
Families and Schools Together Building Organizational Capacity for Family-School Partnerships

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The Alliance for Children and Families has acquired national prominence by creating an organization to support the development and replication Families and Schools Together (FAST), a school-based prevention and family involvement program. Whereas in the past, growth-oriented nonprofit agencies strove simply to expand effective programs, today, many are striving to build organizations that can effectively sustain and improve these programs. The Alliance provides an excellent example of how nonprofit agencies can do this through building the capacity of local organizations to learn from their program experience and to support critical functions such as staff development, evaluation, fundraising, and social marketing.

According to Seymour Sarason, a focus on organizational capacity requires that the setting of the agency be “organized.” This means that there is a distinct pattern of activities that governs roles and interrelationships within the setting. The Alliance and other national agencies that are seeking to build the organizational capacity of local sites to implement family involvement programs face five key developmental tasks:

1. They must consider how to continuously review and upgrade quality of services.
2. They must carefully study the needs of local sites and their participants.
3. They must find ways to tap visions, talents, and creativity of local site employees and participants in developing new approaches and services.
4. They must identify and institutionalize the practices that best respond to the organization’s learning and improvement needs.
5. They must be able to motivate, develop, and support employees and participants in carrying out the organization’s goals and mission.

In building organizational capacity, the Alliance has focused on the following themes: continuous learning, innovation, quality monitoring, and the development of staff and participants. These priorities have been stressed in each part of its organizational structure. This case study presents an analysis of the Alliance’s implementation of FAST—including the Alliance’s vision, training and curriculum, organizational learning, resource development, and the replication and sustainability process.

What Is the Families and Schools Together Program?

Family and Schools Together (FAST) is an early intervention and parent involvement program created by Dr. Lynn McDonald of Family Services of America (now the Alliance for Children and Families). FAST aims to strengthen families and children and reduce the incidence of problems such as school failure, substance abuse, child abuse, and delinquency. The program takes a prevention approach that requires interagency collaboration. FAST is now operating successfully in more than 500 schools in 33 states and is overseen by the Alliance.

Activities and Goals of FAST and FASTWORKS

FAST is structured as an 8-week program, during which whole families gather weekly at the school site to participate in specific, fun, research-based activities. These sessions provide a structured, interactive, multi-family group experience designed to empower parents and build community among them. Each FAST activity and program component is derived from a specific research finding in family systems and child development. A 2-year program called FASTWORKS follows

the 8-week program. FASTWORKS promotes the development of social capital by providing families with opportunities to participate in monthly family-centered activities designed by FAST parent graduates.

The FAST and FASTWORKS programs have four driving goals:

1. To increase children's feelings of affiliation toward their schools and families.
2. To increase parents' feelings of control over their homes, children, and life circumstances.
3. To increase positive and responsive interactions within families and toward children.
4. To increase support networks of families of high-risk students in relationship to the school.

These four goals contribute to the overall program objective of fostering feelings of affiliation, mutual respect, and reciprocity among the various players in the children's family, neighborhood, school, and community environments.

Local FAST programs are initiated by a school, a mental health agency, a city official, or anyone else concerned about helping "at-risk" children and families (i.e., anyone who learns about the program and would like to implement it). The first step in getting a local site established is to organize a FAST collaborative team that is comprised of people who will represent four groups: the school, FAST graduates, a community-based mental health organization, and a community-based substance abuse/treatment organization (Alliance for Children and Families, 1998).

Once a school decides to implement FAST, a program cycle begins with the teacher or school counselor identifying children with multiple risk factors. The screening process and selection criteria are developed at the school, but factors such as school performance, attendance, personality, and behavior are all considered in the screening models. Once children have been identified, the school contacts their parents to explain the child's situation and offer information about FAST. After obtaining parent permission, a FAST graduate parent and another member of the FAST collaborative team conduct a home visit to invite parents to participate in FAST (Alliance for Children and Families, 1998). (Also see Appendix B to see how this recruitment process worked for one family.) Ten to 15 families participate in each FAST cycle.

Program meetings follow a uniform agenda that includes carefully planned opening and closing routines, structured family activities, parent support time, and parent-child play therapy (also called "special play"). A trained group called the FAST collaborative team leads the meetings.

The lively and fun activities are intended to build family unity. They include eating a meal together, creating a family flag, singing, and exercises in communicating and identifying feelings. FAST activities are designed to reinforce loving behaviors such as turn taking and listening. Parents also have opportunities to discuss their common interests and build an informal support network to help one another discover solutions for parenting and family concerns. School personnel support parents and share in activities, but parents take the lead role. FAST offers both intangible and tangible incentives to promote attendance. Participants are given respect and social support, and at a practical level, they are provided with transportation, a hot meal, and childcare for infants and toddlers. Furthermore, each family wins a gift package of needed items during the 8-week program. The winning family prepares and hosts the hot meal for the following session and is given cash to purchase food. A graduation ceremony is held to celebrate of the success of each family, during which certificates are presented by the school principal.

The follow-up FASTWORKS program is structured as a series of monthly family-support meetings that are designed to maintain the active social network that was developed during FAST. A parent advisory council of FAST graduates runs FASTWORKS. Over time, local staff assistance decreases, with parents taking on more ownership of the program. Parent leaders receive a budget and plan recreational, school, and community-related events in which up to 40 FAST families participate. New families continuously move into FASTWORKS as a product of the ongoing 8-week FAST cycles in each school. The interdependence among families that was cultivated during the initial FAST experience increases the likelihood that graduates will participate in FASTWORKS. As a local association of parents with common experiences, FASTWORKS functions as a safety net to encourage previously isolated parents to become actively involved in school activities and to take more risks on behalf of their own and their children's development.

What Do Evaluation Results Show About FAST?

Since its inception, FAST has had a strong national evaluation program. The Alliance conducts evaluations for each 8-week FAST session as part of its national dissemination activities. The evaluations examine variables that are correlated strongly with the onset of children's problems. This emphasis on evaluation reflects the Alliance's stance that it is important to demonstrate FAST's impact on participants' lives in a rigorous way, and that this ability separates excellent programs from mediocre ones.

The evaluations use a pre- and post-test design, and include four quantitative measures and one qualitative component to assess four areas: child behavior, family functioning, parent-school affiliation, and families' experience of the program. Twelve years of extensive evaluation of FAST program cycles in a variety of settings reveals a consistent pattern of positive outcomes. Parents report consistently that their interactions with their children have improved and that they feel more appreciative of teachers and school staff.

One FAST parent from the Southwest explained: "My kids tell me what they do. Before, I never asked them. They used to keep things inside. Now, they come and tell me things I never knew before. It's a big change." A grandmother from the FAST San Antonio program was overjoyed with the change in her grandson. She described his transformation in this way:

I couldn't take my grandson to the store because he would just take something, being really bad. At the end of FAST, he went to the principal and said "This is the last time you're gonna see me in your office." I found out about [a youth program] from one of the other parents and put him in there. I got the name of where I had to go to put him in baseball. He's such a different child than a few months ago.

Other FAST graduates describe equally powerful effects:

It's brought my kids and me closer together to do more things together, even if we just walk to the Dairy Queen and get an ice cream and sit there for a little while. We look forward to doing something everyday at least 1 hour. I was always stuck doing the novela [soap opera]. Now, after the novela's over I say, "Let's play," you know Mexican games or American games and we spend that time together. I feel sorry for the people who haven't been to FAST.

They taught us how to communicate in FAST, cause we do the charade cards and expressions. So sometimes when I'm mad I want them to still approach me, I need to leave that line open to them. So sometimes, when I'm like real angry, I gotta remember don't put on that face, calm down, and remember the facial expression, cause if I'm walking around like this I will not get approached.

My son lived with my mother. I started going to FAST on night three. He did not want to sit with me, so I asked him to do special play with me and at first he was like, "Do I have to?" and I told him "It's up to you." And so he did. By the end, he was right up next to me, getting my plate. A couple of months after he came to live with me. Before, I just thought they needed somebody and I thought my mom could do it all. I never realized how important it was—you know that what they wanted was me.

Beyond these testimonials, statistical results also show significant improvements in children's classroom and home behaviors, self-esteem, family closeness, parent involvement in school, and reduction in social isolation. Sites receive a report that profiles the population served and compares the results of the program cycle with the national database. The Alliance also offers a Practice Profile instrument to local teams to assess the level of their agreement as a team about how well they are implementing FAST. All local evaluation results feed into the composite national longitudinal results that have shown significant and persistent positive effect in the four areas assessed (Alliance for Children and Families, 1994).

Other research supports the dramatic effects of FAST. In a random assignment experimental study conducted in Middleton, Wisconsin, in 1990, children in the FAST group showed significant improvements on scales measuring their sense of maternal acceptance, cognitive self-confidence, and peer acceptance. Children assigned to the control condition, in comparison, did not demonstrate significant improvements over the same period (Harter & Pike, 1984). Schools, in their evaluations of FAST, report a shift in the assumptions of working with "at-risk" families from ones that are remedial and problem focused to ones that are learning centered and optimistic (Alliance for Children and Families, 1994).

Follow-up data suggest that children continue to improve and that after FAST is over, many parents seek counseling and substance abuse treatment, get jobs, return to school, and attend community events. One mother from San Jose described how the program affected her:

It's geared me to something I want to do—I want to work with families and schools. So it's geared me personally, I'm gonna start going to school. This is what I want to do, I'm content here. And mind you, late in my life, this is what's happened. And my second daughter, I tell her, "Look, I'm gonna be doing this and this is the time I'm allowing myself to do it—so at the same token you should allow yourself, you know, your little goals in life and that's how you accomplish your longer ones." That's what I've been able to come out of this program with.

Another FAST graduate attests to the program's role in helping her change her life and gain custody of her children:

My husband was telling the judge I was incompetent to have custody of the kids because I didn't work. I took all my FAST stuff to the judge—my certificate in the frame and the degree and the parent album with pictures of the girls doing their activities and all the things that they did in FAST and I told the judge, "I am committed to my daughters—I've been in this program for 2 months and these are the things we did." I gave the judge my husband's card and he

called him two times. Then the judge told their father, “You know, your wife is not incompetent,” and he gave me full custody of my daughters.

Long-term evaluation indicates these gains hold and that the program facilitates the development of families’ connections with their communities. As parents become empowered in their relations with their children’s schools, many generalize that experience and become more involved in their community as well. Mrs. Martinez explains, “We felt like prisoners in our neighborhood until we founded the association. The mayor wanted to meet me. We have a community center from the women’s group—we’re all FAST graduates.”

The FAST evaluation strategy supports continuous learning both for the Alliance and local collaborative teams. It is the main means of measuring performance of the FAST program.

Key Components of FAST Implementation

The key components of FAST implementation include vision, training and curriculum, organizational learning, program resources, and the replication and sustainability process. The high quality, utility, and consistency of these carefully developed components contribute importantly to the Alliance’s organizational capacity to implement FAST.

Vision

FAST’s vision is rooted in a set of core values and research-based theories of behavioral change for individuals and families (Table 1). These values and theories are translated into essential program elements that are implemented among its sites. The attention that FAST gives to these behavioral theories of change, reflected in its corresponding program activities, provides a model of developmental change that is likely to result in positive changes among families. This is also evident in evaluation data, which show positive changes in child behavior, family functioning, parent involvement, and parent experiences with the program (Alliance for Children and Families, 1998).

Table 1
FAST Activities, Core Values, and Research Base

FAST Activities	FAST Core Value	Research-Based Theory of Behavioral Change
Undivided, one-on-one, nondirective attention from parent to child via special play	Parents are the primary prevention agents for their children.	Parents are the most powerful influences on the self-concept of young children. Low self-esteem is a major substance abuse risk factor play.
Parent-child feeling identification game	Trusting relationships help families find and make good use of helpful resources.	Difficulty discussing personal feelings is a substance abuse risk factor. Young children can learn to name and talk about their feelings.
Modeling of structured family interactions, foreshadowing events, establishing rules, setting consequences, and constant weekly routine throughout FAST sessions	Substance abuse keeps families from succeeding; prevention, and intervention, and treatment of chemical dependency greatly increases a family's chances of success.	A chaotic home life is a substance abuse risk factor. Routine and structure can be learned.
Bring parents and schools together as enthusiastic partners by providing opportunities for families and school personnel to experience repeated positive encounters with each other during FAST.	Families are central and critical to children's educational performance. Schools should be welcoming to all families.	The best predictor of a student's achievement in school is parent involvement.
Aggressive recruitment of hard-to-reach families through home visits, FAST parent group activity and FASTWORKS participation, and parent leadership opportunities Address parent isolation by opportunities for parents to gain confidence and ease in relating to one another, the school, and the community via formal and informal social support networks.	Stress and social isolation diminish parental effectiveness, and social support increases parental effectiveness.	When parents feel respected and supported and their self-sufficiency and self-esteem grow, they become better role models for their children concerning education, and lower their risk for abuse and neglect of children.
FAST is a prevention strategy for families with children aged 4-9 years.	All parents love their children and want a better life for them.	At-risk youth should be reached before serious academic or behavioral difficulties begin.
Schools, parents, and community agencies collaborate as a nonhierarchical team to plan, carry out, and evaluate the FAST program.	Collaboration across systems to address the needs of at-risk children is necessary and important.	Children benefit when community agencies, schools, and families cooperate and build friendly, trusting relationships.
Whole family involvement with parents and siblings joining the at-risk child at FAST sessions where they eat together and have fun as a family group Making a family flag, children serve meals to parents, special play, FAST song, and closing circle.	Trusting relationships help families find and make good use of helpful resources.	Children and family units benefit when the natural caring and strength within the family is supported and enhanced and family traditions, routines and reciprocity are encouraged.
Participation in FAST is voluntary. FAST empowers the parent as the primary prevention agent through encouragement, social networking, and through parent leadership of FAST activities.	Human service organizations should support and include parents to enhance the parent-child relationship rather than isolate parent from child.	Parenting skills are better enhanced via support for the development of positive coping and decision making skills than through teaching about parenting.
Participation in FAST promotes interdependence and enjoyment among 8-12 families and is followed by up to 2 years of continuing support via the FASTWORKS follow up program.	Stress and social isolation diminish parental effectiveness, and social support increases parental effectiveness.	Parental stress is reduced when family support sources are ongoing and long-term and when social isolation and dependence on professionals are reduced.

Training and Curriculum

The Alliance maintains FAST program quality primarily through the extensive training and consultation provided to each replication site. Once the collaborative team is in place, the site team begins 3 months of training on the way to becoming certified as a FAST site. This training process, which is critical for successful replication of FAST, is standardized and of the highest quality. Independent evaluators report that participants give the training exceptionally high ratings (Alliance for Children and Families, 1994).

Phase 1 of the training is a 2-day event during which teams are oriented to the content and values of the program, learn about the project structure and process (including recruitment and retention strategies), review the research base, and simulate an actual FAST session.

Phase 2 includes three visits onsite and phone consultations with a certified trainer who observes, coaches, and provides feedback to the team regarding the first FAST cycle. During these two phases, the trainer helps to adapt the program to local circumstances in areas such as staffing, partnerships, and parent recruitment. The trainer also helps solve problems at each site and responds to unique local parent, school, or community issues that arise.

Phase 3 is a 1-day event that allows for debriefing the first program cycle and planning for FASTWORKS. At this point, a local candidate may also join the trainer certification process for sites that want a trainer on their own staff for further program expansion.

The FAST curriculum is built on a strong research base and has remained consistent since its development in 1988. Local teams rely on a set agenda that provides program structure and prescribes a consistent order of weekly activities. Ongoing consultation and support services such as technical assistance manuals, training for replacement team members, and notification of advanced practice workshops are provided through the Alliance, which invests heavily in maintaining contact with sites throughout the FAST network.

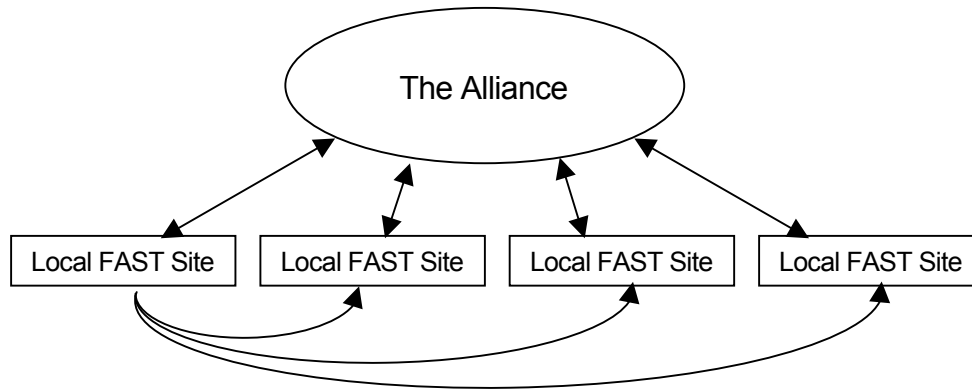
The Alliance's organizational strength in the area of training includes a high quality curriculum, content and process of the training sessions, and the quality of the trainers themselves. The national and local certified trainers are the most important organizational resources that support the Alliance's excellent training and replication capacity. National trainers provide ongoing mentoring, supervision, and support to the local trainers as they develop their skills throughout the lengthy certification process. As they become certified, local trainers maintain this level of intensive support to the local team.

Organizational Learning

The FAST organizational culture is focused on developing learning and motivation among co-workers and participants. Although an important strength of FAST is its core elements that are incorporated into the program agenda, many other areas of FAST's work are open to further development and improvement before, during, and after the program cycle. To accommodate this need for ongoing development, the Alliance has fostered an organizational culture focused on continuous learning. This means that information is exchanged between the Alliance and its sites and across sites (Figure 1). While sites have the opportunity to share their experiences through attendance at meetings, the Alliance also synthesizes information from its sites that it then shares through its training and technical assistance. Furthermore, the Alliance offers evaluation services of the FAST program cycle to its sites. Each site receives a report that profiles the population served

by the program, the results of the evaluation, and a comparison of the site results with the national data. With support from the Alliance, sites use the evaluation information to plan program improvements.

Figure 1
Information Exchange Between the Alliance and FAST Sites



The following are some challenges and suggestions for improvement that have emerged from various levels of the national organization and local sites. The Alliance is currently processing these in its attempt to respond to local needs:

- In response to local need, the national office has developed and implemented new middle school and preschool versions of FAST.
- Local sites have expressed the need for strength-based evaluation instruments and a focus on asset building and resource assessment within the evaluation process and the FAST sessions.
- Evaluation data highlighted the need to facilitate the transition from the structured FAST program to the less structured FASTWORKS program, and also the need to improve the scope and effectiveness of FASTWORKS activities.
- In response to local need, the national office has provided ideas about how FAST collaborative teams can incorporate new partners such as community centers or HUD into their work.
- A local FAST site has shared with the national office and other local sites how to incorporate and disseminate parent suggestions such as having a different teacher attend each FAST session to get to know parents.
- Local sites have shared with the national office ideas about how to make the FAST program more appealing to teenage siblings and fifth grade participants.
- A local site has identified the pros and cons of keeping the same parent leadership from cycle to cycle.
- One local site has shared its strategy for showing the connection between FAST participation and improved performance on standardized tests.

Developing Organizational Learning Locally

For the Alliance, developing organizational learning for family involvement at the local level means specifically that schools, agencies, and communities implementing FAST have the capacity to implement several activities. These capacities include:

1. Training parents to participate in their child's education
2. Creating structures for sustaining family involvement
3. Promoting the development of local leaders
4. Teaching parents to serve as advocates both for their own child's success and for school reforms that will increase student achievement
5. Strengthening families' abilities to respond to stressful challenges they might face

At the national level, the FAST National Replication Center strengthens its ongoing and expanding ability to develop and support these capacities of the local FAST implementers.

Strengthening FASTWORKS

Early evaluations of FASTWORKS programs indicated that the program's potential was not being fully realized. Specifically, the goals of building an informal support network, creating a bridge toward greater parental involvement, and developing a potentially powerful grassroots organization were not being met adequately. In addition, parents were having difficulty maintaining momentum to complete the targeted 2 years of parent-led FASTWORKS activities. Once the Alliance became aware of these challenges, the national office acted on the feedback by hiring an organizational development consultant from Harvard Family Research Project to look at the problem under a technical assistance contract provided through the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund for the national replication.

The consultant's recommendations included expanding Phase 3 of FASTWORKS training and developing new training modules to include community organizing principles, theories, and techniques. Special emphasis was placed on leadership development and support, and on the creation of effective FASTWORKS organizations that are rooted in an understanding of the concepts of power, taking action for community change, and seriously engaging with schools on behalf of increased student achievement. These emphases provide more direction and structure and a stronger philosophical base for FASTWORKS.

The consultant's work also brought greater clarity to the nature of the relationship between schools and FAST as FASTWORKS organizations develop. In the strengthened FASTWORKS model, for example, the relationship between schools and FAST approximated what Swap (1993) describes as a "partnership model" of parent involvement. The partnership model assumes that the school's program is open to negotiation with parents. This may include the opportunity to involve community members in recreating the program and mission, challenging the school's hierarchical struc-

ture, and developing authentic connections between schools and communities. According to Swap, this implies “long-term commitments, mutual respect, widespread involvement of families and educators in many levels of activities, and sharing of planning and decision-making responsibilities” (p. 47).

Based on these points, the enhanced FASTWORKS program aspires to completely revamp the traditional relationship between schools and parents. New FAST sites are currently participating in the enhanced Phase 3 training, and the new modules and program emphases are also being disseminated to existing sites.

Disseminating Local Innovation: The Case of FAST San Antonio

Another way to transmit new learning and innovation within FAST is when a local site creates an innovation that is considered for adoption throughout the FAST network. FAST San Antonio is one of the largest and oldest FAST program sites. Through their experiences implementing FAST in 26 schools over a 10-year period, FAST San Antonio staff members have adapted several aspects of the program to their local circumstances and conditions, including culture. Aspects of the program that have been adapted include recruitment strategies, evaluation data collection, use of counseling, and creation of a FASTWORKS Fiesta event.

In an effort to recruit the greatest number of eligible participants, FAST San Antonio deviates from the Alliance’s recommendation of in-home recruitment. Instead, they set up a FAST recruitment booth during school registration in September and approach parents during well-attended school events such as the student bike rodeo. They also have participants complete evaluations at the end of the final FAST session rather than having them return for a separate session. This helps to ensure as close to 100% completion of evaluation data as possible. Another local innovation is that the program offers counseling on a more intensive basis than other FAST sites. This reflects a different perspective on the mental health partner’s role in the collaborative team. Finally, FAST San Antonio has created a very popular and well-attended annual Fiesta event that is jointly organized and sponsored by all the FASTWORKS programs in the city.

Lessons Learned From Working With Parents

While participants learn from the organization, the organization also learns from its participants. Gifted staff members of the San Antonio FAST program have articulated important lessons they have learned about working with parents.

Valerie: You have to believe in what you are doing ... believe in the parents, that they are good parents and that they just need some connections to help develop their skills and their lifestyles. And you need to know who's around you and if they've got that good energy for what you're going to do together.

Fabiola: You're nobody to tell a parent what to do and what not to do. Sometimes you feel "Oh I know this, I've studied this and that," but there's a point where they're their kids, so you can't really tell them. When something very bad is going on, you can get help for parents, but you can never tell them how to run their family.

Luis: The biggest lesson I've learned is trust. When you do FAST you have to build trust between your parents, your families, and yourself, because you're not from their community, you're not at their school all the time—you have to build trust from the moment you meet them to the moment you don't see them anymore for that night. "I trust you to come to this program and enjoy it and you trust me to have everything prepared for you to run the best program that I can."

These lessons remind practitioners that even when all the right elements of good programming and organizational support are in place, it is often the question of human connection, of whether or not supportive relationships develop in the course of the program which make the difference between a positive change experience and merely attending a program.

Given the excellent long-term evaluation and participation results for the FAST San Antonio programs, the dilemma for the national office is to determine which of these adaptations would be useful in other contexts. If so, they will have to develop criteria for guiding decisions about which adaptations should be disseminated throughout the network or to selected other sites with similar demographics.

Program Resources

Initially, implementing FAST can be relatively expensive. One school can expect to spend \$37,000 in direct costs for two 8-week cycles. However, unit costs go down considerably with more cycles and sites. School districts implementing six 8-week cycles in three different schools can expect to spend about \$113,000. Most of the expenses go toward paying highly trained personnel. General overhead, training, and evaluation are not typically included in the direct cost quoted here. These costs tend to vary widely depending on the agency and the availability of local trainers and resources. Schools can save money by developing in-kind collaborative arrangements with local agencies, since typically they are serving the same clientele.

Before FAST teams can receive training to implement the program they must secure program funding. The Alliance provides detailed start-up information and technical assistance. This includes help accessing and thinking creatively about program funding, providing model proposals, provid-

ing a breakdown of staff requirements and program operation costs, and sharing strategies for redirecting current allocations. This comprehensive assistance contributes to the consistency and predictability of securing funding across replication sites. Since 1993, the FAST Replication Center has helped local sites access over \$35 million from local sources to support the program.

The collaborative team approach provides wider access to grant monies than if services were provided by a single group. This is because collaborative partners can be matched with funders who have similar interests. Over 87% of FAST funding comes from local and state government in conjunction with substance abuse, violence prevention, family support, and education initiatives. Furthermore, over 80% of school sites absorb the program into their budgets at the end of state funding cycles. Six federal agencies that have identified FAST as an exemplary program also fund the operation of FAST within their funding streams.

A guiding premise that drives the Alliance's practices is that high program quality can be ensured through a combination of top quality material and human resources. High quality content, process, and materials for training and curriculum and ongoing localized support via national and local trainers and national/local communication formats are together responsible for the Alliance's organizational strength in quality control.

Sustainability

The goal of all FAST programs is to become institutionalized over time into sustainable, community-owned programs. Sustainability of FAST programs requires attention to four characteristics of long-term service delivery. These include organizational readiness, a collaborative vision, community ownership, and renewable support.

Planning for the sustainability of FAST starts at the beginning stage of program development with assessing organizational readiness. When potential collaborative team members meet for the initial assessment of their interest in FAST, they receive a checklist for collaborative self-evaluation. Potential collaborators are encouraged to get the support of their boards, determine FAST compatibility with the missions of their organizations, and decide on adequate staffing to acquire organizational readiness to sustain FAST.

To create a collaborative vision, team members make sure they understand each partner's strengths and capacities and define shared responsibilities. To build community ownership, collaborative team members develop strategies to maintain program visibility, develop relationships with opinion leaders, and seek public endorsements. Additional strategies to redirect funds and pursue major funding sources for school-linked services and private funding are sought to work toward renewable financial support.

Replicating FAST

The Alliance chose to replicate FAST largely because the curriculum and program design were suitable for any population and the program's essential elements were readily duplicated. Also, the model has a theory of behavioral change that remains constant across replication sites. At the same time, the implementation teams adapt their approach and work with families to create a "best fit" with local circumstances.

As the program has expanded, the Alliance has increased its evaluation staff, has hired two in-house trainers, and has developed a national training pool of independent contractors to help with training. A local FAST program may start with a teacher, parent, counselor, legislator, crime prevention official, or anyone else concerned with building the school community and helping at-risk youth and families. When initial inquiries are made about FAST, the Alliance provides the potential site with opportunities to network with established programs. The Alliance also provides technical assistance to find funding, write grants, and put together a collaborative. Approximately 8 to 10% of more than 600 inquiries per year successfully secure funding. For these programs, the Alliance assigns someone to train the community collaborative for a 3-month training process.

Next, the local community identifies a candidate to attend a 5-day training certification course in Milwaukee. Certification begins the process of expansion at the local level. As a site expands its implementation of FAST from one school to several, the Alliance's role changes from developing the program to providing technical assistance. This technical assistance focuses on creating sustainability, finding additional funding, social marketing, and avoiding pitfalls of expanding too rapidly, and maintaining relationships among the collaborative. The Alliance also provides evaluation instruments and analysis, and presents the information in a form that is useful to the local sites. If a FAST site does not fit the evaluation profile typical of other FAST programs, the Alliance helps the site look more closely at the evaluation data to help the site figure out what is going wrong.

Relationship Between National and Local Sites

The Alliance faces several ongoing challenges in measuring and managing local performance. These challenges include managing the tension between maintaining program integrity and allowing for local flexibility and innovations in implementation, determining what specific services to provide to best support local performance, and developing enhanced capacities for learning about and communicating essential elements of successful program operation to sites. The goal is for the national office to become a resource for continuous learning at the local level.

Letts, Ryan, and Grossman (1999) describe the type of leadership that is needed to manage the central office and the local sites in their book *High Performance Non-Profit Organizations*. In their view, the main task of the central leadership is to support the growth of local leadership: "To get good results in the field, the central entities need entrepreneurial, committed, creative leaders who, almost by definition, will resist direction and control from the central unit" (p. 164).

Linda Wheeler, the National FAST Director, has a keen understanding of this hands-off approach, incorporating trust-building and value into her leadership of FAST. Wheeler develops the network, identifies resources, and disseminates best practices and innovations. The national office communicates new developments in prevention and receives feedback from the local sites through a regular newsletter and a website. Wheeler thinks in terms of "setting the platform at the local level rather than micromanaging" in striving to maintain program integrity and encourage program improvement and innovation.

For example, the Alliance improves parent leadership development within FASTWORKS by providing local teams with tools and encouragement to recognize parents' skills and talents. The Alliance recently introduced improvements to scaffold this process at the local level. These improvements include training in identifying and mentoring leaders, and providing strength-based instruments to survey parent skills and community resources. While this strategy helps, in the end, Wheeler admits, "After we go through giving them ideas and asking, 'Have you been paying attention to this?' we don't have any control over the local process."

Wheeler gives credit to the work of the FAST trainers for maintaining the high quality of training across sites, again emphasizing the interplay between central support and local autonomy:

I strongly believe the strength of our replication is in our national trainers, who we screen for their skills at moving beyond just being a trainer to being someone who helps develop a collaboration and helps put in place the components for sustainability. At the local level, these national trainers are looking for potential trainers for the community, so they suggest who should be going to trainer of trainers. When they come to training of trainers, we spend 5 days with them and they get an intense training, a lot of information, and a lot of help. That kind of supervision and support continues through their certification process.

Wheeler also must mediate many levels of center-periphery activities. She explains:

Replicating the program with integrity is hard to do because we're not a policing force. We just have to trust what's going on. The way we've overcome that is through our trainers, but also through maintaining the network. My responsibility, besides supervising the staff that works with the communities, is to connect with and develop that network that's out there, to keep tabs on the national trends and the funding, and to be a resource at the national level for the local community.

Conclusion

The Alliance has developed successfully into an organized setting that has a structure and organizational capacity to promote family-school partnerships. This success has been achieved through a pattern of activities at the national level that prioritizes learning and innovation, quality monitoring, and staff and participant development.

Placing a high priority on capacity building cannot happen without strong and effective organizational components to support these capacities. Organizational learning, for example, is supported by the well-defined FAST vision and its research-based theory of behavioral change. It is also supported by the strong organizational culture that is dedicated to self-reflection and integrating feedback from the field. Program quality assurance across the FAST network is ensured via the high quality, standardized, and effective training and curriculum, and consistent approaches to resource development, replication, and sustainability.

In conclusion, one lesson to take from the Alliance's replication of FAST is that organizational capacity can support the effectiveness of excellent programs. Nonprofit agencies, therefore, should ensure that the programs they are implementing and planning to replicate are grounded in a strong research-based theory of behavioral change, and that the link between the theory of behavioral change and the program activities is clear and logical. Once these components of program design and vision have been clearly articulated, agencies can focus their attention on developing organizational capacity to support program expansion and maintain program quality.

Research Method

This case study was developed as part of a generous 3-year grant to Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund to provide technical assistance to the

Fund's family-school-community partnership grantees. The Families and Schools Together Program was one of these grantees.

Data for this case study were collected over a 2-year period during 1998 and 1999 and includes the following:

- FAST program, training, and marketing materials
- Evaluation reports
- Participant observation of training sessions and FAST program sessions
- Interviews with principals and national and local staff
- Focus group sessions with FAST participants including parents, school staff, and mental health and substance abuse service providers

This case study was reviewed and informed by FAST staff and HFRP team members.

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Appendix A: Case Study Summary of FAST

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Brief History

The Alliance for Children and Families is an association of 350 child- and family-serving organizations that builds members' capacity to serve and advocate for children, families, and communities. The Alliance formed in October 1998 with the merger of Family Service America and the National Association of Homes and Services for Children. Lynn McDonald and colleagues developed the FAST program in 1988 at Family Service of Madison, Wisconsin.

Number of Sites

The Alliance has trained more than 500 school-based FAST teams throughout 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Canada.

Sources of Funding

The Alliance receives funds from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Kraft Foods, the Metropolitan Life Foundation, Wisconsin Energy Corporation, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Organization

Under the direction of the Alliance's President and Chief Executive Officer, Peter Goldberg, program directors coordinate the national programs. Linda Wheeler, as the Program Administrator of Community Centered Initiatives, operates the National Replication Center of FAST and FASTWORKS. National teams provide site trainings and report to the Program Administrator.

Description of Training

FAST brings together CBOs, schools, and families of children experiencing behavioral or academic difficulties. Over a series of eight sessions, families participate in play therapy, feelings exploration, and communication to address issues of violence, substance abuse, and delinquency prevention. FAST activities are structured and team-led by parent, school, community-based mental

health, and community-based substance abuse partners. Incentives to encourage attendance include home visits conducted by ethnically matched staff, free transportation, child care, a hot meal, and prizes.

The follow-up program, FASTWORKS, serves as a support network for families. For 2 years, graduate families participate in monthly meetings led by other parent volunteers.

Technical Assistance Services

Detailed program information and other resources are available via the Internet. Resources include the FAST program workbook, the FAST trainer's training manual, the FAST orientation manual, the FAST Final Report of OHD/ACF/DHSS Grant, and the study *Family Involvement in Schools*,² funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and the Alliance. Videos, financial information, research, and other FAST supplies can also be obtained over the Internet.

In addition, the Alliance offers news releases and policy briefings. *The Roundtable* addresses topics relevant to members, including information affecting children and families, the Alliance, and other nonprofit organizations. Advocacy strategies and updates on current legislative activity are provided in newsletters and briefs. The academic journal entitled *Families in Society* contains information for practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and educators.

Evaluation

Parents rate program effectiveness using a variety of instruments. The Family Cohesion and Adaptability Evaluation Scales (FACES III) rates a family's ability to change and the degree to which family members feel connected or separated. FAST measures parents' perceptions of social support via the Parenting Stress Inventory, Social Insularity subscale. Parent Survey on School Involvement rates the level of family involvement in their children's schools. Finally, an open-ended questionnaire from a FAST program evaluation provides an opportunity for parents to explain how the program has impacted their lives (Family Service America, 1995; Alliance for Children and Families, 1998).

Appendix B: How FAST Works for One Family

The Ramirez family of San Antonio got involved with FAST because problems they were having with 8-year-old, Joshua, the youngest of their five children. Before FAST, Joshua never wanted to go to school. He had difficulty reading, and his behavior interfered with his learning. He also acted out and fought a lot at home. His parents admitted feeling frustrated due to their advanced age and to the challenges of parenting their other children. Mr. Ramirez was also abusing alcohol and often was absent from the home. Mrs. Ramirez felt isolated from the other parents in her housing complex due to her limited English skills. The family did not have strategies to deal with the stress, anger, and school problems Joshua was experiencing.

One day, two members of the FAST collaborative team visited Mrs. Ramirez at home to invite her to participate in FAST. One person was a recent FAST graduate (also a neighbor of the Ramirez family) and the other was a counselor from Joshua's school. Mrs. Ramirez was surprised by the visit, but she was also very pleased. FAST would be an opportunity for her to learn more about Joshua's education and would give the family a chance to spend time together and meet other families. Furthermore, dinner, child care, and transportation would be provided, which would be particularly helpful on nights that her husband worked. While this assistance helped, Joshua's enthusiasm was what convinced Mrs. Ramirez to sign up.

The first night, Mrs. Ramirez and the children timidly sat down at a table in the far corner, waiting for the program to start. Mrs. Ramirez had been to the school on just a few unpleasant occasions to discuss Joshua's behavior problems. There was no one to translate between her and the principal, so she could only read the anger on his face. Tonight was different. The neighbor who had invited her to FAST greeted her warmly in Spanish and introduced Mrs. Ramirez and the children to the other families.

Over the next few weeks, Mrs. Ramirez and the children began looking forward to the FAST meetings. Each week, they proudly displayed the family flag, which they made on the first night. The youngest children looked forward to the FAST song, and the middle children especially enjoyed the closing ritual, which was to simulate the sound of rain. Mrs. Ramirez enjoyed the games of scribbles and feeling charades she played with the children. Also, during each session, Mrs. Ramirez spent 15 minutes of special play with Joshua alone. She began to appreciate the opportunity FAST provided for undivided attention with Joshua and the rest of the family.

Both Mrs. Ramirez and the children forged new relationships with other FAST participants. While the children played with their new friends during buddy time, Mrs. Ramirez became acquainted with other FAST parents during parent mutual support time. She met several parents who lived in her apartment complex and they discussed how they could solve the plumbing problems in their building.

During the third week, Mrs. Ramirez began to feel more comfortable talking with the school counselor, and found the courage to ask about Joshua's academic difficulties. The counselor suggested a meeting with the teacher. With her new neighbor helping to translate, Mrs. Ramirez learned how she could help Joshua with his reading at home.

Joshua began to anticipate eagerly the daily 15 minutes of special play that was assigned as FAST homework. During this time, Mrs. Ramirez made sure that she first did the reading exercises suggested by Joshua's teacher, and then the special play.

On the night when the Ramirez family cooked the meal, the children convince their father to take off work to attend FAST. The parents felt honored to have their food served to them by the children. The Ramirez children made great sport out of the switch in roles. Besides it being their night to prepare dinner, the Ramirez children had another reason for wanting their father to attend this particular session. The substance abuse member of the collaborative team was going to show a movie about the effects of alcohol abuse on the family and particularly a small boy Joshua's age. Mr. Ramirez watched in silence, and there was no discussion of the film in the family until later in the week, when the oldest son, Joaquin, said at the dinner table, "Dad, I don't have to be like that kid in the movie, do I?" Mr. Ramirez replied, "No, Joaquin, you don't." Through the FAST substance abuse counselor, Mr. Ramirez arranged for treatment, and has been sober for over a year.

The same day, Mrs. Garcia, a parent from a nearby school district who was visiting for the evening, explained to the family that after graduating from the FAST program in her son's school, she had been selected to become a trainer. This meant that Mrs. Garcia would become part of a new FAST collaborative team in her district. In fact, later that day Mrs. Garcia would head to the Alliance office in Milwaukee for the training. Mrs. Ramirez commented on how wonderful it was that FAST selected new staff members from among the graduates. She thought to herself how much she would value such an opportunity.

Graduation was a joyful event. It was announced that even though the 3-year state grant supporting FAST had run out, the district had agreed to continue FAST. The principal attended, and when he spotted Mrs. Ramirez, he approached her with a translator by his side. He said he had heard about the initiative she had taken in meeting with Joshua's teacher and he congratulated her on the improvement in his behavior and schoolwork that the staff had observed. The principal apologized for not arranging for clear communication before. He emphasized that he foresaw nothing but good things ahead for Joshua and gave Mrs. Ramirez a hug.

Another surprise happened after the graduation ceremony. The school counselor asked Mrs. Ramirez if she would be interested in contacting other Spanish-speaking parents about participating in FASTWORKS. Mrs. Ramirez accepted the offer, and was ecstatic to learn that training and a stipend were included.

Shortly after graduation, the participating families were asked to evaluate the program. Mrs. Ramirez reported that Joshua was doing better in school, and no longer wanted to stay home. Also, he and his mother were really enjoying special play; and his anger and acting out had lessened considerably. The family as a whole found ways to spend more time together and their communication with each other improved considerably. Mr. Ramirez became more invested in his parenting and the children began to thrive under the new level of attention. Mrs. Ramirez became part of the planning team for FASTWORKS sessions. She also began meeting regularly with other tenants about building improvements and with Joshua's teacher regarding his progress.

Appendix C: Research and Evaluation of FAST

Families and Schools Together (FAST) Program Research and Evaluation Summary The Wisconsin Center for Education Research December 2004

Starting in 2005, FAST National Training and Evaluation Center will become the sole agency for disseminating the FAST program. The Alliance for Children will no longer sponsor the program and will transfer all of their FAST programming to FAST National Training and Evaluation Center (www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast/FASTNational). The Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) has prepared a list of recent evaluations of the FAST Program.

FAST website: www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast/index.htm

Program/Initiative	Evaluation	Evaluator	Timeline	Most Recent Evaluation
Wisconsin Baby FAST Initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention	Randomized experimental design with approximately 60 families across 3 sites; implementation of Baby FAST program with pre- and post-program evaluation at a total of 10 sites, with an approximate total of 130 families; quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the program's impact on families and on the effectiveness of implementation and funding sustainability	UW-Madison WCER, School of Education; Principal Investigator: Lynn McDonald	In process, 2004–2005	Evaluation in process
Multi-Hub Wisconsin FAST initiative for promotion of school safety, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)	Evaluation of FAST implementation with over 200 families in multiple school-based hubs; evaluated the effects of FAST program on family functioning, social connectedness, child behavior, and parental involvement on universally recruited families in 20 Wisconsin schools; pre- and post-program data for 178 FAST families	UW-Madison WCER, School of Education, Principal Investigator: Lynn McDonald	2003–2004	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (in progress). <i>Participating schools: Wisconsin schools involved with the COPS and FAST programs.</i> Madison: Author. (Evaluation report for FAST Training and Evaluation Center).

Program/Initiative	Evaluation	Evaluator	Timeline	Most Recent Evaluation
<p>Pilot study of Baby FAST, funded by the Office of Early Childhood and School Aged Childcare, Department of Social Services, Missouri</p>	<p>Evaluation of pilot program with 33 families; evaluated the impact of Baby FAST on new mothers and their families, as well as the implementation of Baby FAST and its compatibility with other projects that work with teen parents; pre- and post-program quantitative and qualitative data</p>	<p>UW-Madison WCER, School of Education; Principal Investigator: Lynn McDonald</p>	<p>2003</p>	<p>University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (2003). <i>Aligning best practices to maximize outcomes: A collaboration between Early Head Start, Parents As Teachers, and Families and Schools Together (FAST)</i>. Madison: Author. (Final report)</p>
<p>Asian American (Hmong) study of FAST's effectiveness, funded by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)/SAMHSA</p>	<p>Randomized experimental design with 38 families, using matched pairs in a wait-list control design; measured the effects of initial FAST vs. control, and of FAST on the wait-listed control group, with children universally recruited from several Hmong communities in Wisconsin; pre-, post-, and follow-up data for first cohort; pre-, post- data for wait-listed cohort</p>	<p>UW-Madison WCER, School of Education; Principal Investigator: Lynn McDonald</p>	<p>2001–2003</p>	<p>University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (2003). <i>The Asian American FAST Project: Hmong adaptation of Families and Schools Together</i>. Madison: Author. (Final report summary for Center for Mental Health Services)</p>
<p>Model Program Status, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration Services (SAMHSA)</p>	<p>Independent national evaluation of 1,000 programs; determined that FAST is one of 50 evidence-based substance abuse prevention programs in the United States</p>	<p>National Registry of Effective Prevention Programs (NREPP); Principal Investigator: Steve Schinke</p>	<p>2002</p>	<p>Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. (2002). <i>Science-based prevention programs and principles: Effective substance abuse and mental health programs for every community</i>. Washington, DC: Author.</p>
<p>Prevention of Special Education Referrals, funded by U.S. Department of Education/Office of Special Education/OSERS</p>	<p>Randomized experiment with 134 families using matched pairs on 5 variables; measured the effects of FAST vs. control on mixed at-risk and universally recruited 1–3 Grade students in nine Madison schools; 1-year follow-up surveys for most cycles, plus 3 years of analysis of school district data</p>	<p>UW-Madison WCER, School of Education; Principal Investigator: Thomas R. Kratochwill; Co-PI's: Lynn McDonald, Joel R. Levin</p>	<p>1998–2001</p>	<p>Final report, 2003</p>

Program/Initiative	Evaluation	Evaluator	Timeline	Most Recent Evaluation
Prevention of Drug Abuse (focus on Latino families), funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/NIH/NIDA	Randomized experimental design with 463 families using random classroom assignment and intent-to-treat model; evaluated the effects of FAST vs. FAME on low-income, minority second grade children in 10 high-risk inner-city Milwaukee schools; 2-year follow-up	UW-Madison CHPPE, School of Medicine; Principal Investigator: D. Paul Moberg; Co-PI's: Lynn McDonald, Roger Brown, Melissa Burke	1996–2001	Results presented at the Society for Prevention Research conference, 2002, 2004
Prevention of Crime and Delinquency, funded by the State of California Office of Child Abuse Prevention, Governor's Crime Initiative	Longitudinal comparison of five family-based approaches; followed 2,327 FAST children in California schools, collecting pre-, post-, and annual data each year for 5 years after the completion of FAST program	Philliber Research Associates (PRA), New York, NY; Principal Investigator: Susan Philliber; Co-PI: Sally Brown	1996–2000	Philliber Research Associates. (2000). <i>The California Juvenile Crime Prevention Demonstration Project</i> . New York: Author. (Statewide, final report)
Family Support and Prevention of Child Abuse (focus on African-American families), funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/ACYF	Randomized experimental design with 407 families (207 FAST, 200 control) using intent-to-treat model; evaluated the impact of FAST vs. control on teacher-identified at-risk second grade children in nine inner-city schools in New Orleans, Louisiana; 1-year follow-up	Abt Research Associates, Cambridge, MA; Principal Investigator: Jean Layzer; Co-PI's: Barbara Goodson, Cindy Creps, Alan Werner, Lawrence Bernstein	1996–1999	<i>Community based multi-family groups and mental health disparities: A randomized control trial with low-income, African American children</i> (under review). Abt Associates. <i>National evaluation of family support programs</i> , April 2001 www.abtassoc.com/reports/NEFSP-VolB.pdf (Acrobat file)
Prevention of School Failure/Dropout Rates in American Indian communities, funded by U.S. Department of Education/Office of Education Research (OERI)	Randomized experimental design with 100 families using matched pairs; evaluated the impact of FAST vs. control on universally recruited K–2 students from three Indian Nations in three rural schools; 1-year follow-up	UW-Madison WCER, School of Education; Principal Investigator: Thomas R. Kratochwill; Co-PI's: Holly Young-Bear Tibbitts, Lynn McDonald, Joel R. Levin	1996–1999	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (2001). <i>Families and Schools Together: An experimental analysis of a parent-mediated early intervention program for at-risk American Indian children</i> . Madison: Author. (Final report)

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