



Families and Schools Together (FAST)

Program Description

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a multifamily, group intervention designed to build protective factors for children while empowering their parents to be the primary prevention agents. FAST applies family stress theory, family systems theory, social ecological theory of child development, and adult education and community development theory, to achieve its four goals:

- Enhance family functioning
- Prevent children from failing in school
- Prevent substance abuse by the child and other family members
- Reduce the stress that parents and children experience from daily life situations

There are four different FAST models, each serving a distinct group of children and their families.

- **FAST Babies** serves young mothers and fathers (ages 14–25), their infants (ages 0–3), and the teen mother's adult support person (the grandmother is recommended).
- **Early Childhood FAST** serves children in Head Start, pre-school, or early childhood programs and their families.
- **Elementary School FAST**, the most common FAST model, serves children in Kindergarten through 5th grade and their families.
- **Middle School FAST** serves 6th through 8th graders and their families.

Target Population

Children (birth to age 14) and their families

Special Audiences/Program Adaptations

FAST has achieved success across languages, cultures, socio-economic strata, and in both rural and urban settings. A core component of the program is that FAST teams (trained to lead program implementation) must represent the local culture, ethnicity, language, and social class of the families being served. Once the representative teams are in place, 60% of the FAST program can be adapted to fit local priorities. Randomized controlled trials with African American, Hmong, Latino, and Native American populations have been completed to determine effectiveness. FAST has been implemented internationally in Canada, Germany, Australia, Austria, and Russia.

Program Components

FAST has three core components:

- Outreach to parents
- Weekly, multifamily group sessions held for 8–10 weeks
- Two years of parent-run, monthly reunions

Between 5 and 25 families (are recruited to participate in multifamily support groups for 8–10 weeks. They attend weekly meetings and participate in structured activities. These research-based activities are designed to build respect for parents, strengthen reciprocal, caring bonds within families and across families, and strengthen trusting relationships between and among family members, the school, and the community. Families attending group meetings eat and

play at their own family table, network with peers, and spend one-on-one, quality time together. During the 8–10 weeks, there is only one, 15-minute formal presentation (on substance abuse or stress): the rest of the curriculum consists of interactive learning activities. This experiential learning approach enables all ages to participate, regardless of literacy and language skills.

After families "graduate" from the 8–10 week FAST program, on-going multifamily meetings called FASTWORKS are held monthly. With team support, parents design the agenda to maintain their FAST family networks and identify/develop community development goals. Schools are recommended to run three FAST cycles per academic year, with monthly FASTWORKS.

Program Cost

Costs vary depending on staffing, but are estimated to be approximately \$300–\$2,000 per family. Costs also vary by size of the 8-week, multifamily cycle: size can range from five families (a minimum of 5 families must graduate to become a Certified FAST program) to 25 families. For assistance in developing a budget, contact the FAST National Training & Evaluation Center (www.fastnational.org).

Training & Qualifications to Implement Program

The FAST National Training & Evaluation Center is the non-profit entity that helps communities implement FAST by providing training, technical assistance, and evaluation services to ensure quality outcomes. The Center has experience with custom designing projects for individual schools, school districts, counties, and statewide efforts.

FAST requires four days of team training instruction spread over a four-month period. This intensive training cycle increases the likelihood of positive family outcomes through correct implementation of the program. The training consists of two days in a workshop, three site visits, and one review day. One certified trainer is needed per team (a team must consist of at least four people but not more than ten). Training workshops can be for one or more teams.

Training Costs

Onsite training costs \$4,650 per site and includes technical assistance. In addition, sites must pay the trainer's travel costs.

Evaluation Results

The outcomes of FAST have been consistently reproduced and sustained in more than 700 sites, in 45 states, 6 countries and three Indian nations over the past 12 years. Recently completed, rigorously designed, independent research has verified earlier findings and validated the FAST approach. An evaluation is conducted on every new site and shared in real time. The strong outcomes of FAST encompass several key areas:

School Impact:

- Improved FAST child's academic competence and performance
- Improved FAST child's behavior (social skills and attention span)
- Reduced FAST child's problem behaviors (aggression, anxiety, and depression in classroom)
- Increased FAST parent involvement in school

Family Impact:

- Improved FAST child's social skills and cooperation, attention span

- Reduced FAST child's aggression and anxiety at home
- Reduced family conflict

Community Impact:

- Increased the friendship networks for families
- Increased parent leadership in the community
- Reduction of juvenile delinquency and substance abuse problems in the neighborhood
- Parents pursue further adult education

Program Retention Rate:

- If families attend one FAST session, 80% will complete the 8 weekly sessions and graduate (the 20% drop-out rate is consistent across rural, urban, suburban and inner city communities)

Recommended Evaluation Components

An evaluation must be conducted each time a team implements the FAST program. The evaluation package includes questionnaires, team feedback forms, data analysis, and a site report, as well as a process evaluation conducted by the certified trainer while observing the program implementation during the three site visits. The cost for the outcome evaluation is \$1,000.

Agency/Institution Recognition

- Center for Mental Health Services- Greenberg et al. Promising Program
- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Model Program
- Strengthening America's Families Model Program
- Title V (OJJDP) Exemplary Program

Contact Information

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