The California Autism Professional Training and Information Network (CAPTAIN): Navigating Change and Building our Future Through Interagency Collaboration

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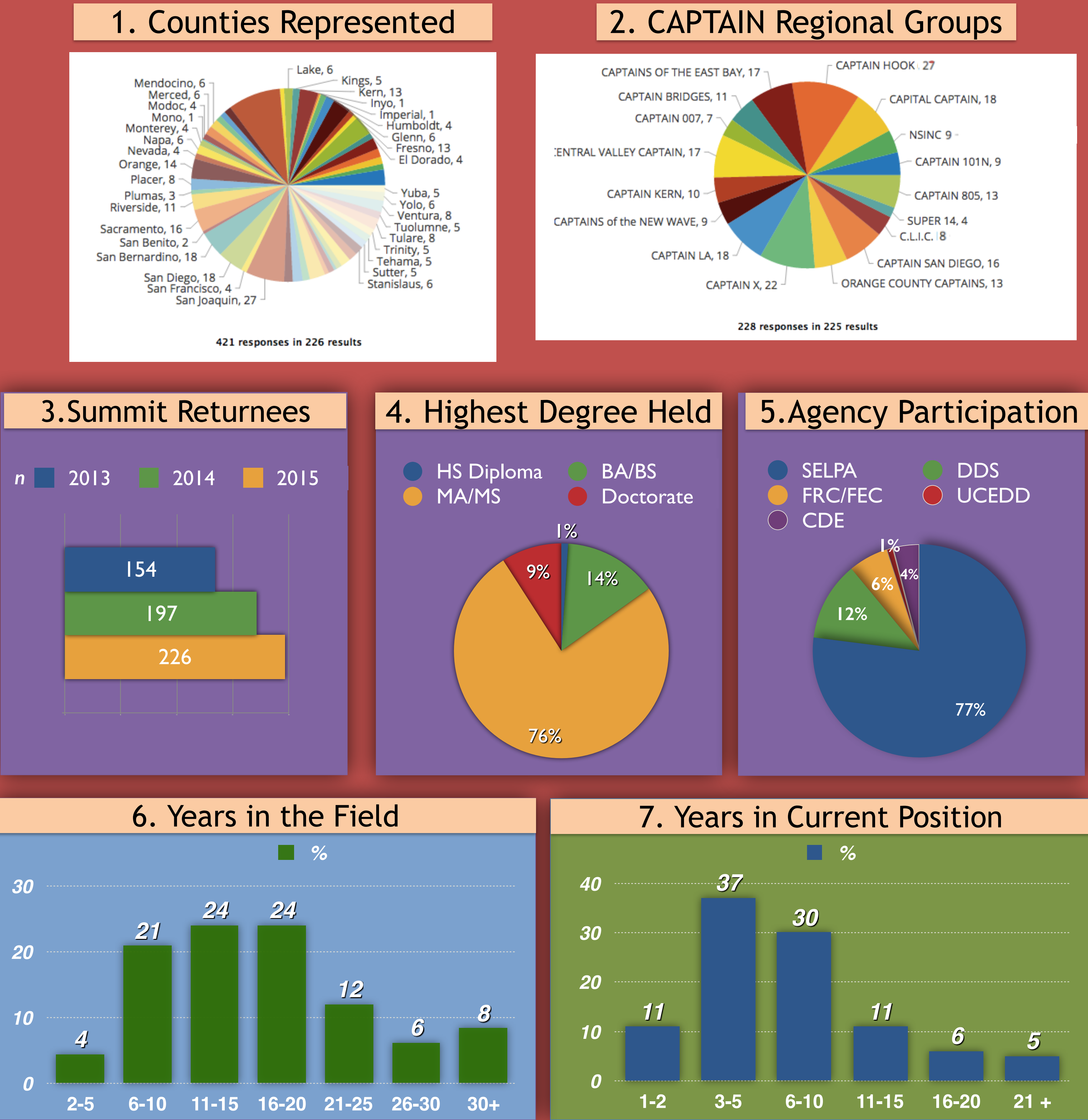
Introduction

In 2014, the Center for Disease Control reported that one child out of 68 was currently diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a seven-fold increase since 2001. Yet there continues to be paucity of skilled professionals with the knowledge and expertise to diagnose and treat ASD. CAPTAIN was created as a statewide multiagency network to address an ever expanding need for sustainable information dissemination about autism and the evidence based practices known to benefit individuals with this disorder. A primary objective of CAPTAIN is to leverage existing resources by increasing inter-agency collaboration and coordination between the state's key stakeholders, especially during crucial transition periods for individuals with ASD. The key CA stakeholders were identified as the **Department of Disability Services Regional Centers** (who operate IDEA Part C and Adult Services), **the school district SELPAs** who are local special education regions, and the network of **Family Resource Centers/Family Empowerment Centers** (who provide parent training and support from birth through age 22). These stakeholders, along with a core group of leadership members from CA UCEDDs, Department of Education, and Disability Services, became the CAPTAIN Cadre, a group of 400 professionals across every county in California. Annual CAPTAIN Summits provide the infrastructure for information dissemination and collaboration.

Methods and Results

Cadre members were asked to complete an online 40 item survey prior to each annual CAPTAIN Summit to obtain baseline measurement on various constructs. Forty-one and fifty-six percent respectively completed the survey in 2013 and 2015. For the sake of brevity, 2014 results are not displayed, but are available in former AUCD poster presentations on this topic. Analysis of the 2015 survey used survey data from returning members only, providing a true post-measurement. Figures 1 through 7 provide descriptive information about the Cadre members. Figures 8 through 9 provide information about intra-agency coordination related to transition periods. Results demonstrate that in 2013 only 27% of Cadre members believed that there was a reliable procedure for the transition between Part B to Adult Services of IDEIA and even fewer, 22%, believed there was a reliable procedure for the transition between Part C to Part B of IDEIA. Figures 10 and 11 suggested an even bleaker outcome in 2013 for interagency collaboration, with only 23% believing there was interagency collaboration for any type of disability services in their region, and 33% for autism specific services. By 2015, the percentages of Cadre members who believed there were intra- and inter-collaboration procedures in place rose dramatically, indicating a positive trend line that is significant in all areas measured.
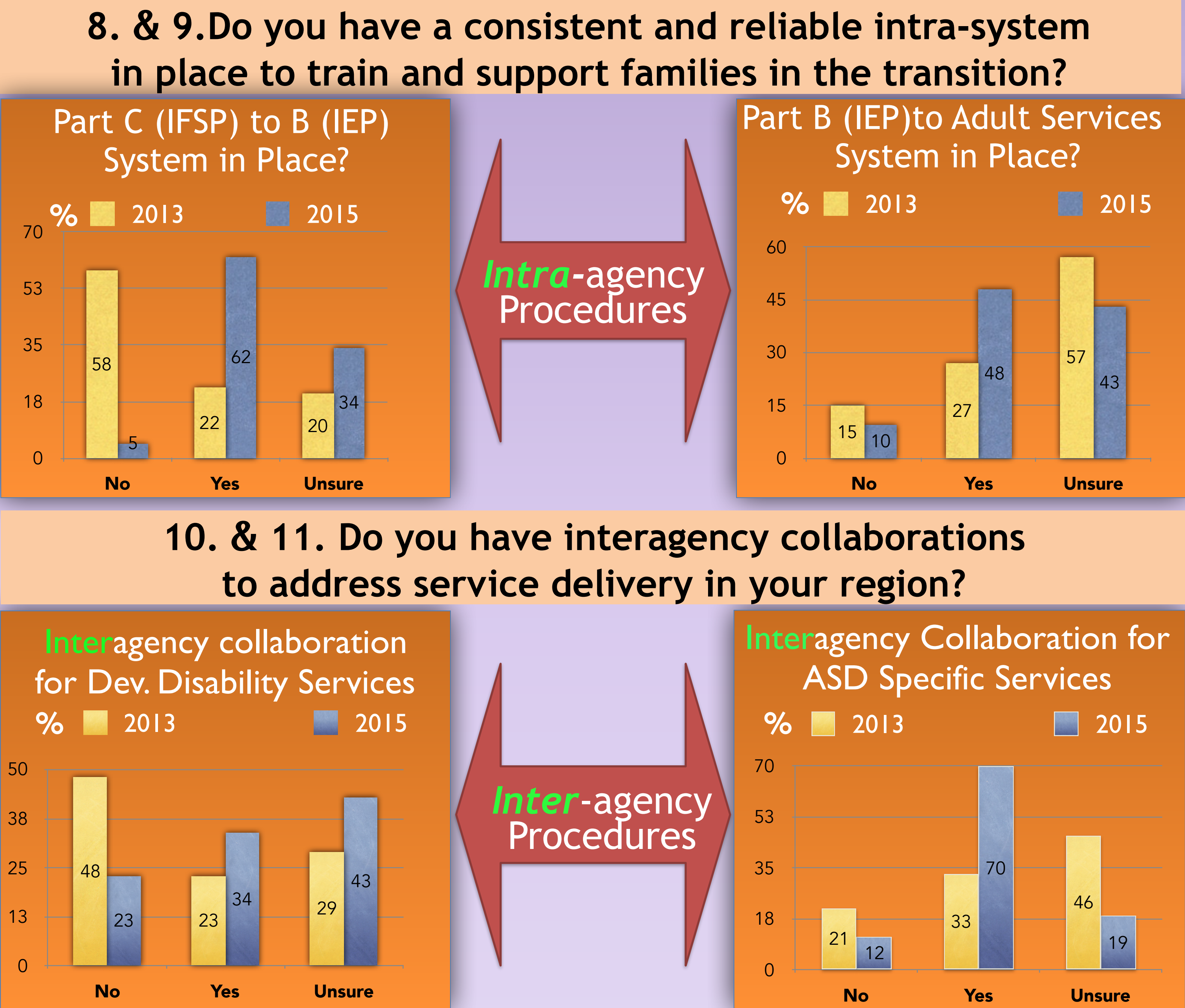
Who are the returning CAPTAIN Cadre members?

1. Counties Represented

421 responses in 226 results

2. CAPTAIN Regional Groups

228 responses in 225 results

3. Summit Returnees

2013: 154 / 2014: 197 / 2015: 226

4. Highest Degree Held

HS Diploma, BA/BS, MA/MS, Doctorate
1%, 9%, 14%, 76%

5. Agency Participation

SELPA, FRC/FEC, CDE, DDS, UCEDD
77%, 12%, 6%, 4%, 1%, 1%

6. Years in the Field

2-5: 4 / 6-10: 21 / 11-15: 24 / 16-20: 24 / 21-25: 12 / 26-30: 6 / 30+: 8

7. Years in Current Position

1-2: 11 / 3-5: 37 / 6-10: 30 / 11-15: 11 / 16-20: 6 / 21+: 5

CAPTAIN is an exemplary model of effecting broad and systems level change by identifying and engaging key stakeholders and promoting connections through regionalized meetings to leverage their existing infrastructures and resources. What began as the vision of a few state leadership members has evolved into active cross-participation from California's UCEDDs, Department of Education Local Education Areas, Department of Disability Services, and the network of Family Resource and Empowerment Centers. Many of these agencies, while mandated to serve the same geographic catchment areas, frequently operated independently.

Our CAPTAIN network has facilitated the interagency collaboration for more effective impact within these catchment areas.

Key Findings

8. & 9. Do you have a consistent and reliable intra-system in place to train and support families in the transition?

Part C (IFSP) to B (IEP) System in Place?
2013 / 2015
No: 58 / 5 — Yes: 22 / 62 — Unsure: 20 / 34

Intra-agency Procedures

Part B (IEP) to Adult Services System in Place?
2013 / 2015
No: 15 / 10 — Yes: 27 / 48 — Unsure: 57 / 43

10. & 11. Do you have interagency collaborations to address service delivery in your region?

Interagency collaboration for Dev. Disability Services
2013 / 2015
No: 48 / 23 — Yes: 23 / 34 — Unsure: 29 / 43

Inter-agency Procedures

Interagency Collaboration for ASD Specific Services
2013 / 2015
No: 21 / 12 — Yes: 33 / 70 — Unsure: 46 / 19

Discussion and Next Steps

To most effectively leverage resources, especially in economically difficult times, interagency collaboration and coordination should be the norm and not the exception. CAPTAIN's goal to build inter and intra agency collaboration began with building agency member awareness of formal and informal policies and procedures and establishing connections with other agencies serving the same populations. 2013 survey results suggested that agency personnel were often unaware of these policies, and effective structures to facilitate collaboration was necessary, including the development of procedures and standardized protocols. CAPTAIN established requirements and a course of action for interagency communication and collaboration between the three primary stakeholder groups, beginning with networking built into the annual Summits. Regional meetings were established as part of CAPTAIN's participation requirements for Cadre members, and quarterly planning meetings and shared cross-agency training plans became the structure for collaboration. By 2015, survey results indicated that Cadre member knowledge of intra- and inter-agency procedures jumped by over 50% overall, indicating that CAPTAIN's role in building a better future for individuals with ASD through collaboration is being realized. Next steps include expanding the CAPTAIN Cadre to include additional stakeholder groups such as adult service providers and higher education professionals.

Systems level change - the power of connections and collaboration