

**Families and Schools Together  
Program Evaluation Report  
Calendar Year 2010 - 2011**

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# FAST Evaluation Report

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## 1.0 Introduction

***Families and Schools Together (FAST)*** is a collaborative early intervention/prevention program for elementary and early elementary school children. It is designed to reduce factors associated with school failure, juvenile delinquency and substance abuse in later adolescence. Catholic Family Service works in collaboration with a number of elementary schools and with families to provide the FAST program. The program brings whole families together to participate in specific research-based activities aimed at enhancing family functioning and decreasing child problem behaviours that impact school performance.

The identified goals for FAST are:<sup>1</sup>

1. To improve family relationships and build stronger family bonds
2. To promote children's success in school
3. To prevent substance abuse by children and their families
4. To reduce the stress that parents and children experience in daily life
5. To increase parent involvement in their children's school and in their community

To help evaluate the FAST program, "pretest" information was collected from families at the time they entered the project, and similar "posttest" information was collected at program exit. The FAST family information presented in this report was collected through six instruments. Two standardized instruments, the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) and the Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness Evaluation Scale III (FACES III) were used to gather information on the child's behavioural and emotional functioning, and on family adaptability and cohesion, respectively. In addition, a modified version of the Isolation Subscale of the Parenting Stress Index was used to gather information about social support, and a modified version of the Witte Parental Involvement & Family Support Survey and a qualitative Program Evaluation form were used to gather information about parental involvement in their child's school and in the community. Finally, a Family Information Sheet was completed that provides basic demographic information on FAST families.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the Family Service Canada website (<http://www.familyservicecanada.org>) November 18, 2002.

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## 2.0 Key Findings

### 2.1 Program participants

- During the period from fall 2010 to spring 2011 there were three cycles of FAST programming offered across 9 different school sites.
- At least 239 parents and 353 children (including siblings) attended one or more F&ST meetings.
- For 122 target child participants, there were 64 boys (52%) and 58 girls (48%).
- Of the 225 families that provided income information, 93(41%) reported their yearly income to be less than \$30,000.
- There was a great deal of ethnic diversity within the group of participating families with 52% of non-Caucasian families from ethno-cultural backgrounds such as African, Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, Caribbean and Latin American.
- A total of 115 families graduated from the 12 programs.

### 2.2 Achievement of program goals

- ***Improving family relationships and building stronger family bonds.***  
Support for *improving family relationships and building stronger family bonds* was provided by the results of the FACES III, where the number of families scoring in the normal range of family cohesiveness increased from 90 (76%) at pretest to 96 (81%) at posttest, and the number scoring below normal decreased 28 (24%) to 22 (19%). In addition, the mean score for Family Cohesion increased slightly from 39.1 at pretest to 39.6 at posttest. One item, "*family members feel closer to other family members than to people outside the family*" showed a statistically significant increase from pretest to posttest ( $P < 0.05$ ).
- ***Promoting children's success in school.***  
The main evidence for achieving the goal of *promoting children's success in school* came from the BERS and the Parental Involvement Survey. On the BERS there was a statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ) increase in the teacher rated mean scores for the *Intrapersonal Strength* and *Interpersonal Strength* subscales based on a paired T-test. In addition, almost half of parents (46.3%) increased their level of involvement in learning and recreational activities with their child at home.

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- ***Reducing the stress that parents experience in daily life.***  
There was some support for achievement of this goal, as almost half of parents (45.5%) showed increased scores on the modified isolation subscale of the Parental Stress Index.
- ***Increasing parent involvement in their children's school.***  
There was strong evidence for achievement of this goal where parental involvement with the school showed a statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) improvement on the total score, as well as on four of the twenty-three individual survey questions, including involvement in parent/teacher conferences, fundraising, taking part in activities of parent/teacher organization and belonging to other organizations dealing with school matters. Almost half of parents had improved scores in the amount of positive school to home contact and parent to school contact.

### 3.0 Program Implementation

#### 3.1 Program Participation

The FAST program was implemented in 9 sites in Calgary in 2010/2011. The following table summarizes information from the recruitment sheets submitted for these sites.

**Table 1. Information summarized from Recruitment Sheets**

Families who were contacted by the school about an at-risk child	779
Families who agreed to a home visit by the FAST team	168
Families who received a home visit from the FAST team	159
Families who attended at least one FAST meeting	166
Families who graduated	115
Children who attended FAST meetings (including siblings)	353
Parents who attended FAST meetings	239

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The following table shows the breakdown of the 153 families who attended at least one meeting and the 115 families who graduated, by school and cycle.

**Table 2. Graduating families by school and cycle**

<b>Cycle and School</b>	<b>Number of families attending at least one meeting</b>	<b>Number of graduating families</b>
<b>Fall 2010</b>		
Cambrian Heights	17	13
Corpus Christi Elementary	15	10
Holy Redeemer	14	7
St. Thomas More	13	13
<b>Cycle total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Spring 2011</b>		
Bowcroft	11	9
Holy Redeemer	10	5
Holy Trinity	16	12
Rosscarrock School	15	9
St. Angela	14	10
<b>Cycle total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Winter 2011</b>		
Holy Trinity	14	11
Reception Centre	14	9
Rosscarrock School	13	7
<b>Cycle total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>115</b>

While a total of 115 families graduated from FAST, there were 122 families for whom at least some data was collected, since a few families completed pretests but did not graduate.

### 3.2 Demographic Information

Demographic information was available from the Family Information Sheet, which was completed by 153 families. Some key information about participating children and families is summarized in the following tables.

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**Table 3. Demographic information on targeted children**

<b>Gender (n=122)</b>	Boys	64
	Girls	58
<b>Age (n=157)</b>	0-3 yrs	22
	5 yrs.	8
	6 yrs.	20
	7 yrs.	26
	8 yrs.	28
	9 yrs.	20
	10 yrs.	22
<b>Grade (n=150)</b>	11 yrs.	11
	Preschool	22
	Kindergarten	8
	Grade 1	18
	Grade 2	26
	Grade 3	27
	Grade 4	21
Grade 5	20	
Grade 6	8	

**Table 4. Demographic information on families**

<b>Marital status (n = 211)</b>	Married:	125		
	Single:	12		
	Sep/Divorced:	26		
	Common-law:	21		
	Widowed:	5		
	Single Parent:	5		
	Dating Couple:	4		
	N/A:	12		
	Unknown:	1		
<b>Family Income (n = 225)</b>	Under \$10,000:	17		
	\$10,000 to \$19,999:	45		
	\$20,000 to \$29,999:	31		
	\$30,000 and over:	132		
<b>Education</b>			<b>Female Parent</b>	<b>Male parent</b>
	8 <sup>th</sup> grade or less :		14	6
	Some high school:		18	7
	High school graduate:		30	23
	Some tech. college:		2	5
	2 year tech. degree:		1	10
	Some college:		12	6
	4 year college degree:		53	37
	Unknown:		3	1
Other:		4	1	
<b>Ethnicity</b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	

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Aboriginal – First Nations	27	10%
Aboriginal – Non Status	5	2%
Aboriginal – Metis	3	1%
Aboriginal - Inuit	1	.3%
African / Caribbean	26	10%
Arab	13	5%
Caucasian	92	35%
Chinese	7	3%
European	4	2%
Filipino	26	10%
Japanese	2	.8%
Latin American	31	12%
South Asian (East Indian)	8	3%
Southeast Asia (Vietnam)	3	1%
West Asian (Iran, Afghan)	1	.3%
N/A or Other	12	5%

**Table 5. Other family information**

	Total	Percentage
Church Involvement (n = 123)	58	47.15%
Community Centre Activities (n = 124)	28	22.58%
Volunteer Organization Links (n = 123)	22	17.89%
Parent Teacher Organization Links (n = 121)	27	22.31%
Counselling Accessed for self or child (n = 123)	23	18.70%
Treatment Accessed (n = 123)	5	4.07%

## 4.0 Program Outcomes

### 4.1 Results from the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS)

The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) is a strength-based assessment tool designed to measure children’s behavioural and emotional strengths (Epstein and Sharma, 1998). It contributes to the measurement of two goals of the FAST program in particular: to “promote children’s success in school” and “improve family relationships and build stronger family bonds.”

The BERS instrument consists of five subscales: *School Functioning*, *Family Involvement*, *Intrapersonal strength*, *Interpersonal strength*, and *Affective strength*. Respondents are provided with a number of statements, and are asked to indicate the extent to which these statements are like the child, where 0 = “Not at all like the child” and 3 = “Very much like the child.”

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The BERS instrument was completed by both parents and teachers – once at entry into the program and once upon program exit – as a way of assessing changes in the strengths of each child. Parents completed all five subscales on the instrument (a total of 52 items). Teachers were given a shortened version of the instrument that did not include the *Family involvement* and *Affective strength* subscales, as it was thought that they did not have enough familiarity with these aspects of the children to make an informed assessment.

### 4.1.1 BERS Scores at Pretest Compared to Norms

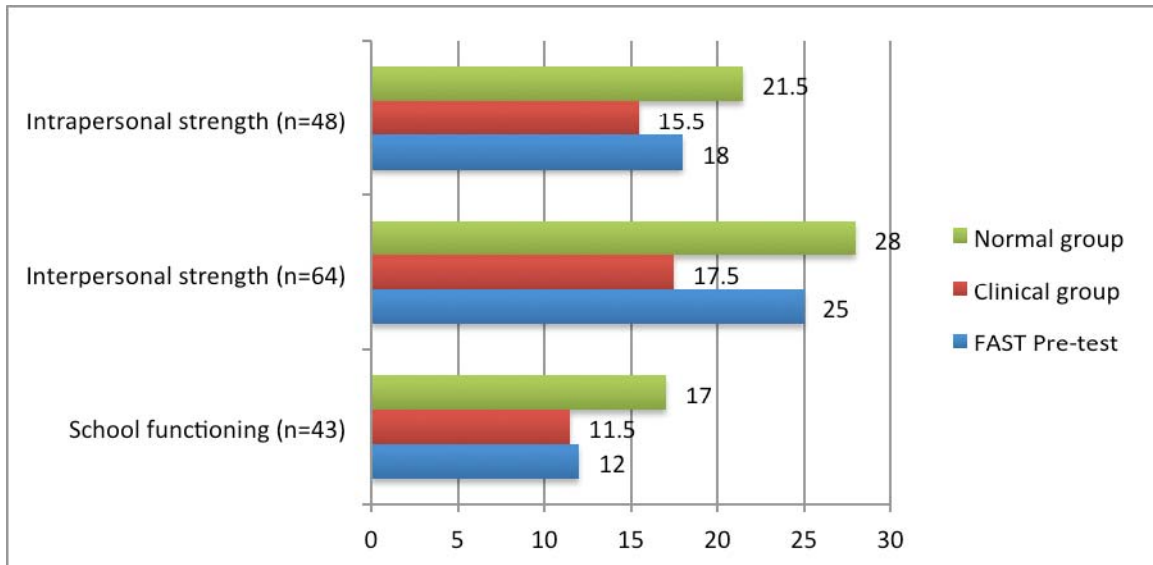
It is possible to compare FAST participant pretest scores to known published norms for clinical and normal populations to determine the relative risk level of the FAST participants. Figure 1 shows the median teacher-rated scores on the School functioning, Intrapersonal strength, and Interpersonal strength subscales for FAST boys prior to entering the program, and Figure 2 shows the median teacher-rated scores for girls. The scores are shown for boys and girls separately, since separate norms are published for boys and girls, with girls' normative scores being higher.

Only teacher-rated scores are used in this comparison with clinical and normal populations. This is because the published norms are based on ratings by professionals, and previous analysis has shown that parents tend to score the same child higher than professionals do.

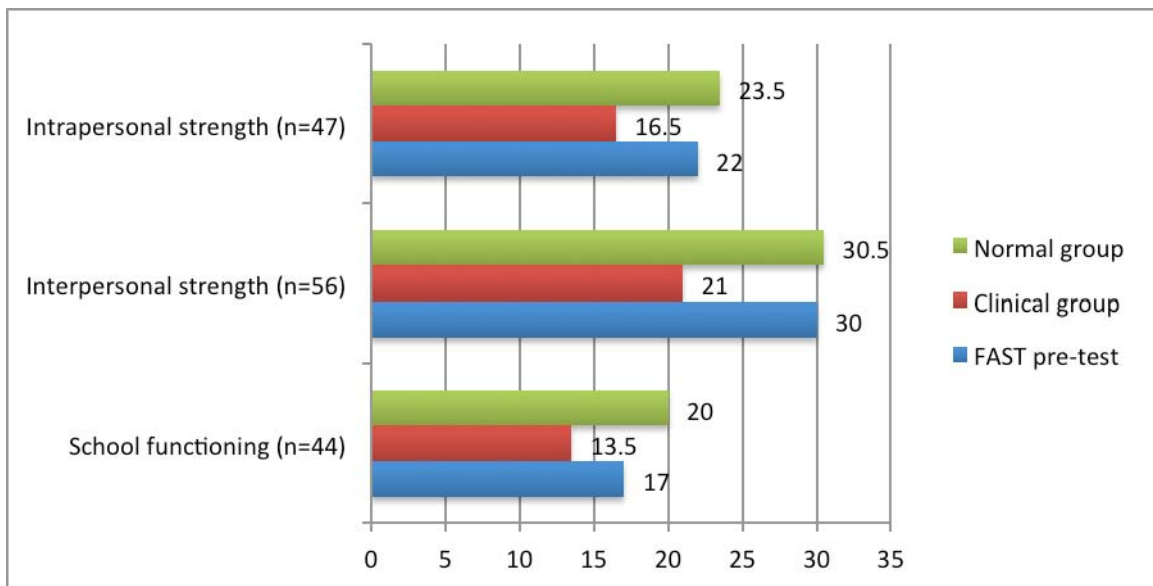
Since scores are being compared with norms, only subscale scores are included that had no missing items on that subscale. In addition, some cases with complete subscales could not be included because the target child's gender was not available. The "n" values in these figures refer to the number of FAST families for whom complete data was available.

### **Figure 1. Median teacher-rated BERS subscale scores at pretest, compared to median scores for normal and clinical groups (male)**

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**Figure 2. Median teacher-rated BERS subscale scores at pretest, compared to median scores for normal and clinical groups (female)**



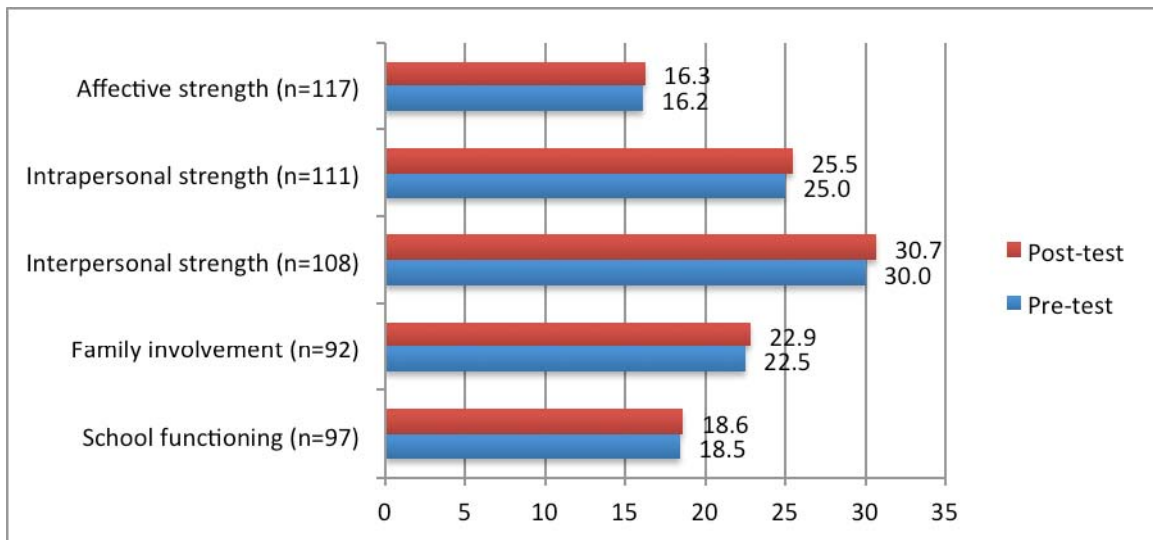
In the above figures, the median pretest score for the *School functioning* and *Intrapersonal strength* subscales was close to the median score for the **clinical group for boys**, and for the *School functioning* subscale was between the normal and clinical group for girls. In all other cases, the pretest score was close to the normal group.

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### 4.1.2 Change in Parent-rated BERS Scores Between Pre- and Posttest

There were a total of 122 children for whom the BERS was completed by a parent at both pretest and posttest. The figure below shows the mean parent-rated scores at pretest and posttest on the five BERS subscales that were rated by parents. The number of children included ranges from 92 for the *Family involvement* subscale to 117 for the *Affective strength* subscale (some were not included because they were missing items at pretest and/or posttest).

**Figure 3. Mean parent-rated BERS subscale scores at pretest and posttest**



The above figure shows that the mean parent-rated scores increased very slightly on all five subscales between pretest and posttest.

It is also possible to compare pretest and posttest scores using only those items that were scored at both pretest and posttest. This allows all children to be included for whom a BERS was completed at pretest and posttest, whether or not there were missing items. Total scores cannot be compared between children, but they can be compared between pretest and posttest to establish whether scores increased or decreased.

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**Table 6. Change in parent-rated BERS scores (n = 122, only items answered pre and post)**

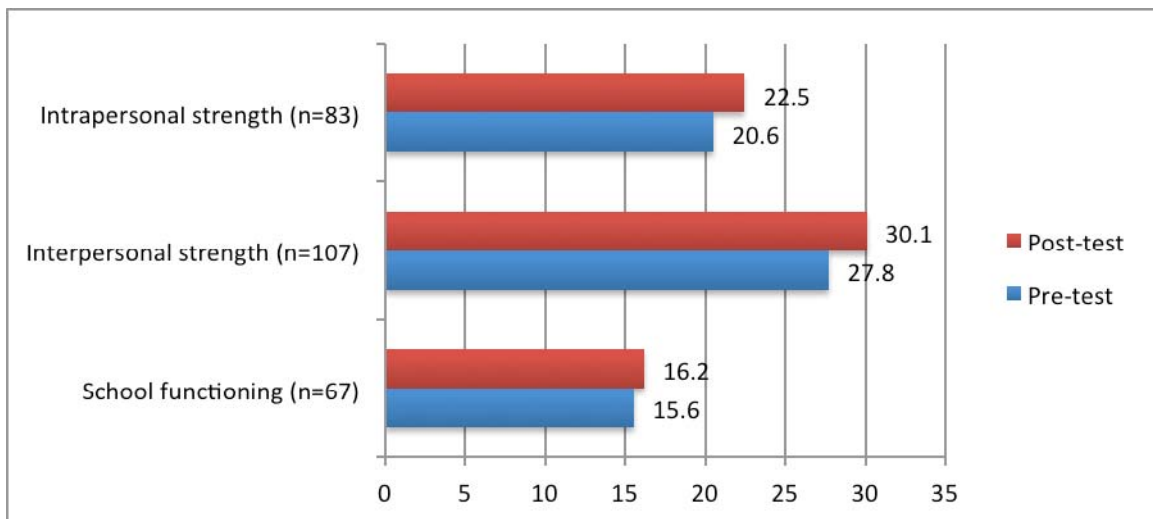
	<b>Number of clients</b>	<b>Percent of clients</b>
Increased	70	57.4%
No change	4	3.3%
Decreased	48	39.3%
Total	122	100.0%

The table shows that the total BERS scores, as rated by parents, increased between pretest and posttest for more than half of children.

### 4.1.3 Change in Teacher-rated BERS Scores Between Pre- and Posttest

There were a total of 128 children for whom the BERS was completed by a teacher at both pretest and posttest. Only three of the five BERS subscales were completed by teachers: the *School functioning*, *Interpersonal strength*, and *Intrapersonal strength* subscales. The following figure shows the change in the mean scores on these subscales between pretest and posttest, as rated by teachers. The number of children included ranged from 67 to 107 (not all surveys could be included because some had missing items at pretest and/or posttest).

**Table 7. Mean teacher-rated BERS scores at pretest and at posttest**



The figure shows an increase in the mean score between pretest and posttest on all subscales. The increase in mean score was 9% on the *Intrapersonal strength* subscale, 8% on the *Interpersonal strength* subscale, and 4% on the *School functioning* subscale. The increase in mean score was statistically significant ( $P <$

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0.001) in the case of the *Intrapersonal strength* and *Interpersonal strength* subscales based on a paired T-test.

In addition, as with the parent-rated BERS scores, it is possible to compare pretest and posttest scores using only those items which were scored at both pretest and posttest. This allows all 74 children to be included who had a pretest and posttest, even if there were some missing items. The following table shows the number of children whose scores decreased, stayed the same, or increased, using this analysis. For the teacher-rated scores, it was possible to calculate change in subscale scores as well as totals.

**Table 8. Change in teacher-rated total BERS scores (n = 128, only items answered pre and post)**

	<b>Increased</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Decreased</b>
School functioning	62 (48%)	32 (25%)	34 (27%)
Interpersonal strength	77 (62%)	14 (11%)	33 (27%)
Intrapersonal strength	83 (65%)	12 (9%)	33 (26%)
Total	82 (64%)	6 (5%)	40 (31%)

The table shows that the total scores from the three subscales, as rated by teachers, increased from pretest to posttest for 64% of clients, with 31% showing decreased scores.

### 4.2 Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness

Family adaptability and cohesiveness are critical to the FAST objective of improving family relationships and building stronger family bonds. These two objectives can be measured through the Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness Evaluation Scale III (FACES III; Olson, Portner and Lavee, 1985), which was also completed at pretest and posttest. Families were provided with a number of statements on the FACES III instrument, and were asked to indicate the extent to which these statements were true for their family, where 1 = "Almost Never" and 5 = "Almost Always."

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### 4.2.1 Family Cohesiveness

Scores of greater than 35 on the cohesiveness subscale of the FACES III instrument indicate normal family cohesiveness. A total of 118 parents provided information on family cohesiveness at both pretest and posttest, and the results are shown in the following table.

**Table 9. Change in family cohesiveness (n = 118)**

	Pretest	Posttest
Lower than normal ( $\leq 35$ )	28 (24%)	22 (19%)
Normal range ( $> 35$ )	90 (76%)	96 (81%)

The table shows that the number of families scoring in the normal range of family cohesiveness increased from 90 (76%) at pretest to 96 (81%) at posttest, while the number scoring below normal decreased 28 (24%) to 22 (19%). In addition, the mean score increased slightly from 39.1 at pretest to 39.6 at posttest.

One of the ten items related to family cohesiveness showed a statistically significant increase between pretest and posttest ( $P < 0.05$ ). Item 7, *Family members feel closer to other family members than to people outside the family*, showed an increase of 0.2 from 3.8 to 4.0.

### 4.2.2 Family Adaptability

A total of 121 parents provided information about their families for all FACES III adaptability subscale items at both pre- and posttest. The table below compares the pretest and posttest scores on this subscale.

**Table 10. Change in family adaptability (n = 121)**

	Pretest	Posttest
Lower than normal ( $< 20$ )	0	0
Normal range ( $\geq 20$ )	121 (100%)	121 (100%)

The table shows that all families scored in the normal range in both pretest and posttest. Mean score remained about the same between pretest (32.79) and posttest (32.83), with  $P = 0.46$  based on a paired t-test.

## 4.3 Parental Stress and Isolation

The fourth goal of F&ST is to reduce the stress that parents and children experience in daily life. In order to assess stress due to isolation, parents were asked 7 questions from a modified version of the Isolation Subscale of the Parenting Stress

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Index (Abidin, 1995), at pretest and at posttest. By reverse scoring appropriate items, this scale can be scored in such a way that the total score is indicative of parents' social support.

Parents from a total of 121 families provided complete pretest and posttest information for this subscale. The following table shows the number of families where parents reported a decrease, no change, or an increase in social support between pretest and posttest.

**Table 11. Change in parents' social support from modified isolation subscale of PSI**

	Number of families	Percent of families
Increased social support	55	45.5%
No change in social support	20	16.5%
Decrease in social support	46	38%
Total	121	100%

The table shows that almost half of parents reported an increase in social support. It was also found that the total score on this subscale increased slightly between pretest and posttest, from 18.07 to 18.22 (not statistically significant).

### 4.4 Parental Involvement

The fifth goal of F&ST was to increase parents' involvement in their children's school and with their child's learning and recreation at home. To help assess this, parents completed a modified version of the Witte Parent Survey (a parent involvement survey; Witte, 1991) that assessed their degree of involvement with their child's school, both at the beginning and end of the F&ST program. This survey contains questions which address four areas: the number of times the parents have contacted the school, the number of times the school has contacted the parents, parent involvement in school organizations, and parent participation in activities with their child.

Almost half of parents showed an increase in involvement with the school, and participation in home learning/recreation activities with their child. Parent involvement with the school showed a statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) improvement on the total score. In addition, four of the twenty-three individual survey questions related to parent involvement with the school showed a statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) increase. These included:

- *How many times have you (or someone in your household) contacted the school about participating in fund-raising this year?*
- *Have you and/or your spouse or partner attended parent/teacher conferences this year?*

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- *Have you and/or your spouse or partner taken part in activities of the parent/teacher organization this year?*
- *Have you and/or your spouse or partner belonged to other organizations dealing with school matters this year?*

**Table 12. Parental Involvement Survey Total Scores**

	<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>Post-test</b>	<b>% Change</b>	<b>P</b>
Parent Contact with School (n=114)	15.36	15.42	0.40%	0.40
School Contact with Parent (n=118)	9.81	9.69	-1.21%	0.26
Parent Involvement with School (n=116)	1.6	2.21	34.03%	0.00
Home Learning Activities with Child (n=109)	16.72	17.30	3.51%	0.07

**Table 13. Parental Involvement Survey (n = 121)**

	<b>Increased</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Decreased</b>
Parent Contact with School	52 (43.0%)	16 (13.2%)	53 (43.8%)
School Contact with Parent	39 (32.2%)	34 (28.1%)	48 (39.7%)
Parent Involvement with School	58 (47.9%)	34 (28.1%)	29 (24.0%)
Home Learning Activities with Child	56 (46.3%)	16 (13.2%)	49 (40.5%)

### 4.5 Parent Feedback

FAST families provide feedback on their experience on an exit survey. There were 131 families who provided feedback on the program.

When asked what the family enjoyed most about FAST, several common themes emerged. One parent described the FAST program as *“a safe place to ask questions without being judged”*. Other common themes included:

- Connecting with Children Through Play ( 42)
- Meeting Other Families, Teachers, Community Connections (20)
- Family time (15)
- Parent Sharing Time (15)
- Sharing a Meal/Getting a Break (15)

*“Enjoyed meeting with parents, loved different cultures, exchanging food.”*

*“The play time, because it gives more connection with the child.”*

*“Having time set aside that was just for family time.”*

*“Having a night out from home. Enjoying the interaction with our family and others.”*

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*"Trying new food. Having food that someone else cooked."*

*"The whole program is incredible lots of information and so great to be able to talk to other parents."*

**Improved Parent/Child Relationship:** Parents also commented on positive impacts on their relationship with their child(ren) due to the time they spent together. Parents specifically mentioned improved communication, increased ability to express feelings, a stronger sense of bonding and trust with their child(ren).

*"The bond between me and my son now is tighter. I became more aware about the importance of being a Mother and the play time is really important."*

FAST *"strengthened out time together, given us more ideas of fun things to do."*

*"It helped us communicate more and express or talk about our feelings."*

*"Now, he talks more with me and trusts me more, is able to communicate better (e.g. his emotions)"*

*"I have seen a side to my children I never saw before."*

**Connection with School:** Parents described how their connections to their child's school were strengthened by getting to know teachers and by having teachers see a different side of their child in the context of his/her family.

*"I have come to really get to know the teachers and am grateful for their dedication and caring."*

*"More of a comfort and welcome feeling, [school/teachers are] more approachable."*

*"Understanding that I am not alone with issues and concerns about my kids."*

**Connection with Other Parents:** FAST participants found the opportunity to connect with other parents allowed them to get to know their children's friends, hear different perspectives on parenting, and feel supported.

*"Just by knowing there are other parents having the same problems as me, make me feel a little less alone."*

*"It's nice to hear different views of how to raise our kids and support when things aren't going well."*

*"I noticed other families, including our family, needs support in different ways."*

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### 4.6 Program Evaluation

Families were also asked to evaluate the FAST program. The instrument used was a single question, "Overall, what grade would you give Families and Schools Together?" on which families indicated a number from 1 to 10. The mean response was **8.8**, with almost half of families indicating a 10, and **87% of families indicating 8 or above.**

### 5.0 Conclusions

The identified goals of F&ST include *improving family relationships and building stronger family bonds, promoting children's success in school, reducing the stress that parents and children experience in daily life, and increasing parent involvement in their children's school and in children's learning/recreation activities at home.* The achievement of these four goals was assessed by the various instruments that were used to evaluate the program.

Support for *improving family relationships and building stronger family bonds* was provided by the results of the FACES III, where the number of families scoring in the normal range of family cohesiveness increased from 90 (76%) at pretest to 96 (81%) at posttest, and the number scoring below normal decreased 28 (24%) to 22 (19%). In addition, the mean score for Family Cohesion increased slightly from 39.1 at pretest to 39.6 at posttest. One item, "*family members feel closer to other family members than to people outside the family*" showed a statistically significant increase from pretest to posttest ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Evidence for achieving the goal of *promoting children's success in school and reducing the stress children experience in daily life* came primarily from the BERS and the Parental Involvement Survey. On the BERS there was a statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ) increase in the teacher rated mean scores for the *Intrapersonal Strength* and *Interpersonal Strength* subscales based on a paired T-test. In addition, almost half of parents (46.3%) increased their level of involvement in learning and recreational activities with their child at home.

With regard to assessing achievement of the goal of *reducing the stress that parents experience in daily life*, there was some improvement in this area. Almost half of parents (45.5%) showed increased scores on the modified isolation subscale of the Parental Stress Index while the overall mean score for all parents improved slightly from 18.07 to 18.22.

Finally, the goal of *increasing parent involvement in their children's school* was assessed through responses on the first three questions on the Witte survey. The Witte survey found a statistically significant increase in several areas of parent involvement with the school including involvement in parent/teacher conferences,

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fundraising, taking part in activities of parent/teacher organization and belonging to other organizations dealing with school matters. Almost half of parents had improved scores in the amount of positive school to home contact and parent to school contact.

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