

Wisconsin Center for Education Research

Families and Schools Together (FAST)

DID FAST ENHANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN AND AMONG FAMILIES AND SHOW POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS?

Project Overview

THE PROBLEM: What Challenge Did the Program Try to Address?

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) program aims to assess whether FAST can contribute to turning around persistently low-performing schools. In many of these schools, student and parent engagement are compromised and many students experience nonacademic barriers to school success. FAST was expected to overcome these barriers by (1) engaging parents in a way that increases their comfort level with the school, (2) countering parent and child stress by building trusting relationships among parents, school staff, and community partners, and (3) reducing family conflict and child neglect by empowering parents to interact positively with their children. The ultimate purpose of FAST is to foster a schoolwide climate of family engagement in children's transition to elementary school and a strong partnership between parents and school staff.

THE PROJECT: What Strategies Did the Program Employ?

The Wisconsin Center for Education Research, in collaboration with Turning Points for Children (implementer) and FAST Inc. (technical assistance provider), received an i3 validation grant (2013-2018) to implement FAST in low-performing schools in Philadelphia.¹ In FAST, students and their parents participate in an eight- to 10-week cycle of after-school sessions during which they get to know one another and interact with teachers and other school staff. The program has three stages: (1) initial outreach to encourage parent participation; (2) eight weekly, multifamily group sessions;² and (3) FASTWORKS which continues the program for two years through monthly parent-led sessions. The study examined the impact of FAST's components one and two using a cluster randomized controlled trial (RCT) design. Sixty primary schools were randomly assigned with 30 schools in each group. In each school, two cohorts of incoming Kindergarten and their families were invited to participate in the study, for a total sample size of 1,396.

¹ Validation grants provide funding to support the expansion of projects that address persistent education challenges to the regional or national level. All i3 grantees are required to conduct rigorous evaluations of their projects. The quality of evidence required to demonstrate a project's effectiveness depends on a project's level of scale or grant type.

² To encourage more families to attend, the typical eight-week session was extended to nine or 10 weeks in some schools.

THE FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER (FAST) MODEL

- **FAST sessions.** Included multiple groups of 20-12 families meeting simultaneously in the school during out-of-school time. The sessions are parent-led experiential exercises, designed to build relationships (a) between parents and their elementary school children, (b) among parents of children attending the same school, and (c) among children, parents, and school personnel. Families who complete at least six sessions “graduate” from the program in a ceremony hosted by the principal.
- **FAST school teams.** Each FAST school creates its own team responsible for recruiting and engaging participants and operating FAST sessions for students and parents. Team members are intended to represent the ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the school and include community professionals in mental health and substance abuse, school representatives (teachers, counselors, and/or family outreach workers), and parents who have children enrolled in the school.

Summary of Results

DID FAST ENHANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN AND AMONG FAMILIES AND SHOW EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS?

- **FAMILY FUNCTIONING.** Offering FAST in schools produced a small but statistically significant negative effect on family functioning. Cohort 2 in FAST treatment group reported more conflict than families in control group who were not offered FAST.
- **FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS.** FAST had no meaningful and enduring effect on family-school relationships. There was a small, statistically significant positive effect of FAST on one aspect of family-school relationships - (the Joining subscale of the PTRS for Cohort 1 students at the end of Kindergarten (effect size 0.28), but this effect disappeared in 1st and 2nd grade. The effect was not found for Cohort 2. There were no statistically significant effects when the Communications subscale of the Parent Teacher Relationship Scale (PRTS) was examined, the School-Based Involvement Scale (SBIS), or measures of student attendance.
- **ACADEMIC LEARNING.** Offering FAST did not **PRODUCE** any meaningful effect on students' academic learning. There was no statistically significant effect of offering FAST on students' overall reading scores or overall mathematics scores at any point in time, nor was there any significant effect on vocabulary at any point in time.
- **SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL LEARNING.** Offering FAST did not produce any significant effects on students' social and behavioral learning. There was no significant effect of offering FAST on teacher rating for student social and behavioral development on the Social Skills Improvement System rating scales at any point in time.

Please see Appendices B and C for information about the evaluation's design and the quality of the evidence, respectively.

SECONDARY FINDINGS

A second sub-study focused on students with adequate, as-intended exposure to FAST versus students from comparison schools with no FAST available. Eight out of 30 FAST schools had both relative high levels of program uptake and were large enough to include at least 60 incoming kindergarteners qualified for this quasi-experimental design (QED) study. These eight schools were matched to eight comparison schools. Results of the QED study across key outcomes showed:

- **FAMILY FUNCTIONING.** No statistically significant effects for FAST were found for any of the aspect of family functioning assessed.
- **ACADEMIC LEARNING.** One statistically significant effect of FAST on 1st grade student achievement was found. Students in the FAST treatment group scored 0.8 standard deviations SD higher than their comparison group counterparts on the WJ-III broad reading score. There was a smaller but still sizeable effect on the WJ-III broad mathematics score of 0.44 SD. This effect was not statistically significant.
- **FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS.** There was a substantive positive effect (effect size 0.96 SD) on school-based involvement. This statistically significant effect disappeared by the end of 1st grade. There was also a large negative effect of FAST on student attendance during the kindergarten year (effect size -1.16 SD) but not in 1st grade.
- **SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL LEARNING.** No meaningful effects of FAST on student social and behavioral learning were found.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Program implementation in this project was significantly compromised. The project aimed for a 60% participation rate in Kindergarten in each FAST school. Such high penetration was deemed necessary for the program to meaningfully contribute to the whole school turnaround. However, participation was approximately 20% in each of the two years that the program was offered. Participating families also had fewer FAST sessions than expected.

The study included an implementation evaluation that examined fidelity of implementation across all schools. Findings from the implementation evaluation and considerations regarding the samples in the impact studies are presented below.

- **FAST SESSION ADAPPTIONS.** In an effort to encourage more families to attend sessions, the implementation team made some flexible adaptations to the program, including extending FAST sessions from the typical eight-week cycle to a nine- or 10-week cycle in some schools so that more sessions were held. Families were also permitted to start the fall cycle and continue in the spring cycle if they were unable to graduate in the fall. Finally, as the study children progress through school years over the course of the study, FAST was open to those families each year.
- **FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION.** Across the 30 participating schools, each FAST component reached an acceptable level of fidelity of implementation for year 1 and year 2. Across schools at the individual component level, fidelity of services never dropped below 90%, and there was 100% fidelity for three components across the two years combined. Components of fidelity are captured on the FAST Program Integrity Checklist (PIC) and include: (1) FAST values and goals, (2) the creation of a collaborative FAST team, (3) the frequency of FAST and FASTWORKS sessions, (4) universal access for families in target grades, (5) recruitment and outreach, (6) special play activities, (7) opening and closing activities, (8) family crafts, (9) family games and activities, (10) parent pairs/buddy time, (11) children's playtime plus parent meeting time, and (12) incentives.

For More Information

Evaluation Reports

[Evaluation Report](#) (Bos et al, February 2018)³

³ The information and data for this result summary was collected from the most recent report as of 02/10/2020: Bos et. al, (2018). *Investing in Innovation (i3) Validation Study of Families and Schools Together*. Retrieved from https://www.familiesandschools.org/app/uploads/2018/11/AIR_FASTi3.pdf

Appendix A: Students Served by the Project⁴

GRADE(S)													
PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

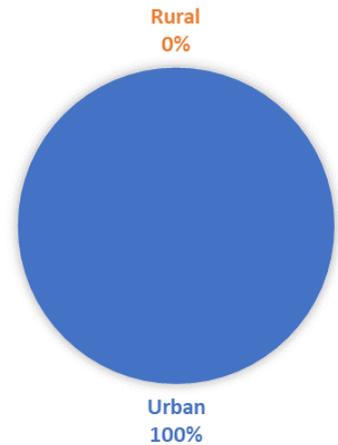
GENDER

Not Reported

RACE/ETHNICITY

Not Reported

COMMUNITY



HIGH-NEED STUDENTSⁱ

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Not Reported	Not Reported	Not Reported

⁴These data reflect the entire student population served by the intervention, not just the evaluation sample used in the impact study.

Appendix B: Impact Evaluation Methodology⁵

This section details the sample studied for the one-year impact evaluation.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

Design:	The study randomized 60 Philadelphia elementary schools for implementation of FAST in 30 and business as usual in the other 30 schools. FAST targeted incoming kindergartners and their families. Impact analyses assessed effect of FAST on family relations and student outcomes.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Using an RCT, schools were assigned to the treatment or control condition. The study estimated impacts using a two-level model with students nested within schools. The following student-level baseline control variables were included in the final model to increase precision of final estimates: ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability status, gender, and English proficiency. For the school-level model, the study included school-level percentages of kindergartners with disabilities and who were English Language Learners, and total kindergartener enrollment in the year of analysis as covariates.
Study Length:	One year

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Study Setting:	Sixty elementary schools in Philadelphia.
Final Sample Sizes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Treatment Group:</i> 30 schools, student samples varied depending on the outcome measure ranging from 147-247 in treatment schools<i>Control Group:</i> 30 schools, student samples ranged from 169-259 in comparison schools depending on the outcome measured.
Intervention Group Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">N/A
Comparison Group Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">N/A
Data Sources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Family functioning: parent surveysFamily-school engagement: parent surveysAcademic learning: student scoresSocial and behavioral learning: teacher rating of students

⁵ These data reflect only the evaluation sample in the impact study, not the entire population served.

Key Measures:

List of topics and measures used in each domain appears below.
[Domain: Topic (Measure)]

- Family Functioning:
 - Family relationships (Child-parent relationship scale)
 - Family involvement (Family involvement questionnaire)
 - Family support (Reciprocal Support from Other Parents)
- Family-school engagement:
 - Teacher-family engagement (Parent-teacher relationship scale)
 - School-based involvement (Family-involvement questionnaire)
 - Student attendance (School attendance records)
- Academic Learning
 - Literacy (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4, Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement)
 - Mathematics (Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement)
- Social and Behavioral Learning
 - Social and behavioral skills (Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales)

Appendix C: Quality of the Evidence

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW⁶

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 02/10/2020	N/A

EVIDENCE FOR ESSA REVIEW⁷

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 02/10/2020	N/A

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS REVIEW⁸

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 02/10/2020	N/A

⁶ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW>

⁷ <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

⁸ <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary

Validation, 2013-2018

The [*Investing in Innovation Fund \(i3\)*](#), established under section 14007 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, is a Federal discretionary grant program at the U.S. Department of Education within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). i3 grants help schools and local education agencies work in partnership with the private sector and the philanthropic community to develop and expand innovative practices that improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, and/or increase college enrollment and completion rates for high-need students.

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ⁱ “High-need student” refers to a student at risk of academic failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, attend high-minority schools, are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, in foster care, have been incarcerated, have disabilities, or who are English learners. For more information see: [*Applications for New Awards; Investing in Innovation Fund-Development Grants, 81 FR 24070 \(April 25, 2016\)*](#).