

# Program Evaluation of Mississippi's CAST Initiative

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# Program Evaluation Components

## Implementation Evaluation

- Interviews with CAST program directors and instructors and with CAST-trained faculty in non-CAST schools.
- Interviews completed January 2020.

## Outcome Evaluation (our focus today-see slides below)

## Project Forecast Sub-Study

- Project FORECAST is a program at the University of Missouri - St. Louis' Children's Advocacy Services of Greater St. Louis (CASGSL) and the University of Illinois at Springfield, funded by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- A large subsample of the overall evaluation sample consists of CAST students from Mississippi.

## CAST Graduate Pilot Interview Sub-study

- We interviewed 6 CAST students who had graduated or were in their last semester between October 2020 and May 2021.
- Questions gathered in-depth information about their experience of CAST.

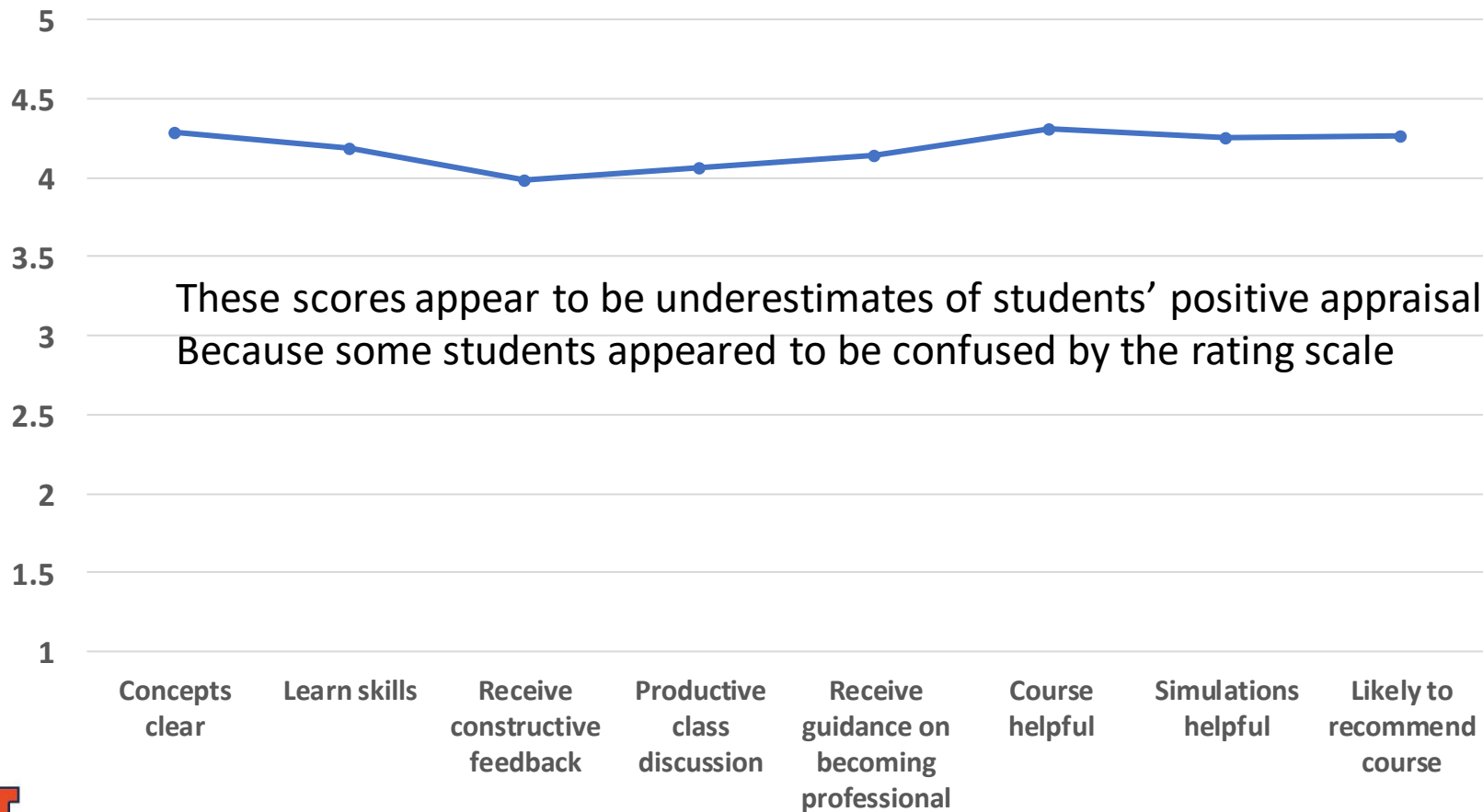
# CAST student outcome survey

- The survey was administered in the following semesters: Autumn 2019-2020 (post-survey only), Spring 2019-2020 (pre- and post-survey), Summer 2019-2020 (pre- and post-survey), Autumn 2020-2021 (pre- and post-survey), Spring 2020-2021 (pre- and post-survey).
- Students were offered a \$25 electronic Amazon ecode for participating in the survey.
- Non-CAST students were students in similar classes (e.g., social work, psychology) in non-CAST schools (who aspired to implement CAST)
- 11 CAST schools and 2 non-CAST schools: one school began to implement the CAST course in the middle of evaluation.
- Sample: total 750 responses (CAST=480 and non-CAST=260); nonduplicated 618 participants (CAST=375 and non-CAST=243); 109 repeated participants (CAST=101 and non-CAST=8).

# CAST Students Rated their Courses Highly

## Average Student Rating of their CAST Course

(5 = maximum positive score)



# Students described their positive experience of CAST in text questions

- *This course shows the truth about child abuse and neglect without sugarcoating anything. This makes it a more eye-opening experience that helps me understand the importance of taking a course like this.*
- *This course opened my eyes to how child advocacy is all around me and how my day-to-day actions affect it.*
- *The simulations help students get the full picture; brings about awareness of child abuse; focuses on real life situations that happen every day.*

# CAST can be emotionally demanding but rewarding

*It's an emotional rollercoaster. But it was one of the best classes I have ever taken in my college career.*

*Don't lose your faith in people. Going through the material, it can be a little disheartening to realize this stuff really happens and how much falls through the cracks. But there are still good people and children are resilient.*

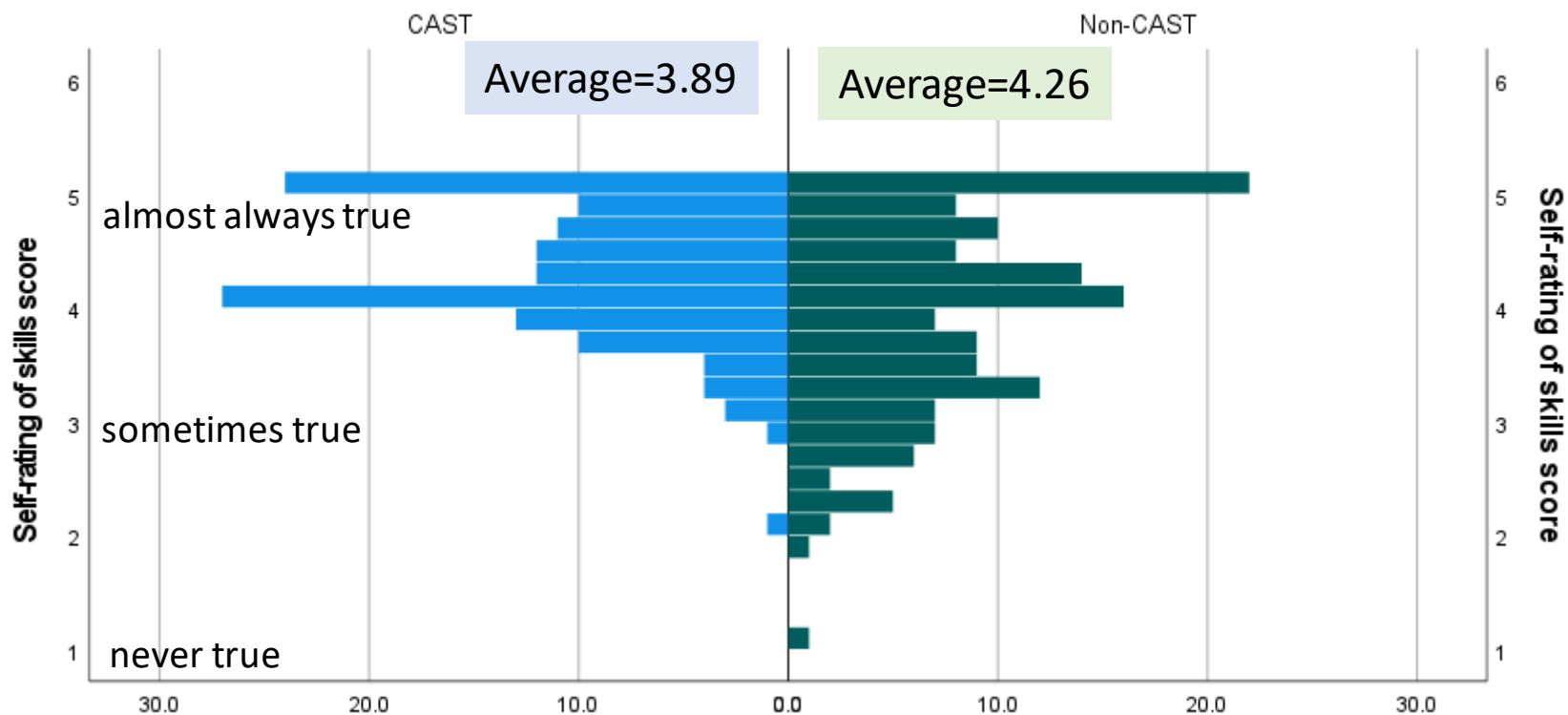
*Do not hesitate to take this class, but be prepared for the intensity of the subject material. Take it seriously, and share the knowledge you gain with family and friends who might not have an opportunity to take such a class.*

*It will be hard sometimes, and a lot of the things we talk about are harder to hear, but building a good relationship with your peers and your instructor will help you all be able to share the weight of this topic...*

*Hearing that others are feeling the same things I was made it easier to take in the experience at its fullest.*

# CAST students rated themselves significantly higher on skills related to child maltreatment

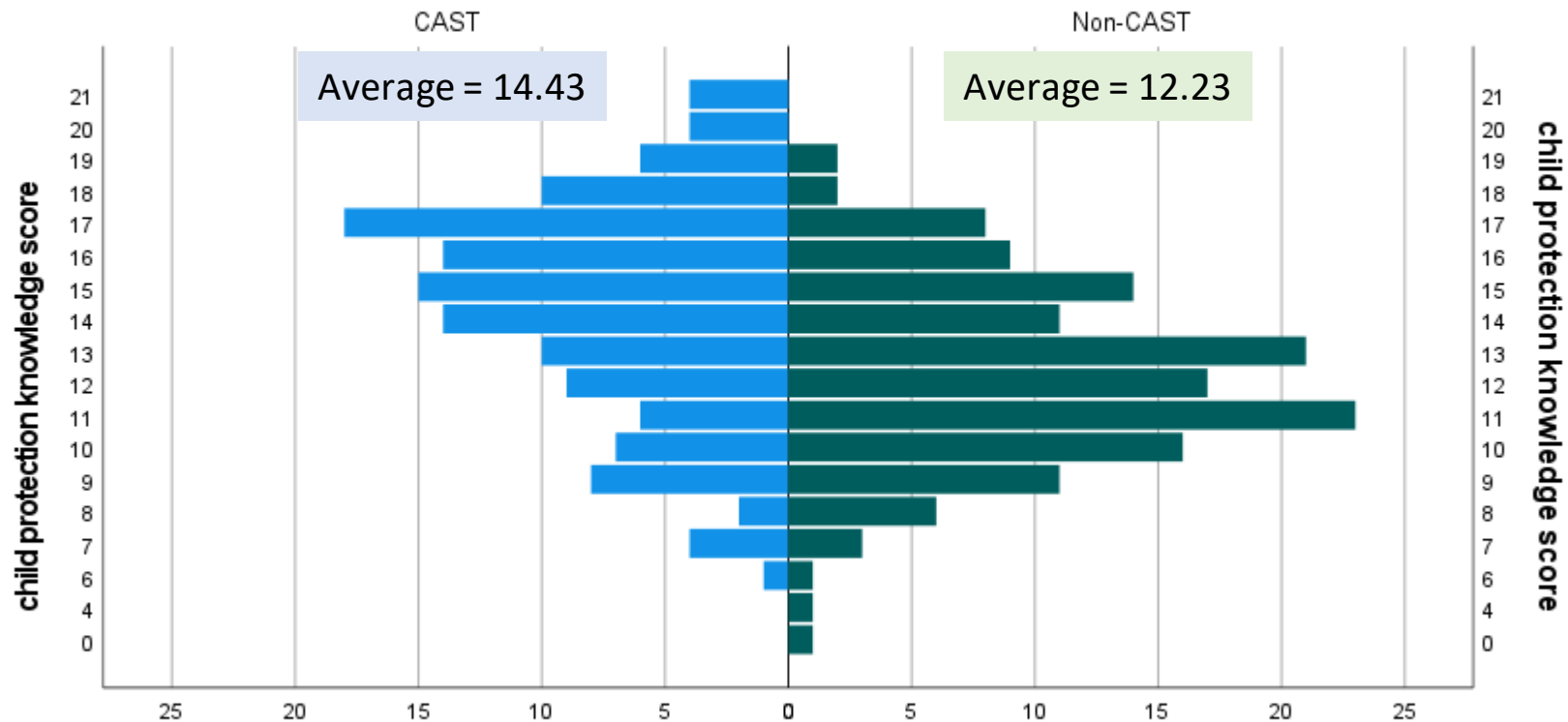
Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Self-Rating of Skills Related to Child Maltreatment



Average score on 15 questions, such as  
“I know how to identify possible instances of child maltreatment”

# CAST students had significantly higher child protection knowledge scores

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Students on Child Protection Knowledge Score





Try some of the child protection  
quiz questions yourself!



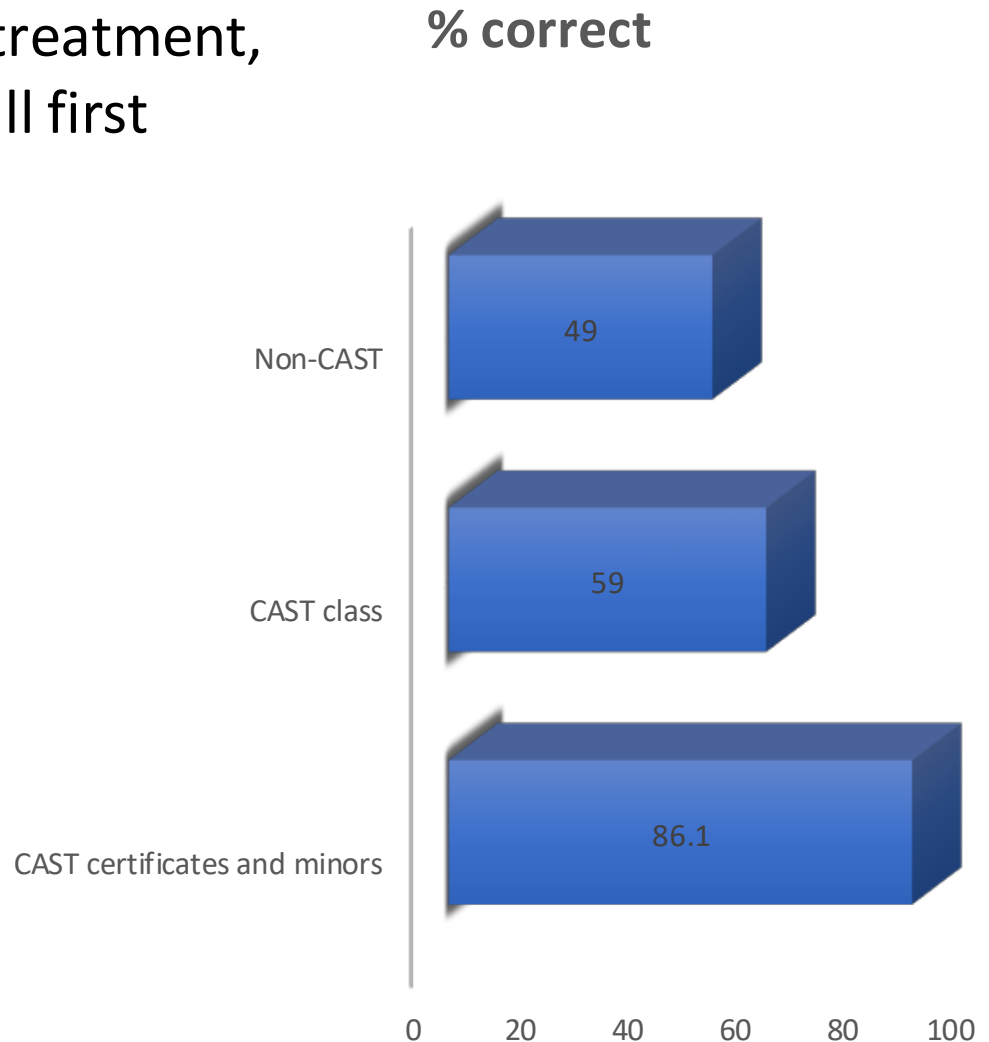
Question 1: If a child is removed from the home due to child maltreatment, child protective services will first attempt to place the child

- In a previously determined safe house
- In a monitored CPS facility
- With family members
- Either a or b



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Question 16: The main job of a Children's Advocacy Center is...

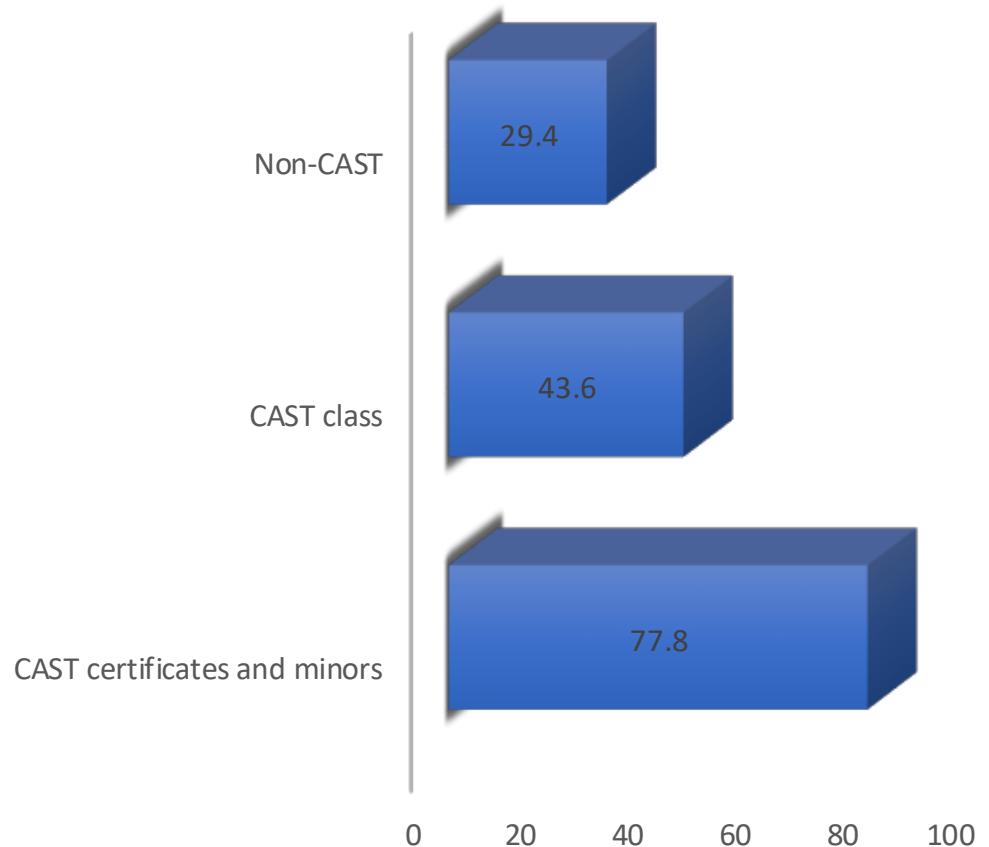
- To support and coordinate investigation and services in response to allegations of abuse
- To lobby for laws and government funds to help respond to and prevent child abuse and neglect
- To provide volunteers to support and advocate for children in foster care in youth court hearings and other situations
- To provide free or low-cost lawyers for children when their families cannot afford them.



## Question 16: The main job of a Children's Advocacy Center is...

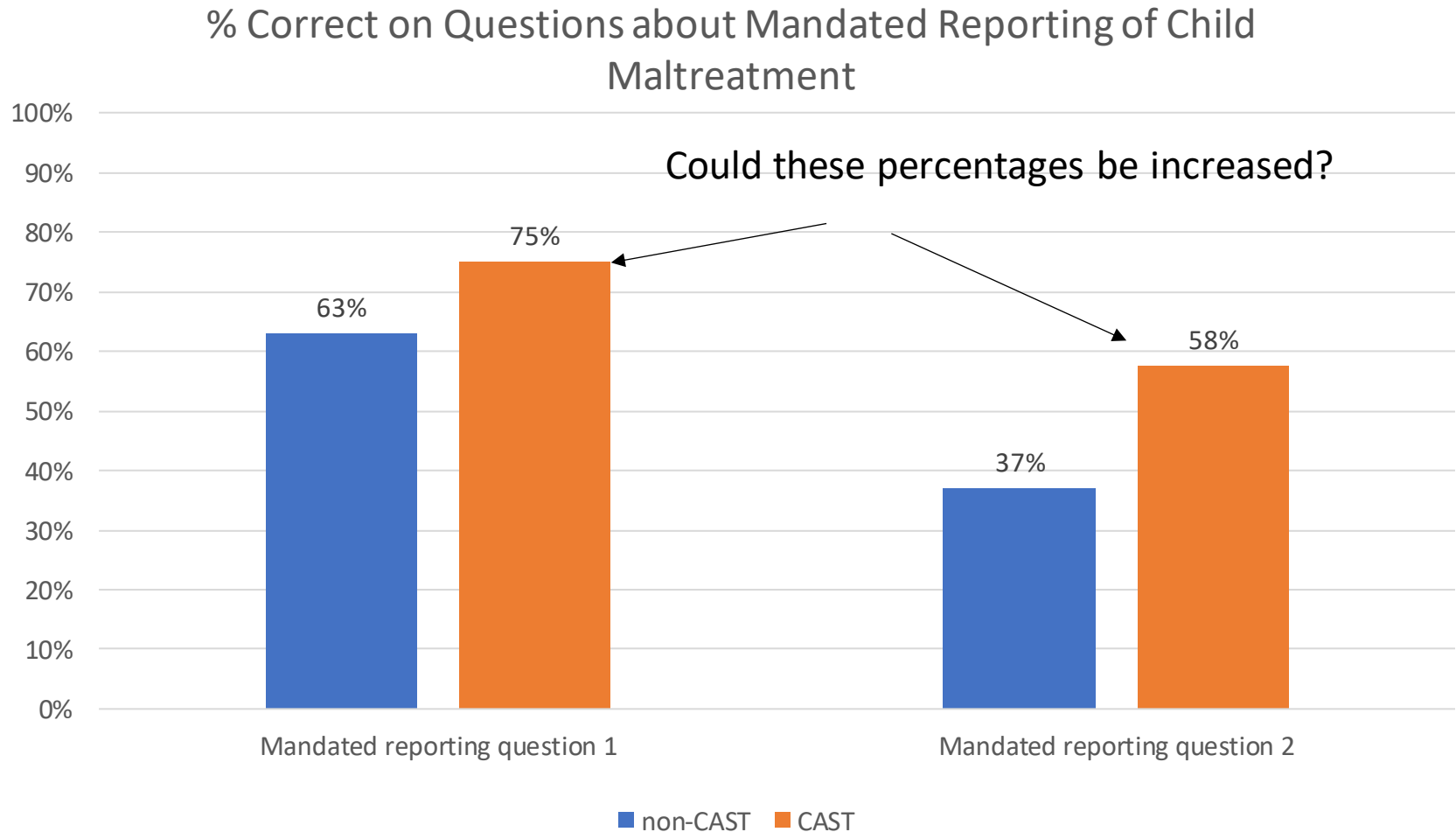
- a) To support and coordinate investigation and services in response to allegations of abuse
- b) To lobby for laws and government funds to help respond to and prevent child abuse and neglect
- c) To provide volunteers to support and advocate for children in foster care in youth court hearings and other situations
- d) To provide free or low-cost lawyers for children when their families cannot afford them.

% correct



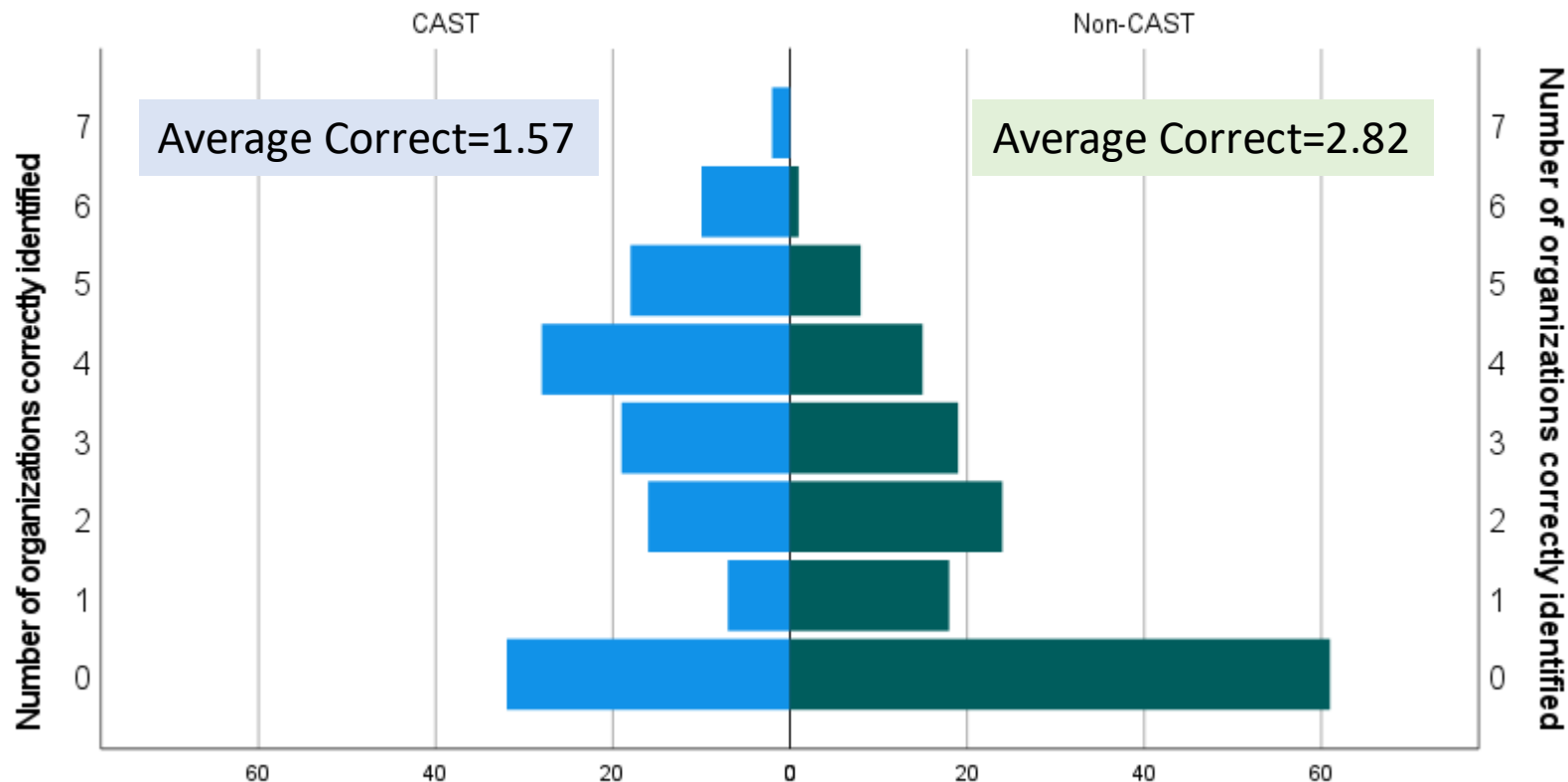
# Is there room for improvement on child protection knowledge for CAST students?

An Example:



CAST students knew more of the organizations likely to be involved in a child sexual abuse investigation (7 possible correct answers)

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Students on Number of Organizations Correctly identified



CAST students were significantly less likely to judge family behavior as maltreatment when there might be a better explanation

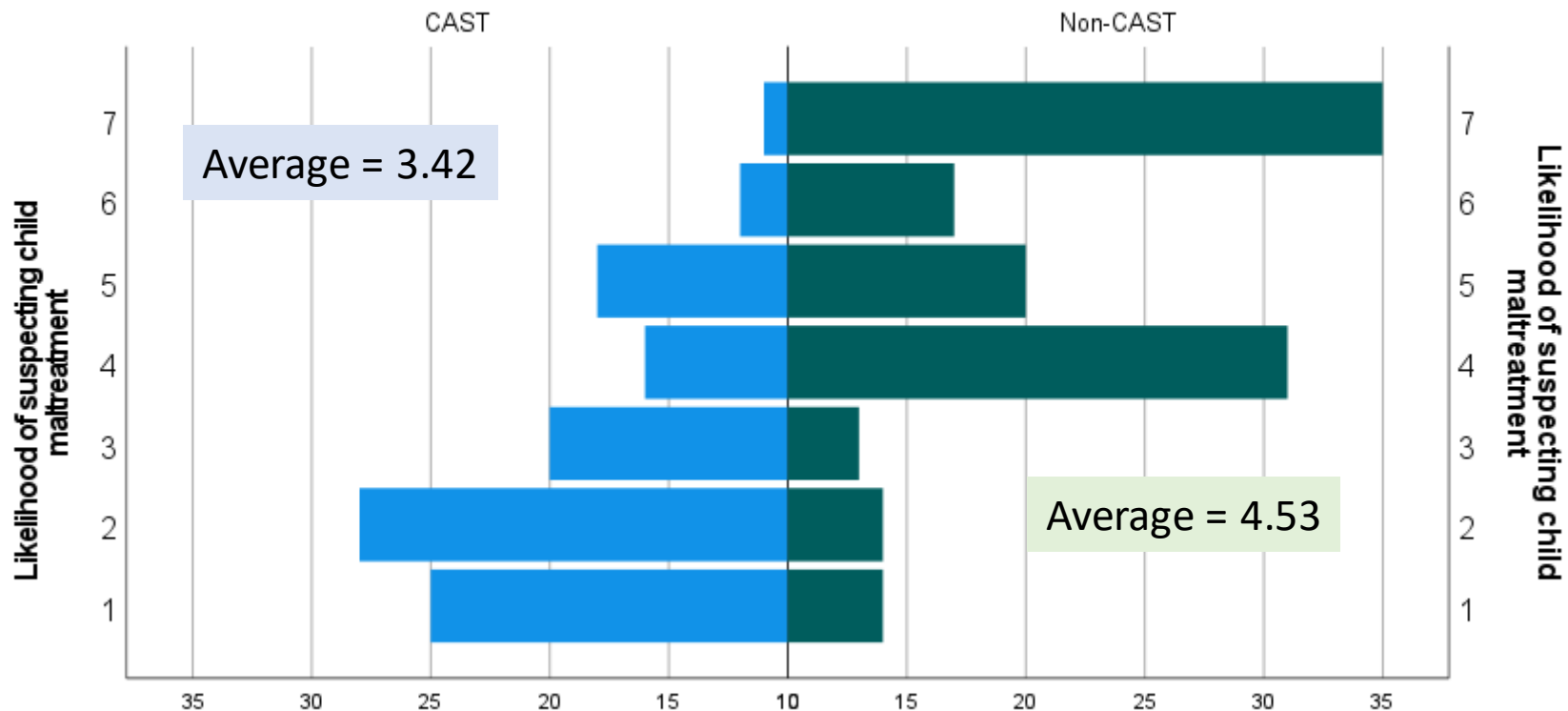


A toddler you know comes from a culture in which parents often swaddle young children. You learn that the toddler was wrapped tightly in a blanket so that she could not move. The child was left on the bed in this fashion for 15 minutes

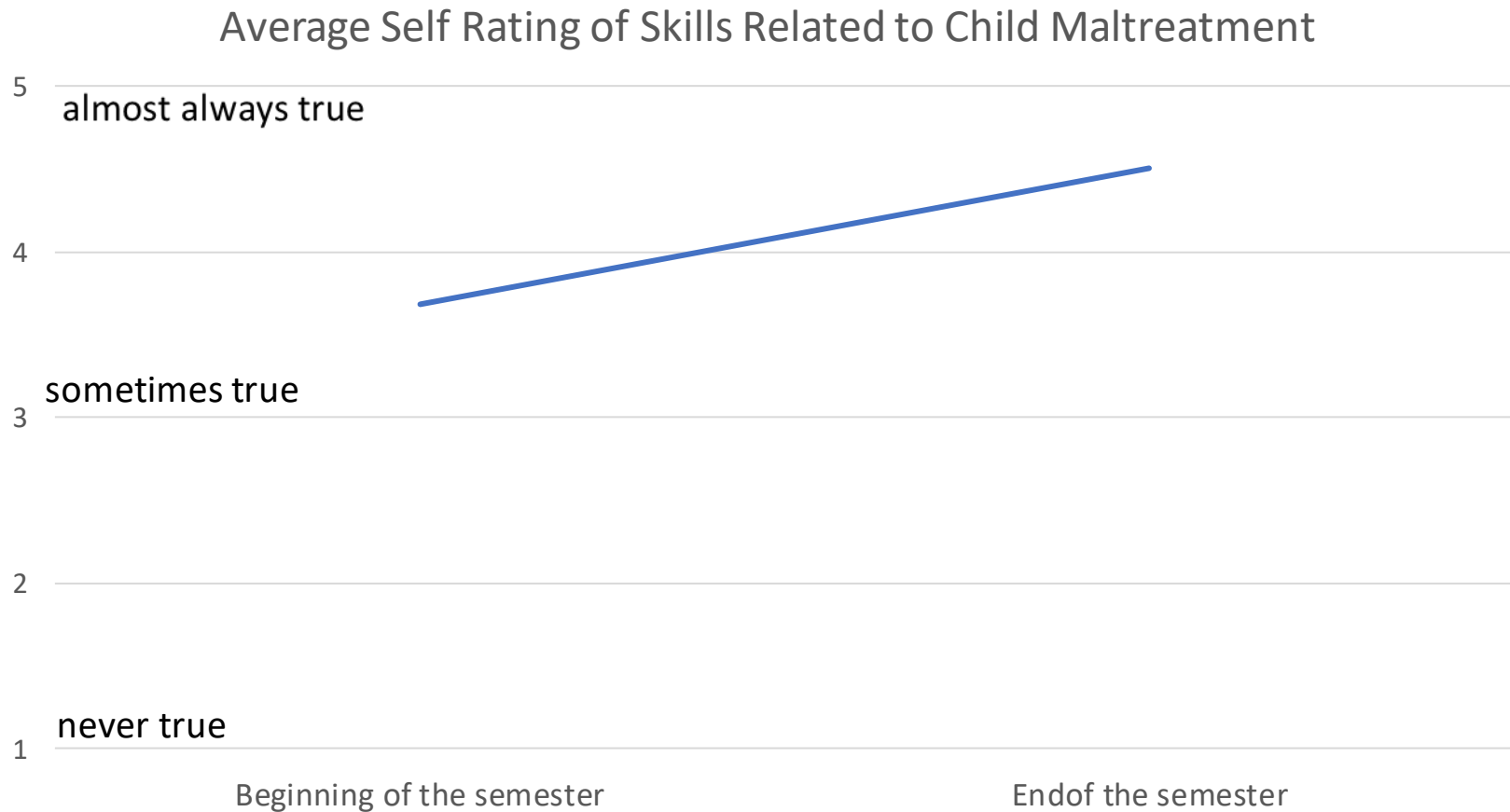
From the information provided, how likely are you to suspect child maltreatment?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Students on Judgment about Child Maltreatment



CAST certificate/minor students showed noticeable improvement during the semester (despite COVID)

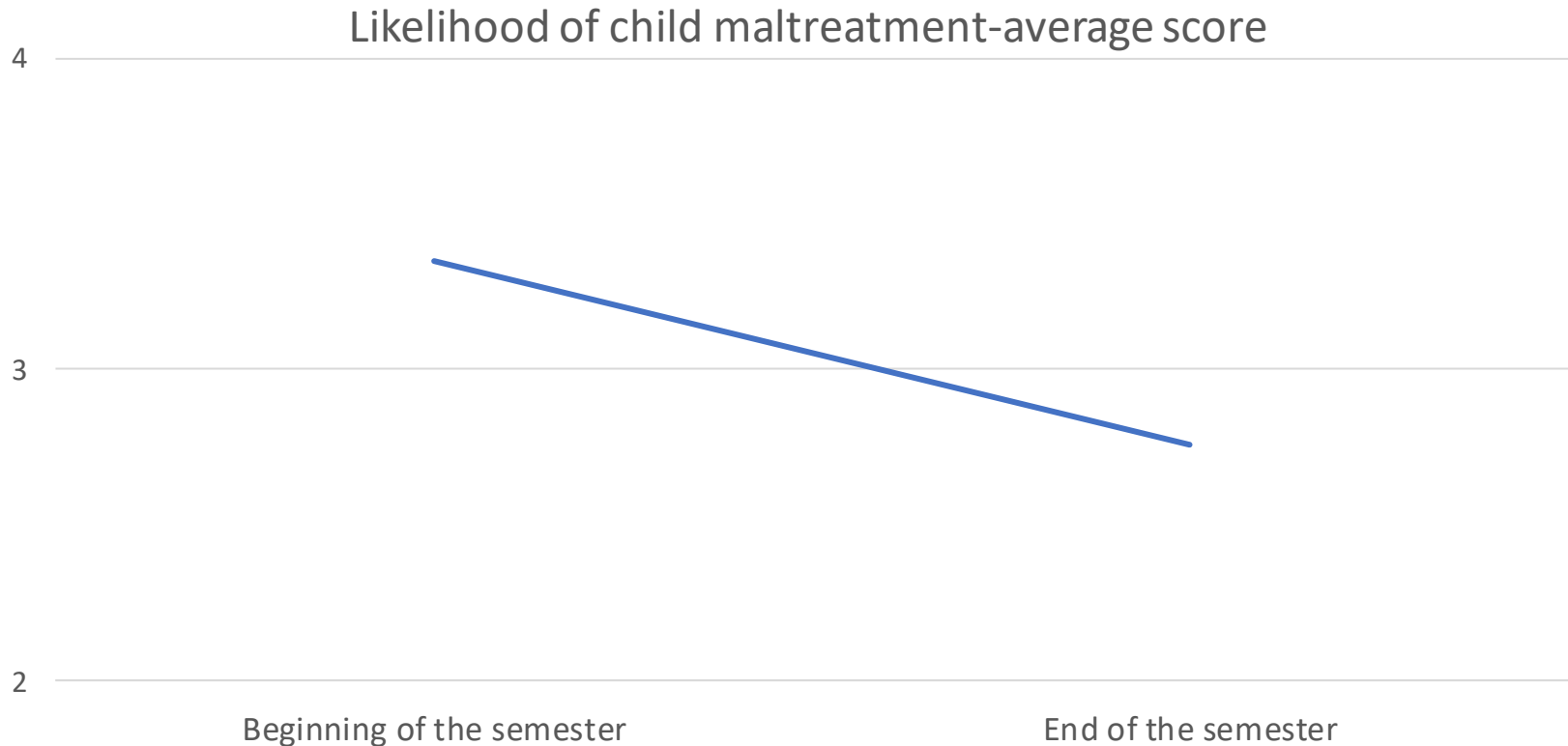


# CAST certificate/minor students' judgment improved

Shaunte is a 13-year-old female. You notice multiple scratches on her shoulder. You inquire about the scratches on her arm. She reports she was having an argument with her mother, and as she turned to walk out of the room, her mother grabbed her by the shoulder and “accidentally” scratched her. Her mother apologetically recounted the same story.

From the information provided, how likely are you to suspect child maltreatment?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



# Results Support the Value of CAST

- Mississippi CAST students show evidence of having knowledge and skills that could help them be more prepared to function effectively in child-serving careers
- CAST students had better knowledge and skills at the beginning of the semester—CAST attracts the right students
- CAST certificate & minor students showed significant improvement over the semester
- Mississippi CAST initiative is a promising program that deserves to be maintained and expanded
- Positive results in multiple schools of different types, support a broad approach to CAST education that includes both two-year and four-year institutions