

# FAST

Families and Schools Together

*"I learned a lot of things that are important about things going on in our children's lives at school and every day life with their peers."*

-- FAST Parent

## What is FAST?

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an outreach and multi-family group process designed to engage parents into increased involvement with their children, other families, and community-based structures, including schools. FAST systematically applies family-stress theory, social ecological theory, community development strategies, and brain research to increase family support and to build social skills, learning readiness, and protective factors for ages 0-16 years. Positive experiential learning activities for the family, such as playing and talking in dyads and small groups, maximize the relationship-building processes.

FAST was developed in 1988 by Dr. Lynn McDonald, a former senior scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER), is now at Middlesex University in London, England.

In 2002, The SAMHSA identified FAST as an evidence-based model program through a peer-review process based on review of results from randomized control trials.

FAST is a widely disseminated evidence-based model program. FAST has been implemented in over 1,000 communities, 45 states, 8 countries, and many Indian Nations. Program fidelity and outcome monitoring is ensured through Families and Schools Together, Inc., (FST) a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose sole mission is replication and dissemination of the FAST program. FST provides training, evaluation, and technical assistance as well as collaborates with the University of Wisconsin - Madison, WCER, to support ongoing research and program development.

Program Impact - Experimental studies show that the following improvements are maintained for at least one year:

1. Parent engagement, especially from low-income and diverse populations (African American, Latino, American Indian, refugee): increased volunteering, community leadership, and involvement with schools.
2. Improved child functioning in the classroom: increased social skills, decreased aggression, improved academic performance

## Evidence-Based Practices Lists

2002 - US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention: Model Program (FAST is 1 of 54)

1999 - US Department of Justice, office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Model Family Program (FAST is 1 of 35)

1998 - US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement: Tool for School (FAST is 1 of 27; 1 of only 2 models for parent involvement)

1998 - US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services: Culturally Competent After-School Program (FAST is 1 of six)

## History of State Investment in FAST

**California** - From 1996-2006, California budgeted \$1 million annually to include FAST as a component of the state's Health and Human Services, Office of Child Abuse and Prevention, Juvenile Crime Prevention Initiative designed to demonstrate how programs strengthen families and reduce delinquency. 24 County governments were awarded competitive grants across two separate five year cycles.

**Hawaii** - The governor introduced a state FAST day in recognition of the contributions of the evidence-based model. Hawaii is the third state to create a position at the state level to coordinate FAST; the position is within the Department of Education.

**Missouri** - Department of Early Childhood Education funded a statewide pilot of Pre-K FAST multi-family groups to supplement early childhood initiatives (2003).

**South Carolina** - From 1999-2004, state TANF funds (\$8 million annually) were allocated via the Dept. of Mental Health to a statewide NGO initiative funding FAST into every county in the state.

**Wisconsin** - From 1990-2000, Wisconsin's Act 122 (1989) funded FAST through the Dept. of Public Instruction (DPI) to support schools in the creation of effective responses to behavioral problems, including alcohol and other drug abuse. 110 urban and rural school districts implemented FAST programs. In 1994, WI's statewide FAST initiatives was one of the the 25 finalists for the Ford Foundation and Harvard University Innovations in State and Local Government award. While president of the National Governors' Association, Governor Tommy Thompson personally recommended FAST.

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# Why should FAST be your choice?

*“FAST prevents school failure, prevents substance abuse, enhances family functioning, and empowers parents in their responsibility to serve as their child’s primary prevention agent as well as partner’s in their child’s educational process.”*  
-District Superintendent

## Parents as Partners

Parents are valued as equal partners on the collaborative implementation team. They are required partners in the process from the earliest planning stages to the monthly parent-led reunions. Parent leadership is a hallmark of FAST. *One Ohio principal said, "If you want to improve parent involvement in your school, and you have tried everything else, try FAST, it works!"*

## Local FAST Adaptations Promoted

Collaborative FAST teams must represent the local culture, ethnicity, language and social class of the families being served in the multi-family groups. Cultural representation is a FAST core component which cannot be changed. Once the representative teams are in place, 60% of the FAST program can be adapted to fit local priorities and needs.

## Multi-Disciplinary = Cost Effective

FAST is a good investment of scarce resources as it bolsters child, family and community outcomes across the social, educational, behavioral and mental health domains with one simultaneous intervention. That's a lot of impact; FAST is a wise choice for those investing in better outcomes for children and families.

## Research- and Values-Based

FAST activities are research- and values-based, and are based on proven techniques. The values of FAST are woven into the fabric of the curriculum as well as openly taught, discussed and agreed upon in training. One of the core values of FAST is the belief that all parents love their children and want the very best for them. This value is demonstrated at every point in the FAST process.

## Multi-Family Group Approach

FAST is the first application of a multi-family group strategy in community-based prevention. Based on family systems theory and family stress theory, multi-family groups systematically build relationships across domains of family, community and school.

## Unique Combination of Benefits

FAST is unique in its partnership with parents, its predictable outcomes, its advanced training and support structure, and its impact across so many domains of the child's ecology.

## Replicable, Predictable Outcomes

The predictability and breadth of the outcomes of FAST is another one of its unique trademarks. Over 12 years of replication in more than 1,000 sites, in 45 states, 8 countries (Canada, Germany, Australia, Austria, England, The Netherlands, and Russia) and three Indian nations, the outcomes of FAST have been consistently reproduced and sustained. Recently completed, rigorously designed, independent research has verified earlier findings and validated the FAST approach. In addition, an outcome evaluation is conducted on every site and shared in real time. Funders, therefore, know very quickly just how effective FAST is in their own community.

## An Exemplary, Model Program

FAST has received numerous awards and honors and was acknowledged as a SAMHSA model program in 2002. FAST was one of five programs selected and featured at the 1999 White House Conference on the Prevention of School Violence, and it was also the only family approach selected. It is a model program listed by the Centers for Substance Abuse Prevention and one of twenty-five model school reform tools. Also, in 2006, FAST was recognized as an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Exemplary Program.

## Population Served

FAST effectively engages hard-to-reach families with successful implementation in rural and urban communities with parents from many different cultural backgrounds. FAST also has a high program retention rate. Of families that come to one FAST session, 80% will graduate from the program.

## *Recent Articles on FAST*

McDonald, L., Moberg, D.P., Brown, R., Espiricueta, I., Flores, N. & Burke, M.P. (2006). After-School Multi-Family Groups: A Randomized Controlled Trial Involving Low-Income, Urban, Latino Children. *Children & Schools*.

Kratochwill, T.M., McDonald, L., Levin, J.R., Young Bear-Tibbetts, H., & Demaray, M. (2004). Families and Schools Together: an experimental analysis of a parent-mediated multi-family group program for American Indian Children. *Journal of School Psychology*, 42, 359-383.

McDonald, L., & Sandler, J. (2005). Engaging Parents in Schools Serving Low-Income, Diverse Children. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada, April.