

Family & Children First Council
Annual Report
**Families and Schools Together
(FAST)**

Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education
Case Western Reserve University
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The Family & Children First Council (FCFC) of Cuyahoga County supports the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program for children and their families as a multifamily group intervention designed to build protective factors and enhance well-being for children, and empower parents to be the primary prevention agents for their own children. FAST enlists children 4 to 12 years old and their parents using engaging activities led by local school and agency partners in times of non-crisis.



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FAST 
Families & Schools TOGETHER

The Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education at Case Western Reserve University conducted an evaluation of the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program in Cuyahoga County. County government provides public funding for the program through the Family & Children First Council.

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Executive Summary: Families and Schools Together (FAST)

The report that follows includes tables and figures derived from Families and Schools Together (FAST) data provided by FAST's national office for Cuyahoga County schools reporting program results. These tables and figures were created by taking multiple years of FAST reports and aggregating data at the county level. The purpose of these analyses is to:

- provide the Family & Children First Council (FCFC) of Cuyahoga County with a detailed depiction of the number of families served, improvements reported, and parent and teacher satisfaction with FAST programming;
- display the five-year trend of parents reporting improvements on FAST domains;
- highlight FAST domains that fail to report favorable improvements;
- isolate individual items of FAST domains that may have a negative effect on improvements; and
- identify perceived strengths and areas for improvement.

Since the 2010–2011 school year, a total of 909 families have engaged in FAST programming, across 29 schools. More than nine out of 10 (90.4%) families reported attending all eight weekly FAST sessions. Reports indicate a moderate level of satisfaction with FAST programming, with parents providing a 9.3 out of 10 satisfaction rating and teachers providing a rating of 6.1 out of 10, respectively.

By tracking these data, Cuyahoga County can tell if funded programs are “trending up” to improve over time, and make decisions about how programs are offered. These levels of assessment offer acumen on the benefits of programming and may assist with the decision of expansion.

FAST Program Description

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a preventive and intervention program aimed at improving family functioning and children's resiliency. FAST's primary goals are to enhance family functioning, decrease risk of school failure, decrease risk of substance abuse in parents, and reduce identified stressors in the lives of parents and children.

The program also strengthens the connection between schools and families while providing social support to families. Most significant is the inclusion of parents within FAST to engage parents with their local schools, which ultimately leads to children's academic success. Inclusion of parents is achieved through focused, engaging activities led by local school and agency partners in times of non-crisis. That is, parents are engaged with FAST as part of their children's activities in school, and not as an institutional response to their children's behaviors.

Though a principal philosophy of the FAST program is that it is guided and led by parents, the program is supported by a core team of well-trained community, school, and parent partners. In Cuyahoga County, the core team consists of the following members:

- **Two Community Partners:** These are prevention partners from local organizations, who are typically experts in substance abuse, mental health, or domestic violence, and who can link families to community resources.
- **Two School Partners:** These are employees of the school that is hosting the FAST program, and are often the teachers of the students or grade-level participating.
- **Two Parent Partners:** These are parents or caregivers of a child who attends the school and are usually FAST graduates, meaning that they participated in the FAST program in the past. They cannot be from families currently enrolled in the FAST program.

FAST has been implemented in nearly 30 schools across Cuyahoga County (Table 1). The program includes multiple sessions, each eight weeks long, each with about a dozen families. FAST uses multi-family group interaction to build relationships between parents and schools, improve the parent-child bond, and empower parents. FAST participants

experience a reduction in compulsive behaviors such as substance abuse, and an improvement in positive scholastic behaviors while building resiliency factors against risks and stressors.

Table 1. Summary of Schools Engaged in FAST Programming from 2010–2011 through 2014–2015 School Years					
Schools	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015
Almira Elementary			√	√	√
Boulevard Elementary	√				
Brookridge Elementary			√	√	√
Canterbury Elementary	√	√	√	√	√
Case Elementary	√	√	√		
Central Elementary			√		
Dentzler Elementary			√	√	√
Drake Elementary				√	√
Friendly Inn/G.W. Carver Elementary	√	√	√	√	
Fullerton Elementary					√
Glendale Elementary			√		
Grant Elementary					√
H. Barbara Booker Elementary	√	√	√	√	
Hanna Elementary			√	√	
Harrison Elementary				√	√
Hayes Elementary					√
John Muir Elementary				√	√
Marion Seltzer Elementary			√		
Marion Sterling Elementary					√
Parkview Early Childhood			√		
Parkview First Step	√	√			
Parma Park Elementary	√	√		√	√
Pleasant Valley Elementary			√	√	√
Pleasant View Elementary					√
Pleasant View First Step				√	√
Ridge Brook Elementary	√				√
State Road Elementary	√	√	√		
Thoreau Elementary	√	√	√	√	√
Walton Elementary	√				

History of FAST

Families and Schools Together (FAST) arrived in Cuyahoga County in 2000, under the stewardship of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board (ADAMHS). Under the supervision of ADAMHS, Cuyahoga County Kids FAST earned a Science & Service Award from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for its implementation.

Over time, administrators of the FAST program adapted to fluctuations in funding by increasing and decreasing the number of schools that can participate. In the summer of 2011, Cuyahoga County partners identified cost-saving strategies within the existing program, and transferred management of the FAST program to the Family & Children First Council (FCFC). FCFC implemented cost savings that allowed the county to continue to offer the same level of service, despite budget cuts. In less than three months' time, FCFC staff:

- determined the ideal level of paid personnel for effective program operation at each FAST location, and reduced staff accordingly;
- eliminated high training and supply costs by developing collaborations with entities for free space and supply usage;
- restructured the responsibilities of the FAST coordinator, the main person accountable for overseeing the program, so that the position is part rather than full time;
- assessed the existing program for ways it could adhere more strictly to the proven national FAST model;
- secured the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Cuyahoga County, which has existing relationships with school districts and superintendents, as the fiscal agent for FAST; and
- developed stringent procedures that streamline daily operations.

Given the success of these efficiencies, Cuyahoga County's FAST coordinator was asked to present at the international FAST Conference Winter 2012, to share techniques with other

“Super Users” (high-level FAST sites) who want to reach Cuyahoga County’s level of fidelity to the FAST model.

As recently as 2012, Cuyahoga County ranked second in all Kids FAST users in number of sites and cycles, from a total of 61 national and international users of the Kids FAST curriculum.

Also, in July 2015, at the national FAST conference in Madison, Wisconsin, Cuyahoga County received a *Best Practices for Sustaining FAST Award* from the national Families and Schools Together (FAST) program. The award recognizes Cuyahoga County for its “commitment to maintaining a vibrant FAST community for over 10 years.”

Findings

Table 2 presents the FAST descriptive statistics and outcomes for the 2010–2011 to 2014–2015 school years. These statistics are based on school-level reports provided by FAST to the Family & Children First Council (FCFC). There were a total of 90 reports and 909 families served over the last five years. The average number of families that attended at least one session per report for all years was 10. The average number of graduated families per report was 8.2.

FAST provides a pre- and post-questionnaire to both teachers and parents. Questionnaire items are grouped into six domains: *family functioning*, *parent-child relationship*, *parental effectiveness*, *parent involvement in school* (reported on by parents and teachers), *child behavior* (reported on by parents and teachers), and *social support and expanded social relationships*. FAST reports the percentage of parents or teachers reporting improvement in these domains, from pretest to posttest.

In the 2014–2015 school year, 48% of parents reported improvements in *family functioning* from pretest to posttest, an increase of 5.2% since the 2010–2011 school year and an improvement on the five-year average of 46.3%.

In 2014–2015, 67.2% of parents reported improvements in the *parent-child relationship*.

More than half (51.3%) of parents reported improvements in *social support and expanded social relationships* in 2014–2015. *Social support and expanded social relationships* also experienced the greatest decline (compared to all other focus areas) over the last year, decreasing nearly 13% (64.1% to 51.3%).

Teachers reported improvements in *parent involvement in school* (6.4% for all years), but a decline in *child behavior* (3.5% over the last year).

Parents reported high levels of satisfaction with FAST, with an average rating of 9.3 out of 10. Teachers rated the benefits of FAST to children with an average rating of 6.1 out of 10.

Table 2. FAST Descriptive Statistics and Outcomes (Measured by Percentage of Parents Reporting Improvements from Pretest to Posttest for FAST Scales) for Cuyahoga County from 2010–2011 to 2014–2015 School Years

Indicators	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	Current 1-year change	5-year average
Family Functioning ^a	42.8	42.5	48.9	49.1	48.0	-1.1	46.3
Parent-Child Relationship ^b	60.7	65.6	70.7	71.2	67.2	-4.0	67.1
Parental Effectiveness ^c	51.4	51.0	53.4	53.4	47.1	-6.3	51.3
Parent Involvement in School ^d	46.0	42.8	45.6	44.5	46.7	2.2	45.1
Parent Involvement in School (Teacher) ^e	39.5	42.4	39.2	43.9	45.9	2.0	42.2
Child Behavior ^f	41.3	39.4	47.1	45.2	43.9	-1.3	43.4
Child Behavior (Teachers) ^g	31.3	32.8	35.4	39.7	36.2	-3.5	35.1
Social Support and Expanded Social Relationships ^h	51.5	51.9	52.9	64.1	51.3	-12.8	54.3
Summary Statistics	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	All Years	
N of Reports	13	16	15	24	22	90	
Avg Number of Families that Attended at Least One Session per Report	9	10	11	10	11	10	
Avg Number of Graduated Families (Attended 6 out of 8 Sessions) per Report	7.5	8.5	8.5	8.1	8.2	8.2	
% Graduated Families that Attended 8 Weekly Sessions per Report	90.2	89.6	91.5	90.2	90.5	90.4	
Number of Families Served ⁱ	122	163	160	238	235	909	
Parents Satisfaction with FAST ^j	9.3	9.5	9.0	9.3	9.3	9.3	
Teachers Rated Benefits of FAST to Children ^k	5.9	6.4	5.8	6.1	6.5	6.1	

^aPercent of parents who answered "true"; ^bPercent of parents who rated their relationship between a 7 and 10; ^cPercent of parents who answered agree or strongly agree; ^dPercent of parents who answered 4 or more times in the last month or agree or strongly agree; ^ePercent of teachers who answered 3 or more times in the last month or agree or strongly agree; ^fPercent of parents who answered 'certainly true' or reported a medium amount or a great deal; ^gPercent of parents who answered 'certainly true' or reported a medium amount or a great deal; ^hPercent of parents who rated their relationship between a 7 and 10, 'often' and 'always, or rated level of support as 4 or 5; ⁱcalculated by multiplying the number of reports by the avg number of families that attended at least one session per report; ^j1=very dissatisfied, 10=very satisfied; ^k1=no benefit, 10=excellent benefit

The FAST domain *parental effectiveness* is defined by three items, 1) nurturing efficacy, 2) general efficacy, and 3) social self-efficacy. *Nurturing efficacy* indicates a parent’s confidence in caring and encouraging the development of their child. *General efficacy* is specific to a parent’s overall confidence in their parenting skills. *Social self-efficacy* refers to a parent’s confidence in their ability to engage in the social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships with their child.¹

As shown in Table 3a, *nurturing efficacy* is responsible for 9.2% of the change in *parental effectiveness*. *General efficacy* is responsible for 8.3% of the change in *parental effectiveness*. While neither item is responsible for more than 10% of change, it is noteworthy to point out that both *nurturing efficacy* and *general efficacy* are the primary items contributing to the decline in the *parental effectiveness* domain. Together, these items are responsible for a 6.3% decline in *parental effectiveness*, from 2013–2014 to 2014–2015.

Table 3a. Descriptive Statistics (Measured by Percentage of Parents Reporting Improvements from Pretest to Posttest for FAST Scales) for Individual Parental Effectiveness Items for Cuyahoga County from 2013–2014 to 2014–2015 School Years			
Parental Effectiveness	2013–2014	2014–2015	Current 1 year change
Nurturing Efficacy	50.1	40.9	-9.2
General Efficacy	56.2	47.9	-8.3
Social Self-Efficacy	53.8	52.5	-1.3

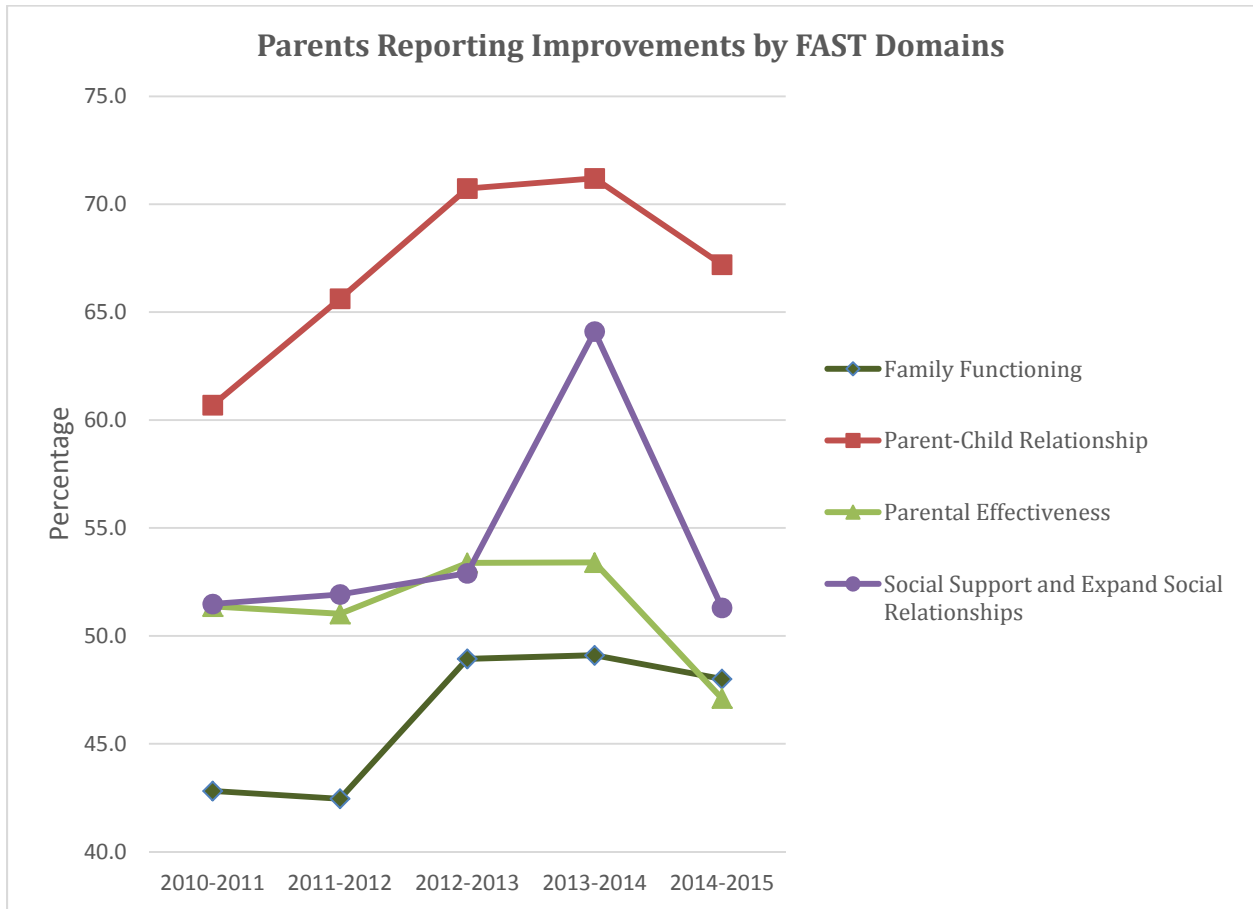
¹ Anderson, S. L. & Betz, N. E. (2001). Sources of social self-efficacy expectations: Their measurement and relation to career development. *Journal of Vocation Behavior*, 58, 98–117.

Table 3b highlights the primary items that are contributing to the decline of the *social support and expanded social relationships* domain. *Support provided to others* is responsible for 20.4% of the change in the *social support and expanded social relationships* domain; *support received from others* is responsible for 15.6% of the change; and *total reciprocal support* is responsible for 19%. Together, these items are responsible for a 12.8% decline in the *social support and expanded social relationships* domain.

Table 3b. Descriptive Statistics (Measured by Percentage of Parents Reporting Improvements from Pretest to Posttest for FAST Scales) for Individual <i>Social Support and Expanded Social Relationships</i> Items for Cuyahoga County from 2013–2014 to 2014–2015 School Years			
Social Support and Expanded Social Relationships	2013–2014	2014–2015	Current 1 year change
Community Social Relations	64.6	62.6	-2.0
Total Social Relationships	71.9	69	-2.9
Tangible Support	45.4	45.6	0.2
Affectionate Support	36.2	36.5	0.3
Emotional Support	38.1	42.9	4.8
Total Support	51.9	55.8	3.9
Support Provided to Others	68.7	48.3	-20.4
Support Received from Others	65.3	49.7	-15.6
Total Reciprocal Support	70.4	51.4	-19

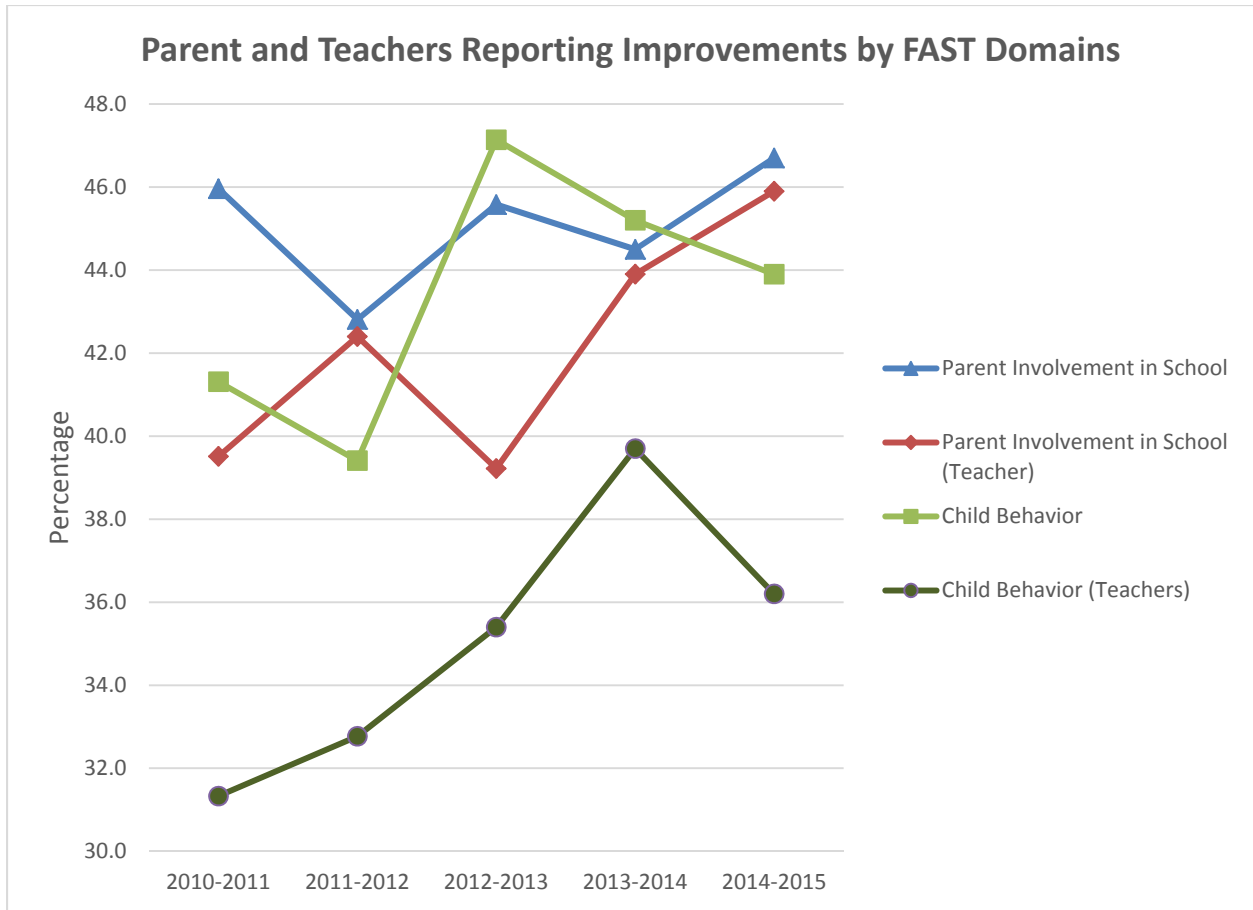
*Bolded numbers reflect items that are plus/minus 10% in change.

Figure 1. Five-Year Trend in the Percentage of Parents Reporting Improvements by FAST Domains for Cuyahoga County from 2010–2011 to 2014–2015 School Years



- As shown in Figure 1, parents reported improvements from 2010–2011 to 2013–2014 school years. In each FAST domain for the 2014–2015 school year, there is a decline in the percentage of improvements that parents report.

Figure 2. Five-Year Trend in the Percentage of Parents and Teachers Reporting Improvements by FAST Domains for Cuyahoga County from 2010–2011 to 2014–2015 School Years



- As shown in Figure 2, parents reported improvements from 2010–2011 to 2013–2014 school years.
- Parents and teachers reported improvements in the *parent involvement in school* domain over the last year.
- In the *child behavior* domain, both parents and teachers report a decline in the percentage of improvements over the last year.

Insights from a Focus Group with FAST Team in Parma

Parma was identified by the Family & Children First Council (FCFC) as a location that has been particularly successful at sustaining their FAST program. The evaluation team conducted a focus group in Parma with FAST team members in April 2014 to assess the factors that have contributed to its successful sustainability and to learn about the positive impact the program has had on both parents and children.

Parent and Child Satisfaction with FAST

FAST appears to be well received by parents. Parents who completed FAST frequently ask if they can sign up for the program a second time. Parents are also the best recruitment source. There is a great deal of word-of-mouth recruitment from the parents.

FAST team members report seeing firsthand the impact that FAST has on parents. They note that parents often have an emotional reaction, frequently crying after completing the program because they feel more strongly connected to their children. The children also seem very satisfied with the program. Team members say that kids are quite upset if they must miss a session.

FAST Team Member Satisfaction

FAST team members stated that they rearranged their schedule to be able to attend the focus group because they truly believe in the program's success. One team member mentioned that she would still be a leader for FAST even if she was no longer employed with the district and goes on to say, "These are my families." Team members believe that there are many success stories about how FAST has impacted parents and their children that are not evident from just looking at the in the numbers: "I know FAST makes a

difference. I see it. These families deserve it. Deserve to be built up and recognize their strengths. It makes school a happy place.”

Unintended Factors in the Success of FAST

One unexpected finding was that when asked for reasons why FAST is effective, participants mentioned that having access to and familiarity with the school building and staff helps parents and children feel more comfortable and thus more engaged: “Having access to the school increases both the parents’ and the children’s comfort levels. Parents are better able to be advocates for their children. They feel more empowered. Makes it easier to walk into the school and talk to staff or volunteer. It breaks the ice and makes it less intimidating.”

Recommendations

After improving nearly 14% over the past four years, the *social support and expanded social relationships domain* declined nearly 14% from the 2013–2014 to 2014–2015 school years. Table 3b highlighted the items that contributed most to this decline, which were *support provided to others*, *support received from others*, and *total reciprocal support*. It would be beneficial to examine how these constructs were defined during the years of improvement, as well as what activities families engaged in to facilitate improvement. For example, if *support provided to others* is conceptualized as activities such as cleaning the home of a sick grandparent or volunteering at homeless shelters, it may be advantageous to offer more of these activities, or offer at a higher frequency. Another example would be if *support received from others* is conceptualized as obtaining tutoring activities, it may be valuable to allocate resources more specific to those activities.