

Families and Schools Together:

An Innovative, Targeted Strategy for Removing Key Barriers to School Turnaround

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Families and Schools Together:**An Innovative, Targeted Strategy for Removing Key Barriers to School Turnaround**

This proposal seeks a Validation grant under Absolute Priority 4, Innovations That Turn Around Persistently Low-Performing Schools, and Competitive Preference Priority 6, Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes. It aims to validate a *targeted approach to reform* that reduces or eliminates critical non-academic barriers to school success in low-performing schools in disadvantaged communities. The innovation, Families and Schools Together (FAST), overcomes these barriers by (1) engaging parents in a multi-family program that increases parents' comfort level with the school, (2) countering parent and child stress by building trusting relationships among parents, school staff, and community partners, and (3) reducing family conflict and child neglect by empowering parents to interact positively with their children (McDonald et al., 2012). FAST leads to an improved classroom climate, creating conditions in which teachers can foster student learning. Effective in diverse contexts, FAST is recognized as an exemplary, research-based model program by the United Nations list of Evidence-Based Family Skills Programs (UNODC, 2010), the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2008), and the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2006).

Competitive Preference Priority 6

FAST targets early socialization and learning to build a lifetime of success in school and beyond. Its implementation in this project, beginning with kindergartners and their families, and continuing support through the second grade, meets the criteria of Competitive Preference Priority 6:

- FAST team members (local parents, teachers, and community members) coach parents to practice school-readiness skills with their child, as reflected in both socio-emotional and

cognitive measures, enabling children to succeed in core academic competencies as they advance in school (see Significance section).

- Both the FAST program and the independent evaluation planned for this project rely on developmentally appropriate measures to identify children’s socio-emotional and cognitive advancement (see the Project Design and Evaluation sections).
- FAST operates through family engagement in schools, which enhances school readiness and is a strategy to align early learning with the transition to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

A1. Need for the Project

Despite decades of efforts in education reform, many schools still fail to raise student achievement and reduce gaps (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2009). Research over the past 20 years indicates that lack of parent engagement, family stress, and child neglect are major barriers to the success of children in persistently low-performing schools (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1996; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2003). The purpose of this project is to validate a well-tested innovation that reduces or eliminates these barriers to learning.

An emerging empirical literature on school turnaround attests to the importance of family engagement for school success. In a recent study of California schools that dramatically changed their achievement trajectories, principals identified parent involvement as a critical element of school turnaround (Huberman et al., 2011). In a study of Chicago schools that moved out of school improvement status, researchers found that family and community ties were among the central factors for success (Bryk et al., 2010). To turn around low-performing schools, we need family, school, and community programs whose impacts are sustained over the long term (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). FAST has been shown to build lasting relationships that help remove the following critical non-academic barriers:

1. ***Parent disengagement with the school system.*** FAST brings whole families to the school repeatedly for 2 years along with other parents and families of same-aged children; in this way FAST creates a *comfort level for families at the school*, which positively impacts the school climate, school attendance, and engagement in learning.
2. ***Parent and child stressors from outside the school.*** Repeated positive activities in multi-family groups build a *social network* of parents, educators, and community members that helps parents feel less stress and isolation and thus better able to focus on providing support for “learning readiness” as their child enters into school.
3. ***Family conflict and child neglect:*** Parents receive support from one another as they practice specific *family interaction and parenting strategies* that increase positive family talk, parent-child bonds, and child emotional self-regulation and discipline for learning.

Reducing these barriers improves school social climate, which helps turn around low-performing schools so that teachers, in partnership with parents, can prepare children for success.

A2. Project Design

FAST will be implemented through a dynamic partnership. The Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison) will serve as the lead organization and provide administrative capacity, coordination, and dissemination; the School District of Philadelphia, PA (hereafter, the District) will serve as the Local Education Agency (LEA) and coordinate the participation of 60 schools (see Appendix A for eligibility); Turning Points for Children (TPFC), a Philadelphia-based non-profit organization, will implement the local FAST groups; and Families and Schools Together, Inc. (FST, Inc.), a national non-profit, will provide training and quality control (see Management Plan and Quality of Personnel section). The American Institutes for Research (AIR) will serve as independent evaluator (see Evaluation section).

Intervention Design

FAST is a multi-family, after-school program implemented in three stages: (a) outreach to encourage parent participation, (b) a program of eight weekly, multi-family group sessions, and (c) FASTWORKS, which continues the program for 2 years through monthly parent-led sessions. Each FAST school has its own trained team that represents the races, languages, religions, and ethnic backgrounds of the families in the school, and which leads FAST sessions for all kindergarteners and their families. Members of the team include community professionals in mental health and substance abuse, school representatives (teachers, counselors, or family outreach workers), and parents who have children enrolled in the designated schools. FAST is implemented with multiple groups of 10–12 families meeting simultaneously in the school during out-of-school time. Parent-led experiential exercises during FAST sessions systematically build relationships (a) between parents and their elementary school children, (b) among parents of children attending the same school, and (c) among children, parents, and school personnel. This welcoming approach creates a school-wide climate of family engagement in the transition into elementary school, and a respectful partnership between parents and school staff.

Through the proposed project, we will build this school-wide climate of family engagement by offering FAST to all kindergarten students and their families in 60 Philadelphia schools over the 5-year grant period, including 38 schools that are in corrective action or reconstitution status under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and thus identified as persistently low-performing. From among the 60 schools, 30 will be randomly selected to receive the FAST intervention, with all kindergarten families in two successive cohorts in 2013–14 and 2014–15; the other 30 schools will serve as comparison sites and will receive the FAST intervention in 2016–17. The randomization design ensures that half of the 38 low-performing schools will be in treatment and half in the control condition. (Further details of the randomization procedure are provided in the

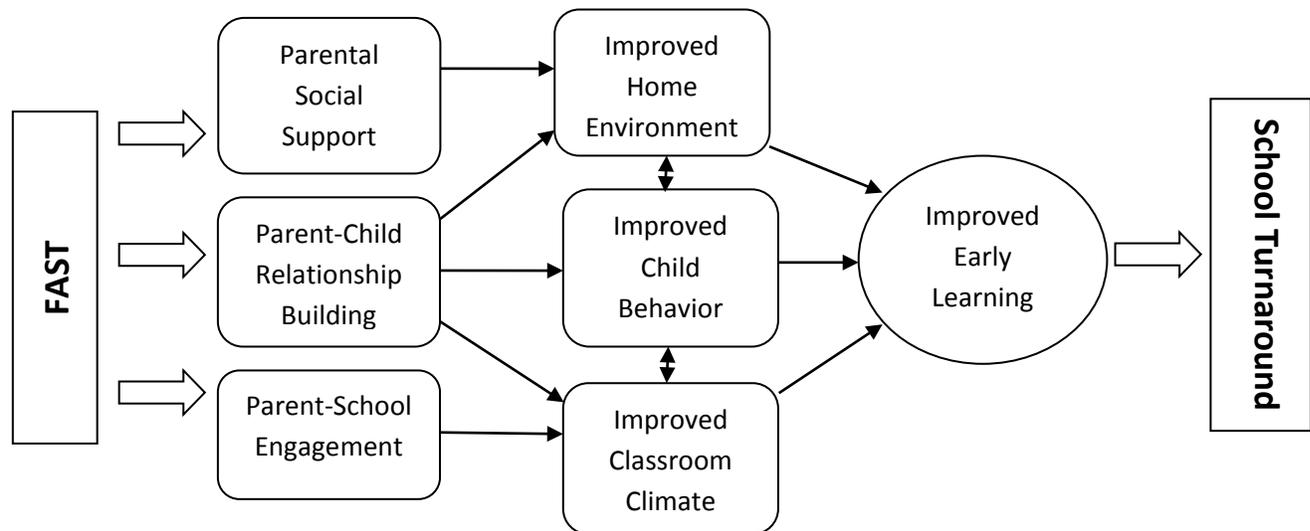
Evaluation section.) This design will provide a randomized comparison of family-school communities to validate the impact of the FAST innovation on family engagement, school and classroom climate, student achievement, and school turnaround.

FAST logic model. Each element of FAST is grounded in theories such as Bronfenbrenner's (2002) social-ecological theory of child development, Minuchin's (1974) structural theory of family functioning of poor families, Coleman's (1988) social capital theory of intergenerational closure in schools and families, and others (see also McDonald, 2003, on the theoretical basis of FAST). FAST activities (described below) offer social support to parents, build parent-child relationships, and engage parents in schools. In the short term, these activities result in improved child behavior, an enhanced home environment, and a more positive classroom climate. In the long term they result in better early learning for students and turnaround for low-performing schools. The relations between FAST activities and its short- and long-term outcomes are displayed in the logic model in Figure 1.

Elements of FAST. At FAST sessions, groups of 10–12 families gather in the school for 1 hour of parent-led family activities with the team coaching them. The activities may include a family craft, a family meal, family singing, or communication games. (None of the activities requires parent literacy or mastery of English.) Because the parent-led activities happen in the school and often in the classroom, good feelings are associated with school, which supports engaged learning. School and community staff members then organize children's time for 1 hour. Children see the school and community staff in an informal role, leading fun activities. At the same time, small groups of parents meet and discuss topics of their choice, sharing advice on parenting. Gradually, parents of same-aged children at the school get to know and trust one another, and they are more likely to return to the school for other events. Next, parents practice

being responsive in “special play,” which is 15 minutes of 1-to-1 parent-child time. The parent is coached to pay full attention to the child’s free play choices, and to not criticize, interrupt, boss, or teach. After 8 weeks families “graduate” in a ceremony hosted by the principal.

Figure 1. FAST Logic Model



Monthly FASTWORKS sessions are booster sessions to sustain the improved relationships made at the school among parents of same-aged children. These are led by FAST parent graduates and co-produced with school and community staff. Especially for low-income, disengaged, and isolated parents, such a structure is welcomed as a way to negotiate the school institution. Events that are structured according to the parents’ design often lead parents to take a more proactive role within the school and community. Parent initiatives that result from participation in FASTWORKS help create a collaborative and respectful school climate for the children.

Adaptation for low-performing schools. FAST is adapted at each school by a culturally representative FAST team to fit local priorities (McDonald, et al., 2012). Core components constitute 40% of the implementation, and structured local adaptations represent 60%. This ratio of fixed-to-variable program components contributes to the high level of ownership perceived by

local teams. For example, each participating family has the opportunity (and funds) to plan, cook, and host the group meal once during the 8-week FAST program; through sharing their favorite foods, children see their families' culture treated with respect by other parents, community members, and school representatives, learn to appreciate their schoolmates' diverse cultures, and experience commonalities that bridge diverse cultures.

Fidelity of implementation. Each FAST team is trained for 2 days and then supervised at each school by a nationally certified FAST trainer/supervisor. Services are provided in a standardized fashion by trained FAST teams and monitored during three of the eight weekly sessions to observe implementation and note local adaptations, while protecting the core components. Both the Quality of Implementation Checklist and the FAST Program Integrity Checklist (see Appendix J) will be used to monitor ongoing implementation and provide feedback as needed. After each 8-week cycle, trainers complete the Program Integrity Checklist to assess fidelity of implementation. Site visits are made to the monthly FASTWORKS sessions of each school. A summary report documents the time spent by parents, school representatives, and community professionals in all facets of the program.

Intervention Sites

The School District of Philadelphia (District) was chosen for two primary reasons. First, local agency TPFC has 9 years of experience implementing the program in 51 schools in the District (see Appendix C for evidence of success). This grant, if awarded, would validate that success on a larger scale while maintaining high quality. Second, the District has identified parent and family engagement in schools as a priority in school improvement efforts, as reflected in the District's 5-year strategic plan (School District of Philadelphia, 2009). FAST is well synchronized with the plan and, most specifically, with Goal 1: Student Success, which emphasizes stronger family engagement among its levers for change.

Table 1. Proposed Intervention Timeline

	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
Intervention					
Identify school sites					
Recruit and train FAST teams					
Implement FAST					
Cohort 1		K			
Cohort 2			K		
Control schools					K
Implement FASTWORKS					
Cohort 1		K	G1	G2	
Cohort 2			K	G1	G2
Control schools					K
Evaluation					
Randomize schools					
Finalize instruments					
Collect data					
Draft interim report #1					
Draft interim report #2					
Draft interim report #3					
Draft final report					
Dissemination					
Create website					
Participate in community of practice					
Publish newsletters					
Publish policy briefs					
Convene national conference					
Conduct national training					

Note. K = kindergarten; G1 = Grade 1; G2 = Grade 2.

According to the 2010 census, 31% of Philadelphia's families with children under age 18 live below the federal poverty level. The District serves 146,080 students in grades K–12, and 81% are classified as economically disadvantaged. As of the 2010–2011 school year, 105 of its 249 schools (42%) were in school improvement status. The District serves over 12,000 kindergarten children per year across 167 Title I schools, among which 61 (37%) faced corrective action or restructuring during the 2011–2012 school year, and another 30 (18%) were under warning. Of the 91 schools facing corrective action, restructuring, or warnings, 60 are not currently involved with the FAST intervention. It is these 60 schools—serving more than 5,000 kindergarteners—that will take part in the proposed project.

Number of Students to Be Reached

FAST will be implemented in 30 schools over two cohorts (approximately 3,000 children, based on 84 kindergartners per school and anticipating a 60% participation rate) and in another 30 schools over one cohort (approximately 1,500 children) for a total of 4,500 children and their families. (See the timeline in Table 1.) Because this is a whole-family approach, it is reasonable to anticipate benefits for siblings as well; if the average number of children in each family is two, the total number of children reached will come to approximately 9,000 over 5 years.

Parents from disadvantaged communities, perhaps with poor school experiences themselves, also benefit from a positive school experience with FAST. Historically, 44% of parents who graduate from FAST have returned for further adult education within 2 years of the weekly program (McDonald et al., 1997). If an average of 1.5 parents per family are included, this project will reach 6,750 adults in Philadelphia. Not only will FAST reduce the obstacles to these parents' learning by enhancing family-school relationships, it will also reduce isolation. FAST parents get to know the parents of their children's friends; in one study, 86% of FAST graduates reported making a friend whom they still saw 4 years later (McDonald et al., 1997; McDonald & Sayger, 1998; see also

Valdez, Robinson, Mills, & Bohlig, 2010). With more than 50% of the kindergartners at a school graduating from FAST, the school climate will improve through parent engagement and relations of trust and shared expectations that serve as a resource for information flows and enforcement of pro-school norms (Haskins, Rangel, Shoji, & Sorensen, 2010). At the conclusion of the proposed project, more than half of the parents for 2 years of entering classes will have had a positive social inclusion experience, and those connections and trust will continue to permeate the school climate for years.

Incorporating Project Activities into Ongoing Work

In 2005, TPFC (then called the Philadelphia Society for Services to Children), expanded its FAST program sites from 5 to 30 schools with support in training and quality assurance from FST, Inc.,¹ a national non-profit agency committed to achieving high-quality dissemination of the FAST program with predictable results. FST, Inc. provides technical assistance and maintains the infrastructure of subcontractors that train FAST teams and evaluate FAST cycles. FST, Inc. has developed and tested this quality assurance structure to ensure that investments in FAST achieve their intended outcomes and retention rates, which leads to local sustainability. To help ensure long-term sustainability for the Philadelphia communities in this proposal, FST, Inc. will dedicate a staff member for resource development and support, and develop a network of local certified FAST trainers to meet the training needs of this initiative.

Capacity to Bring to Scale

The proposed project has the capacity for scale-up at three levels.

Grassroots scale up. Communities with strong FAST programs support scale-up of other local FAST programs by developing certified trainers, which reduces the costly dependence on the national nonprofit organization and increases local program longevity, expansion, and cost-

¹ Whereas FAST is the program to be implemented and evaluated, FST, Inc. is the national non-profit organization that disseminates FAST across the United States through training and quality control.

effectiveness. FAST uses a train-the-trainer model, which emphasizes learning by doing with ongoing supervision and support. Certified FAST trainers are primarily master's-level professionals from social work, health, or education. By investing in the local capacity of certified FAST trainers, communities are able to conduct pilots and implement FAST across district schools for a cost that is lower than that of many other evidence-based programs (WSIPP, 2012).

Community-level scale up. The FAST process encourages collaboration among community organizations and public agencies. The first step is establishing a collaborative team of at least four individuals who reflect the demographic characteristics of the families to be served and representing the following sectors: substance abuse prevention, mental health, school personnel, families, and community volunteers. The FAST process brings these groups together for the sake of the child.

National scale up. Since 1998, the sole mission of FST, Inc. is the replication and effective dissemination of the FAST program. The FAST quality assurance package includes technical assistance, training, supervised implementation, negotiated cultural adaptations, program manuals and integrity checklists, evaluation guidance and resources, teaching CD-ROMs, and webcasts. To qualify as a FAST implementation site, a group must submit quality implementation site visit reports and pre-post outcome data. Refined over 20 years through local input, consultation with experts, and significant federal funding, the quality assurance system is relationship- and site-based, involving repeated face-to-face meetings between a certified FAST trainer and the local team for 6 full days of training and supervised practice over a period of 4 months.

Costs of going to scale. For initial implementation at this level of scale, the cost of FAST has been calculated as a per child cost of \$1,400.² After deducting start-up costs of training, supervised implementation, and evaluation, the estimated per-school ongoing cost of

² The Washington State Institute for Public Policy calculated \$1,759 per child for a smaller FAST implementation (WSIPP, 2012); our estimate is \$1,400 at the scale of implementation in Philadelphia.

implementing FAST is \$54,000 to serve 60 families at one grade level. Assuming an average of 100 kindergartners per school and a participation rate of 60%, the cost would be \$54,000 per 60 students, or \$900 per child. However, because families participate, and if the calculations include benefits for two children per family, the cost may be recalculated as \$450 per child. Thus, an estimated scale-up costs is as follows:

- 100,000 kindergarten children = \$900,000,000 (and 200,000 children with siblings counted, for the same cost);
- 250,000 children = \$225,000,000 (and 500,000 children counting siblings, for the same cost);
- 500,000 children = \$450,000,000 (and 1,000,000 children counting siblings, for the same cost).

Dissemination

National dissemination will be achieved through a collaborative effort of FST, Inc. and WCER, both of which have extensive capacity and experience in dissemination. A half-time dissemination coordinator at WCER will work with the PI and a team of graduate assistants to conduct and disseminate case studies of successful FAST implementation. The WCER team will work with AIR staff to prepare policy briefs based on the evaluation reports. AIR staff will also publish findings in journals devoted to educational evaluation. The WCER team will submit articles to popular and practitioner journals. In addition to print publications, dissemination of results will occur through presentations at national conferences of academics and practitioners, social networking media, and websites that report on the growth of FAST and provide case studies of FAST implementation and success. In the final year, the project will convene a national conference of education leaders and policy makers in Washington, D.C. to disseminate the results of the evaluation study, illustrate findings with case study materials, and build support for a national scale-up of FAST.

Community of practice. Project members involved in the implementation and the dissemination of findings will help organize a community of practice among recipients of i3 grants who are working to overcome barriers to turning around persistently low-performing schools. This may involve videoconferencing, gathering at national meetings, and visiting other sites to share results and identify best practices.

B. Significance

The achievement gap of children from disadvantaged families compared to their middle-class peers continues to be unacceptable. Many writers have noted that a large portion of children's academic difficulties derives from conditions in the home and community (e.g., Rothstein, 2004). FAST is an exceptional, theoretically-grounded and empirically tested approach that is distinctive among family engagement programs. In 2006, the Harvard Family Research Project, comparing 13 evidence-based family-strengthening programs (Caspé & Lopez, 2006), recognized FAST as having a distinctive track record of engaging low-income, socially marginalized, diverse parents, and for being the only program that operates systematically with schools.

Importance and Magnitude of Anticipated Effect Based on Prior Studies

Rigorous evaluations of FAST have demonstrated the program's positive effects on parent engagement, child behavior, and teacher perceptions of child performance, and its efficacy in reducing child aggression in low-income, socially marginalized populations. Four randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of the program have been completed since 2001, and a fifth is under way. All used standardized outcome measures of child behavior: the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990), the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991), or the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 2001). A separate research team was created for each RCT, and each featured a different design. One was an independent study conducted by Abt Associates (2001), and four were based at UW–Madison. In total, these RCTs have involved 135

schools in low-income communities and over \$13 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Reports of the four completed RCTs have been published (Abt Associates, 2001; Kratochwill et al. 2004; McDonald et al., 2006; Kratochwill, et al., 2009); the latter three appeared in peer-reviewed journals. An early report from the ongoing study has also appeared in print (Gamoran, Turley, Turner, & Fish, 2012).

The first study (Abt Associates, 2001) involved low-income, urban African American children ($N = 400$), average age seven, who were identified as at risk by teachers at nine elementary schools in New Orleans. Importantly, as in the proposed project, the evaluation was conducted by an external agency independent of the program developer. The children were randomly assigned either to a FAST treatment or comparison group condition, which involved mailed parenting pamphlets. Families were recruited after assignment to condition. Among families that agreed to participate, 77% participated in at least one session. Among families that attended at least one session, 78% attended at least five sessions and 60% graduated. Outcome ratings by parents and teachers for students assigned to treatment and comparison groups were analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and an intention-to-treat (ITT) design. One year after the intervention, children assigned to the treatment group showed significantly more positive scores than control group children on social skills (SSRS) as rated by parents. In addition, children assigned to the treatment condition had significantly lower scores than children in the comparison group on aggression (as measured by the CBCL externalizing subscale) ($p < .01$; effect size = .23). Teachers, who were blind to the students' experimental conditions, also gave higher social skills ratings to children in the treatment group, but the difference was not significant ($F = 2.36, p = .13$). Parental involvement data also were analyzed

after 1 year. FAST parents volunteered significantly more and were more involved as parent leaders than comparison group parents (Abt Associates, 2001).

A second RCT involved randomly assigning second-grade classrooms in 10 inner-city elementary schools in the Midwest serving at-risk, low-income, diverse communities (McDonald et al., 2006). Assignments were made to either FAST groups or a comparison condition called FAME (cognitive behavioral parenting booklets mailed to participants' homes, with active follow-up.) This study involved universal recruitment from classrooms after assignment to condition, and included a 2-year follow up. The participation rate in FAST groups among those who agreed to join the study was 89%, and the rate of retention for at least five sessions was 78% among those who participated, with an overall completion rate of 69%. Moreover, 82% of FAST graduates (program completers) attended at least one monthly FASTWORKS session, with graduates attending an average of 7.1 FASTWORKS sessions over 2 years.

An ITT HLM analysis of 2-year outcomes found that teachers (who were blind to the experimental condition) gave significantly higher ratings of academic competence to children assigned to the FAST condition (effect size = .23) than to children assigned to the comparison condition (Moberg, McDonald, Brown, & Burke, 2002). In the sample as a whole, findings for behavioral outcomes reported by parents were almost all in a positive direction for both the groups and the pamphlet conditions, thus the differences between the conditions were non-significant (Moberg et al., 2002). However, an HLM analysis that examined the program impact on Latino children only in the sample ($N = 130$) found that, at the 2-year follow up, teachers gave Latino children in the treatment group significantly higher scores on academic competence and social skills and significantly lower scores on aggression than low-income Latino children in the comparison group (McDonald et al., 2006). In addition, the rates of participation and graduation

from the weekly groups were much higher than the non-Latino parents, as were those of the monthly groups. The overall 2-year follow-up findings for academic competence in this study are especially important because they demonstrate impact on student academic performance, which, in turn, leads to the ultimate goal of school turnaround.

The third RCT (Kratochwill et al., 2004) featured universal recruitment of K–2 Native American children from three reservation schools in a generally low-income, rural area. Fifty matched pairs were created based on five variables (age, gender, grade, tribe, and baseline teacher assessment of high vs. low classroom aggression on the CBCL). The matched pairs were then randomly assigned to FAST or control groups, and pre-post and 1-year follow-up data were collected and analyzed with an ITT model. All 50 families assigned to the FAST treatment group attended at least one session, and 80% returned for a minimum of five more weekly sessions. Results on student-level analyses showed statistically significant improvements at 1-year follow up. Assessments by teachers—again blind to condition—favored FAST participants over the true control group with regard to classroom behavior, specifically the CBCL externalizing subscale, e.g. aggression (effect size = .61) and academic performance (effect size = .45) (Kratochwill et al., 2004). This study demonstrated impact not only on child behavior but also on academic competence, as measured by teacher reports on the CBCL.

The fourth RCT (Kratochwill et al., 2009) used a combined recruitment method: half of the children for each experimental group were identified by teachers as being at risk, and the other half were universally recruited from grades K–2, in a low-income, ethnically diverse school district. Again, the children were assigned to matched pairs prior to randomization (based on age, gender, grade, race, and teacher assessment of high vs. low classroom aggression). Among 67 families that attended at least one session of FAST, 90% returned for five or more additional

weekly sessions. Pre-post and 1-year follow-up data were collected and analyzed with an ITT model. At the 1-year follow up, teachers blind to condition, did not show significant differences in their ratings of the FAST and control children on standardized measures. However, parents in the treatment condition rated their children significantly lower on a standardized measure of externalizing behavior (CBCL externalizing subscale, e.g. aggression) (effect size = .68) than parents in the true control condition. In addition, school district data collected for the 3 years of the study showed that children who had participated in FAST received 1/14 the number of special education services received by children in the control group.

The fifth study, a 5-year RCT funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (led by the PI of this proposed project, Adam Gamoran) is in progress with 52 Title I schools in the San Antonio and Phoenix areas. This study focuses on schools with at least 25% of students from Latino backgrounds, with 26 randomly assigned to FAST and 26 in a no-treatment control condition. The schools were further randomized to two cohorts, with 24 schools in Cohort 1 (12 FAST and 12 control) and 28 in Cohort 2 (14 FAST and 14 control). The sample includes over 3,000 families. In treatment schools, all first graders and their families were invited through universal recruitment to participate, with about 60% agreeing to do so. An average of 44.5 parents attended at least one FAST session at each school (Miller, Sandler, & McDonald, 2012). Published school-level analyses of Cohort 1 exhibited significant differences between FAST and control schools in the number of parents of their children's friends that parents know, favoring assignment to FAST (Gamoran, Turley, Turner, & Fish, 2012). This number is a key indicator of parent social networks that points toward success in breaking down barriers of parent isolation (Valdez et al., 2010). Unpublished HLM analyses on Cohorts 1 and 2 combined continue to show significant benefits of FAST for relationships among parents, as well

as significant benefits for reducing children's problem behavior as assessed by teachers on the SDQ (Turley, Gamoran, Turner, & Fish, 2012).

Overall, existing experimental research establishes the effectiveness of the FAST program in engaging parents, supporting the development of young students' social skills and academic competence, and reducing aggression. Moreover, these effects were obtained with low-income, diverse families living in a wide range of urban and rural disadvantaged communities. The consistent effects across a variety of settings lend credence to the external validity of the intervention: FAST's systematic dissemination, cultural adaptation, and evaluation process ensures that the benefits of the intervention are conferred on children and families wherever the program is implemented. These findings give strong reason to believe that the FAST intervention will serve its purpose in the proposed study.

C. Management Plan and Quality of Personnel

Management Plan

With extensive experience managing large federal grants, WCER emphasizes collaborative relations with sponsors as well as with partners in research and implementation activities, while producing results of the highest quality and greatest value for policy and practice. The management structure for this project will include a PI who provides overall leadership and guidance, a steering committee that governs day-to-day operations and ensures coordination among the project partners, and an advisory board that counsels the steering committee. The steering committee, consisting of the PI and representatives from each of the partners, will meet monthly by videoconference and twice yearly in person to coordinate and manage all aspects of the project. It will monitor progress and ensure that project members adhere to the timeline represented in Table 1. Based on monthly financial balance statements provided by the WCER business office, the steering committee will also monitor expenditures relative to budget. The

advisory board will conduct a thorough review of progress made by the project on an annual basis, and will meet with the steering committee to provide feedback.

Past Performance in Implementing Complex Projects

WCER, the applicant, has a demonstrated record of effectiveness in implementing large, complex projects of research, technical assistance, and educational innovations. WCER is one of the nation's oldest and most highly esteemed university-based education research and development centers. A part of UW–Madison's School of Education, WCER provides a productive environment where scholars conduct basic and applied education research and development. WCER's Business Office provides projects with budgeting, forecasting, accounting and financial management, and human resource management. The WCER Technical Services Department provides multimedia services, custom software development, and computer support for more than 350 networked computer systems; it also has a state-of-the-art multimedia studio staffed by multimedia artists, animators, and programmers. WCER has deployed an enterprise-level web-based collaborative environment to support distributed work across complex partnerships. This environment facilitates data sharing and is backed up by a relational database for tracking and reporting project activities and outputs and monitoring project status.

Record of Improving Student Achievement

As noted, four major RCT studies of FAST have been based at WCER. WCER and FST, Inc. have collaborated on the recent studies, sharing in FAST training and quality assurance, with WCER providing overall coordination and research. Through FAST, both WCER and FST, Inc. have demonstrated success in improving family engagement with schools, child behavior, and children's academic outcomes. For WCER, these gains have been measured in the 135 schools that participated in the RCTs. For FST, Inc., this success has been measured by the more than 2,500 schools in the United States and in 15 other countries that have implemented the program.

FAST is one of many WCER programs that have contributed to higher levels of student achievement. Among WCER's notable recent contributions are Cognitively Guided Instruction (Franke, Carpenter, Levi, & Fennema, 2001); Mathematics in Context (Romberg & Shafer, 2008); discussion-based approaches to literature (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003); and Enhanced Anchored Instruction (Bottge, Rueda, & Skivington, 2006). Collectively, these programs have involved scores of schools around the country.

TPFC, the organization that will implement the FAST intervention, has documented success with the FAST program in Philadelphia. In 2011, it partnered with the Office of Research and Evaluation of the School District of Philadelphia to evaluate the effectiveness of the program for students who participated in FAST from 2005 to 2009, compared with students who were not in FAST. This study showed that up to 95% of the participating students outperformed their peers in almost every area examined (i.e., promotion to next grade, and reduced suspensions, tardiness, and serious incidents). TPFC itself compiles data after each cycle, and the Fall 2011 data showed that for the 307 children who graduated from FAST, there was a 31% decrease in below-average academics, a 14% increase in average academics, a 35% increase in above-average academics, a 24% decrease in unsatisfactory behavior, a 25% increase in satisfactory behavior, a 26% decrease in suspensions, and a 25% decrease in days absent. The retention rate was over 80%. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very satisfied, FAST participants gave the program an average rating of 9.35.

AIR also has a strong record of improving student achievement, often through the sort of independent, consultative role it is playing in the proposed project. Many of its contributions have been targeted toward helping struggling students and those with special needs. Among AIR's many signal accomplishments in helping to raise student achievement are the Whole Day First Grade Program and the Good Behavior Game, both developed in partnership with the

Baltimore City Public Schools; the Access Center: Improving Outcomes for All Students K–8, used in school districts in Vermont, North Carolina, and Kansas; and the Cleveland audit of barriers to school improvement (Osher et al., 2008).

Resources and Support of Stakeholders

From the outset, FAST has been funded by multiple agencies—governmental and nongovernmental—spanning education, health and human services, and juvenile justice. This approach is a deliberate strategy to achieve sustainability. In Philadelphia, FAST—exclusively implemented by TPFC—has been supported through such mixed funding streams. After implementing FAST for 2 years in 2005, the program was expanded, and support began to come in from the private sector via foundations, corporations, professional organizations, and individuals. TPFC is in the process of expanding FAST to serve fifth to eighth grade students via funding from a public statewide delinquency prevention entity.

We have secured a private-sector match of \$1.5 million, pledged by the board of directors of TPFC, which will either raise these funds from philanthropic sources or draw from the agency’s own budget. A letter attesting to this commitment is included in Appendix G. Beyond the 5-year period of the proposed project, both TPFC and FST, Inc. are committed to raising funds for FAST in Philadelphia and beyond.

Quality of Personnel

Members of the steering committee and advisory board have been chosen for their particular areas of expertise. (See Appendix F for resumes of key personnel.) **Adam Gamoran**, John D. MacArthur Professor of Sociology and Educational Policy Studies and director of WCER at UW–Madison, will serve as PI. He will devote 20% of his time over 5 years to this project and will be responsible for overall project management. He will also be the project’s liaison to the U.S. Department of Education. Gamoran has extensive experience leading large, complex

projects. As director of WCER, he heads an organization consisting of over 400 employees working in over 80 projects with an annual budget that exceeds \$40 million. His own research and training activities include the ongoing RCT study of FAST in San Antonio and Phoenix; two successive \$5 million IES grants to operate a predoctoral interdisciplinary training program in the education sciences; and a recently-completed, \$2.5 million NSF award to study professional development for elementary science teaching in Los Angeles. Gamoran is an elected member of the National Academy of Education and was appointed by President Obama in 2010 to serve on the National Board for Education Sciences, and reappointed for a second term in 2012.

The School District of Philadelphia will be represented on the steering committee by **Tonya Wolford**, director of the Office of Research and Evaluation, and **Renee Queen Jackson**, deputy chief for the Office of Early Childhood. Dr. Wolford, who will oversee the District's participation in program implementation and the evaluation, is an expert in bilingualism and literacy among elementary school children and has served on the faculty of North Carolina State University. Dr. Wolford is responsible for the District's internal evaluation activities for federal and state-funded grant programs. Ms. Queen Jackson, who holds bachelors and masters degrees, as well as certifications for roles as early childhood educator, principal, and superintendent, has been an educator and an advocate for children for more than 30 years. She is a member of the Policy Advisory Council for Pennsylvania, and has been appointed by the Governor's Office as a member of the Pennsylvania Early Learning Council to represent the School District of Philadelphia at the state level. She also is an adjunct professor at Rosemont College and Villanova University. **Mike Vogel**, chief executive officer of TPFC, has held leadership roles in TPFC and its predecessor, the Philadelphia Society for Services to Children, since 2000. Previously he held numerous leadership positions during a 20-year corporate career with Johnson & Johnson. **Carol Goedken**, representing

FST, Inc., has over 20 years of experience developing and managing research-based programs for education, most notably in the reading assessment area. She joined FST, Inc. in 2011 as Director for Growth to spearhead the expanded dissemination of FAST in the United States. **Lynn McDonald**, Professor of Social Work, Middlesex University, England, and Chairman of the Board of FST, Inc., will serve the project in a consulting role, advising on all aspects of program implementation and quality assurance. She created and founded FAST in 1988 and has continued to focus her research on refining and improving the FAST model. She is an internationally renowned scholar on family-school partnerships. **Elizabeth Spier**, Senior Research Analyst at AIR, will lead the evaluation. Dr. Spier has designed and managed several large-scale, policy-relevant qualitative and quantitative studies examining the effectiveness of programs and interventions intended to improve developmental and educational outcomes for children in the United States and internationally.

A three-member Advisory Board will provide consultation and feedback: **Thomas Backer**, Human Interaction Research Institute, is an international expert on dissemination strategies of evidence-based models and policy consultant to government/foundations; **Nancy Boyd-Franklin**, Rutgers University, is an international expert on family therapy with African American families; and **Andrew C. Porter**, dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania (located in Philadelphia), is an internationally renowned leader in educational evaluation and policy.

D. Project Evaluation

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