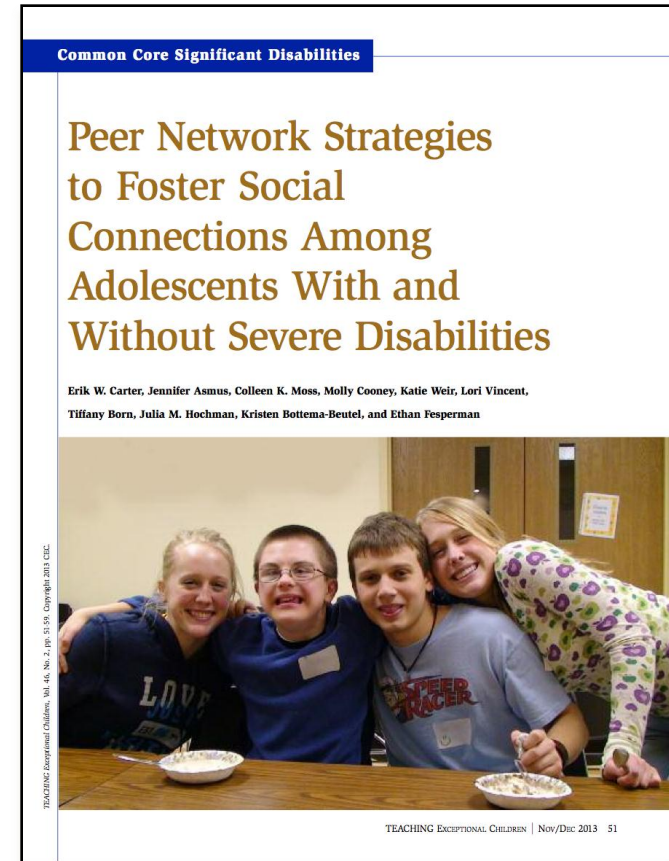


CSESA Interventions/Components



Option 1: Peer Networks

- *What is it?* A social group of students established around a student with ASD that:
 - Meets weekly and interacts outside of the meeting
 - Helps the student become more involved in school life
 - Receives regular guidance from an adult facilitator



Goals of a Peer Network

- Students with ASD who are supported by peers have been found to:
 - Interact regularly with more peers
 - Enjoy more sustained interactions with peers
 - Increase the number of friendships
 - Participate in more school activities
- Peers providing support to classmates with ASD have reported:



I loved being part of this and being able to learn a little more about Jack.

I've been able to communicate better with the kids but also with other people.

My eyes are more open to my partner's needs.

Identify and Provide Training to Facilitators

- Identify adults (e.g. special educators, paraprofessionals, school staff, community staff) who will facilitate the network.
- Facilitators should know the student(s) well, have the time to implement the intervention, and ideally, know other students in the school who might participate as partners.
- Facilitators receive a manual, view a PowerPoint, and ask questions in the training meeting (with subsequent meetings if necessary).
- The CSESA team provides ongoing coaching to facilitators throughout the intervention.
- Groups can have co-facilitators if desired.

Implement the Social-Focused Intervention(s)

The following sections include step-by-step guidance for establishing peer networks and peer support arrangements in a variety of school settings.



Peer Networks

Steps for Getting Started

Adapted from: Carter & Asmus (2010-2014); Carter, Asmus, Moss, Cooney, Weir, Vincent, Born, Hochman, Bottema-Beutel, & Fesperman (2013); Gardner, Carter, Gustafson, Hochman, Harvey, Mullins, & Fan (in press).

Peer Networks: Overview

1. Identify and invite network partners
2. Hold a training meeting for partners (student with ASD usually does not participate, but can do so)
3. Hold an orientation meeting with student and partners
4. Facilitate regular social network meetings
5. Schedule regular social contacts between meetings
6. Provide feedback and support
7. Fade support

Some Additional Resources

Peer Network Materials



Significant Disabilities

Ten Guidelines to Facilitate Social Groups for Students With Complex Special Needs

Emily C. Sartini, Victoria F. Knight, and Belva C. Collins

Mrs. Martin has 25 students in her first grade class at Clear Lake Elementary. This year, her class includes Kyle, a student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It is clear from his complex needs that he is on the more severe end of the spectrum, although his assessments have been vague about his intellectual functioning due to testing challenges (e.g., communication deficits, ability to follow directions). His support team wants to keep Kyle in the first grade class as the least restrictive environment, but his presence presents some challenges. When Kyle is in class, he often chants or sings to himself and flaps his hands. The other students seem curious about Kyle but rarely interact with him. Some of the children have tried to speak to him, but he does not answer them, and the students rarely persist in engaging in conversation. Kyle occasionally looks at the other students, but he has never spoken to them. During recess, Kyle usually sits on the bench and watches the other students play. He usually sits with cars next to Max on the sandbox, imitating Max when he makes "vroom-vroom" sounds with his car.

Mrs. Martin wants Kyle to be included in the class as much as possible so he can have access to the same-age core content taught to his peers, have same-age peers as role models for communication and social skills, and develop friendships that may carry over to settings outside of school. She knows, however, that he will need help learning how to socialize with his peers. Mrs. Martin and Ms. Marsh, the special education teacher, meet after school to decide how to help Kyle learn to socialize. They both agree that peer socialization is important for Kyle and will improve his ability to establish fulfilling relationships throughout his life. They know that they will need to plan carefully to teach Kyle how to make friends with his classmates. He will need explicit instruction to learn how to establish and maintain positive peer relationships.

Kyle and other children with special needs provide unique challenges for many classroom teachers. Students with complex special needs, including students with severe and multiple disabilities (SMD) and students with ASD, often struggle in establishing peer rela-

tionships, engaging in conversation, and using language to express thoughts and feelings (Howlin, 2006; National Research Council, 2001; Pritzant & Wetherby, 2005). These challenges in social interactions are usually due to communication needs. For example, students with ASD rarely respond or initiate conversation as often as their peers (National Research Council, 2001). Students who have difficulties in communication may also be at higher risk for social problems (e.g., Benner, Rogers-Adkinson, Mooney, & Abbott, 2007).

Much of the research on social skills and peer interactions includes students with ASD. These studies have investigated a number of successful strategies to increase peer interactions. Zanolli, Duggett, and Adams (1996) studied the use of "priming" during social skills groups that included preschool boys with ASD and their peers. In the priming strategy, the teacher conducts a social skills lesson immediately prior to the social activity. During the priming session, the teacher uses the same materials that will be used in the social skills activity. The teacher creates frequent opportunities for reinforcement

54 COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Common Core Significant Disabilities

Peer Network Strategies to Foster Social Connections Among Adolescents With and Without Severe Disabilities

Erik W. Carter, Jennifer Asmus, Colleen K. Moss, Molly Cooney, Katie Weir, Lori Vincent, Tiffany Born, Julia M. Hochman, Kristen Bottema-Beutel, and Ethan Fesperman



TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN | Nov/Dec 2013 51

1. Identify Network Partners

1. Identify **three to six** peers who may be:

- Interested and excited to participate in the group
- Have shared interests in common
- Motivated to develop an ongoing social relationship with the student with ASD
- Can/will stay involved through the semester
- A positive peer model for the student with ASD
- Has shared time available with the student with ASD

Keep in Mind

- Think creatively!
- Select the right number of peers based on the student.
- If not familiar with the student, talk to someone who is.
- Peers may have a disability such as a learning disability or emotional/behavior disorder but not an ASD.
- Think about peers who:
 - Already interact with the student
 - Have shown interest in the student
 - Are often around the student
 - Have similar interests to the student
 - Have an established group of friends

How to Identify Peers

- Ask the student with ASD for ideas
- Ask teachers (beyond special educators), coaches, club leaders, paraprofessionals, and parents
- Look around, get to know students at school, and look for established groups
- Talk to a class or a club

How to Ask Peers

- Meet individually with students
- Approach an existing peer group
- Speak generally to a large number of peers

"No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted."
~Aesop

Peer Networks




What is a peer network?

- A peer network is created when 4-5 students are partnered together and they socialize. Together they form a peer network.

What does a peer network look like?

- Hanging out together before or after school and having conversations just like you would with any other friend
- Eating lunch together, talking about your day, talking about what you are going to do over the week-end...



Why create peer networks?

- Have fun!
- Make other peer feel comfortable and included
- Meet new people

How can you help other people feel included?

- Say "hi" to your network members in between classes
- Walk with students in your network to their classes
- Hangout with students in your network before or after school or during lunch
- Other suggestions?

What is your role as a peer partner?


- Be kind!
- Make other people feel comfortable and included
- Help students learn the "rules of the road"!

Questions for the Experts!

- What are the social customs at your high school?
- How can we help other students learn those social customs?
- What should you do if you see someone in your network getting bullied?
- What if someone asks you a question about a member in your peer network?

Benefits of being in a peer network:

- Meet new people
- Talk with people who have similar interests as you
- Help make school more welcoming for everyone



2. Hold a (separate) Training Meeting

- This is an optional meeting. The idea is to address issues that may be inappropriate to discuss in front of the student.
- Possible topics to cover:
 - Communication strengths and difficulties of the student
 - Tips for the peers on the most successful ways of communicating with the student
 - The student's goal and how the peers can help them meet that goal (if appropriate)
 - Unusual/challenging behaviors and how peers should respond

Peer Training Prezi

3. Hold an Orientation Meeting

(refer to Orientation Meeting Guide)

- Introductions
- Discuss goals of the social network:
 - To have fun together
 - To increase opportunities to interact with new people
 - To help each other develop new friendships
 - To encourage each other to be involved together in other school or after-school activities

3. Orientation Meeting (cont.)

- Try to get peers to discuss ways to accomplish these goals
- Schedule regular meetings
- Establish a way to remind students about weekly meetings: email, text, in person
- Consider students' schedules:
 - Be sure to have the schedule of the student with ASD at the initial meeting
 - Have other students share when their schedule overlaps with the student with ASD

Orientation Meeting Fidelity Checklist

Social Network Orientation Meeting Checklist

(to be completed by the facilitator after the orientation meeting)

Focus Student: _____ Facilitator: _____

Date: _____ Total number of students at meeting: _____

Circle Y (yes) or N (no) based on whether the following occurred:

1. Y N Was the student with autism (SWA) present?
2. Y N Were all of the peer network members in attendance? List names of peers that were present. _____

3. Y N Did the peers and SWA introduce themselves and participate in introductory activities appropriately (if SWA is mostly nonverbal, did I introduce him or her to the group and give non-confidential background information)?
4. Y N Did students mention any shared interests? If so, what? _____

5. Y N Did the group discuss the goals for the group? List any goals suggested by group members. _____

6. Y N Did the group discuss ways to work toward the goals of the social network?
7. Y N Did I discuss the importance of confidentiality and respectful language with the group?
8. Y N Did the group talk about when social interactions can occur?
9. Y N Did I offer specific suggestions on ways to interact socially?
10. Y N Did the group schedule regular meetings or discuss the date of the next meeting?

Comments:



4. Facilitate Weekly Network Meetings

These meetings provide a venue for:

- Peer network members, including the student with ASD, to interact and informally discuss weekly interactions
- The facilitator to model and facilitate peer interactions
- Peers and the student with ASD to consider how to extend the social network beyond the school day

4. Weekly Meetings (cont.)

(refer to Network Meeting Guide)

- Conversation and/or activities
 - Card games, board games
 - Technology (iPad games, music)
 - Arts and crafts
 - Eating lunch
 - Discussing a movie or common interests
- Discuss previous week's interactions and record
 - Share as a group
 - Ask students individually during meeting

4. Weekly Meetings (cont.)

- Discuss the next meeting and interactions, including ways to extend the network beyond school day.
 - Talk to students about events outside of school (school plays, sporting events) and using technology (email, Facebook, texting, etc.) to interact as a group
- Facilitator needs to:
 - Plan and organize activities where appropriate
 - Facilitate interactions
 - Informally assess group satisfaction

Importance of the Weekly Social Interactions

- Informally scheduled interactions between the student with ASD and network partners throughout the week
- Weekly social contacts are intended to:
 - Increase the number of interactions between the student with ASD, network partners, and possibly other students
 - Increase participation of the student with ASD at school events
 - Promote the development of relationships

Network Meeting Fidelity Checklist

Social Network Weekly Meeting Checklist

Focus Student: _____ School: _____
 Intervention Facilitator: _____ Coach: _____
 Date: _____
 Total number of students at meeting (including the focus student): _____
 Peer Network Members Present: _____
 Targeted social-related goal: _____

Circle Y (yes) or N (no) based on whether or not these behaviors occurred during the observation.

☐ Y ☐ N 1. Are peer partners and the focus student interacting during the meeting?

- Y N Did the student **stay for the majority** of the meeting?
- Y N Does the **student initiate** interactions with peer partners?
- Y N Do **peer partners initiate** interactions with the student?
- Y N Do students engage in a **game or activity** together?
- Y N Do students engage in **conversation** together?
- Y N Was the targeted social-related **goal addressed**?

☐ Y ☐ N 2. Are you (facilitator) supporting peer partners and the target student?

- Y N Do you provide **structure and facilitate** the meetings as needed?
- Y N Do you **monitor** interactions during the meeting?
- Y N Do you provide **praise and feedback** to students **during** the meeting?
- Y N Did you discuss the **date of the next meeting**? _____
- Y N Did you discuss the **activity for the next meeting**? _____

☐ Y ☐ N 3. Are peer partners and the focus student reporting that interactions occurred during the week (outside of the meeting)?

- Y N Does the **focus student ever initiate** interactions?
- Y N Do **peer partners initiate** interactions?
- Y N Are interactions occurring between **more than one peer partner** and the student?

- 1) How many **students report interactions** during the week? # of students: _____

2) **When** were interactions reported as occurring (circle all that apply):

Before school Between classes In class Lunch After school Weekend

Additional Notes from meeting/weekly contacts:



*Adaptations for Students Across the Spectrum

- For students with high-functioning autism (HFA), a peer network could focus on the student's interests/activities or be part of a volunteer credit project.
- Students with HFA may take a more active role in leading parts of the orientation session.
- Peers may need additional support to understand and accept the student's individual social needs.
- Students with complex communication needs may need additional supports such as visual aides or a communication device to interact with peers.
- Peers may need additional training to be able to use the student's communication system or help the student participate in the group



A Glimpse at a Peer Network



A Glimpse at a Peer Network



5. Provide Feedback and Support

- Support contacts by:
 - Occasionally observing
 - Talking to other adults
 - Talking to students
 - Communicating with parents
- Support interactions during and after meetings by:
 - Using facilitation strategies outlined in the *Network Meeting Guide*



6. Fade Direct Involvement

- As the network progresses, try to have students take more ownership of the group:
 - Ask for their input for activities
 - Step back when possible to be less involved
 - Explicitly ask the students to lead and plan next week's activity
- Continue to check in with students.

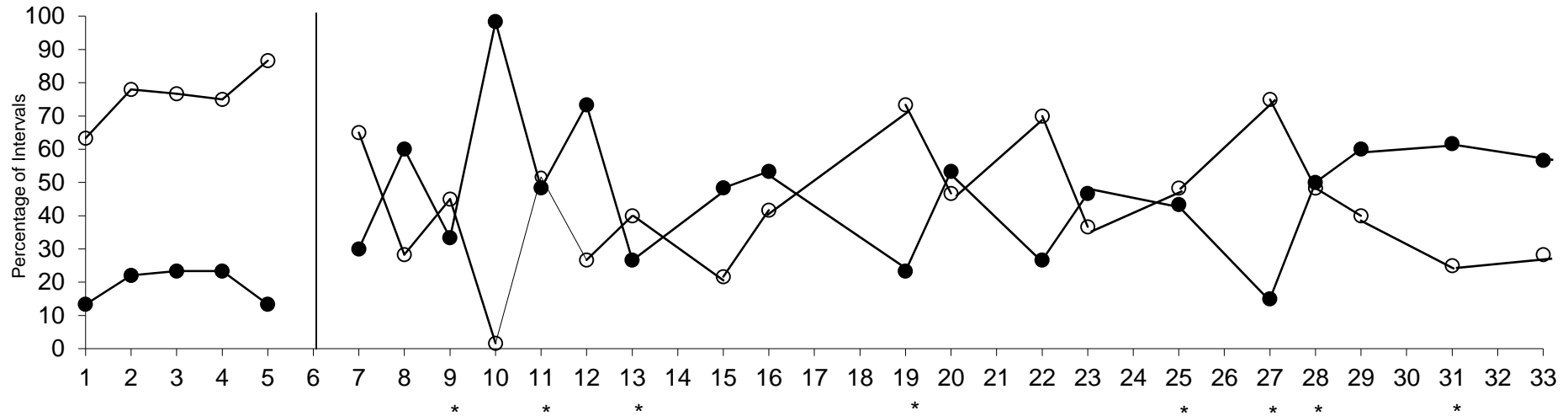
Peer Network Summary

- Remember the goals of the intervention:
 - To have fun together
 - To increase opportunities to connect with new people
 - To help students develop new friendships, especially those who may have trouble forming friendships at school
 - To encourage students to be involved together in other school or after-school activities
- Help students find ways to interact and connect. Be creative!
- Focus on fun. This should be an enjoyable experience!

Peer Networks- A Case Study

- Hispanic male student, age 15 (ASD diagnosis)
- Life skills classroom for all classes
- Peer network set up at lunch
 - 3 female peers (2 Kurdish; 1 Asian-American)
 - 1 special educator as facilitator
- GAS goal (social):
 - No specific social IEP goals; viewed by school staff as quite social and initiating often to peers (but repetitive and inappropriate interactions, rarely maintaining conversation beyond two turns)
- Social-related goal for peer network- maintain a conversation with peers for more than two turns.

Communicative Engagement

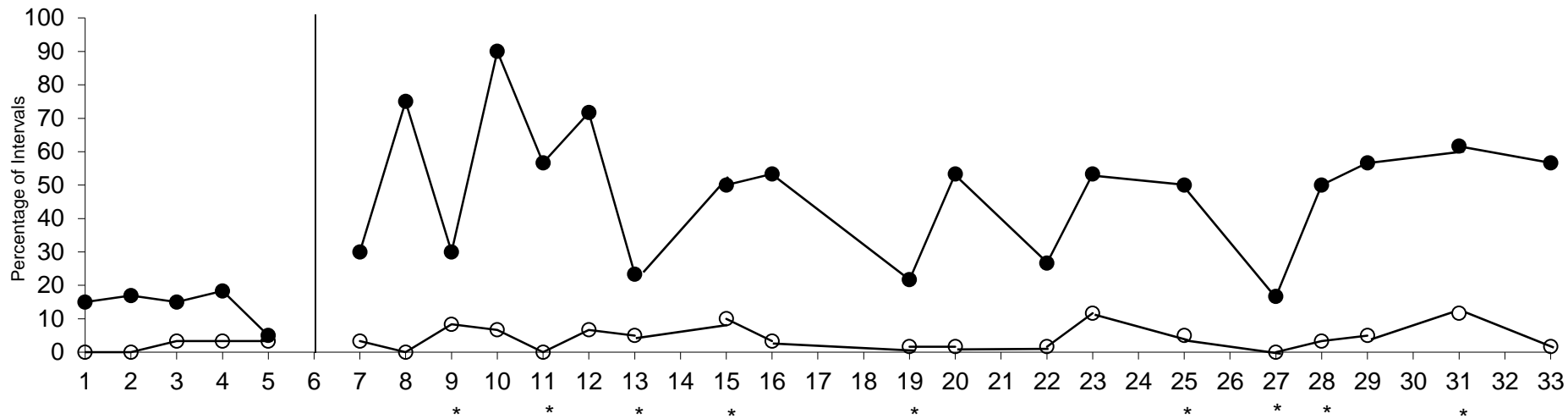


Closed circles- Communicative Engagement

Open circles- Communicative Unengagement

* = probe days; no network meetings

Interactions and Initiations



Closed circles- Interactions with peers

Open circles- Initiations to peers

* = probe days; no network meetings

Positive outcomes reported by facilitator, peers, and student with ASD:

Facilitator: “I especially liked the interaction and the interest other students in the school exhibited.”

Peer: “I think he is more able to talk in conversation with people outside of [the group].”

Peers also described feeling “like a good role model” and understanding their partners and classmates with disabilities more.

Student with ASD named network members as his friends and wanted to continue hanging out with them.

Family Involvement

How will the students' families be involved?

- Complete initial assessments and post-assessments
- Complete social contact forms 3 times per year
- Reinforce social-related skills
- Promote interactions that extend outside of school
- Communicate with educators about social connections

7. Data Collection

The CSESA team will collect the following data:

- Pre-intervention Assessments (school staff, parents)
 - Various assessments before the intervention begins
- Meeting Checklist (facilitator)
 - During the initial meeting and all subsequent meetings
- Social contact forms (school staff, parents, students)
 - 3 times throughout the year
- Goal Attainment Scale (school staff)
 - 2 times throughout the year
- Post-intervention Assessments (school staff, parents)
 - Various assessments after the intervention ends

Data Collection

- What additional data might the facilitator collect to gauge the acceptability and impact of the peer-mediated interventions?
- Observations of:
 - Nature of student's interactions with peers
 - Types of conversational skills
 - Modes of communication
 - Persons involved in interactions
 - Time in which students are engaged academically
 - Time in which students work on activities aligned with the general curriculum
 - Time in which students are working with one-to-one adult support

Data Collection

- Feedback from Students with ASD:
 - What help do you find most helpful? Least helpful?
 - What have you learned from working with _____?
 - Do you consider _____ to be a friend?
 - Would you like to continue working with _____? Why or why not?
- Feedback from Peers:
 - How would you describe your experiences?
 - Did you enjoy serving in this role? In what ways?
 - What things have been going really well? Not so well?
 - In what ways have you benefited from this involvement?
 - What changes have you noticed in your partner, if any?
 - Has this been a beneficial experience for your partner?
 - What additional help would you like to be effective in this role?

Next Steps

- Peer Training (introduction)
- Preferred days/times
- Match students to networks
- Orientation meetings with facilitators
- Start weekly meetings
 - CSESA grant can provide a set of games