



Frequently Asked Questions

for School Leaders

& Team Members

Families and Schools Together® (FAST®) in your Philadelphia school is sponsored by the Investing in Innovation (i3) project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the i3 project is to advance school climate change in 60 Philadelphia elementary schools, focusing on grades K-2 during a five-year period. This distinct implementation and research project is searchable online as **PhillyFAST-i3**.

The partners involved in the i3 project are nonprofit agencies Turning Points for Children, Families and Schools Together, Inc., the School District of Philadelphia, the American Institutes for Research, and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

What is FAST®?

FAST is an evidence-based family engagement program that has been shown to increase family cohesion, empower families, strengthen social networks, and build bridges between home and school.

What is the goal of FAST?

FAST aims to increase the likelihood that a child will be successful in the home, in the school, and in the community.

What makes FAST unique?

- FAST is structured to **equip and empower** each family with new skills that strengthen communication, family cohesion, and community networks.
- The program aims to **reduce family isolation** by involving families in groups (hubs)—expanding the network of which the family is a part. Parents exchange ideas and experiences during parent-parent time, strengthening social ties, increasing social capital and understanding. This strategy is beneficial on several levels. Research shows that reducing social isolation in turn reduces risk factors associated with chronic daily stress, substance abuse by the child and family, as well as chronic family conflict.

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- **By systematically structuring activities to involve key people in a child's life.** All selected activities are supported by social science research:
 - Research shows that **it is critical to build up the long-term, naturally occurring relationships supporting each child**—parents, guardians, pastors, neighbors, educators, etc. FAST involves the people closest to the child.
 - Activities enhance the child's respect for their parent or guardian.
 - Activities help children better realize their potential and enthusiasm for learning, reaping benefits in the classroom.
 - Hosting activities in (or in relation to) the school helps increase students' and families' comfort levels with the school, enhancing the likelihood of more positive school-home communications.

What makes FAST a powerful strategy for schools?

- Dr. Lynn McDonald at the Wisconsin Center of Education Research (UW-Madison) over the years wove together several social science research findings to create FAST:
 - family systems, family stress, family therapy and adult education theories;
 - child psychiatry, child psychology and children under stress; and
 - self-help groups, building social supports and community organizing.
- FAST has been evaluated in many different settings with culturally diverse populations, even as it has been implemented in 50 states and 20 countries.
- **Families like FAST.** Once a family comes to FAST, over 80 percent will graduate from the initial 8-week program, and 75 percent will stay involved in school activities four years later.
- *FAST® is recognized by the*
 - National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (The NREPP is a resource developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.), United States
 - Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, United States
 - Office of Education Research and Improvement as a research-based approach to school-wide reform, United States
 - National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Australia
 - United Nations

What does FAST require? Your leadership, space, and allotted time.

- *School Leader/ Champion:* **The PRINCIPAL is *critical* to the SUCCESSFUL RECRUITMENT of FAMILIES to FAST.** The principal and school leaders help families understand why the program is important for their children to succeed in

school. The principal can spread the word through messages, backpack mail or an assembly/coffee for K-1 families.

- **To save principals' time, the i3 project has drafted letters and emails that can be easily adapted.** Principals are able to download and adapt these from **PhillyFASTi3.com**. At the website's **School Portal** enter the password **FASTROCKS**. (We highly encourage you to save time by using these family-friendly pieces.)
- *FAST Champions* also come in the form of teachers or other school partners (nurse, social worker, school psychologist, librarian) willing to serve on the FAST team with parents and agency partners.
- *Space*: Classroom space, gym and cafeteria space.
- *Time*: An after-school commitment of 2.5 hours for 8 weekly FAST meetings in the Winter and the Spring, with allowances for time to set up prior to the session, and time for team leaders to debrief afterwards.

Who leads and manages FAST at each school?

- Quality Control Managers (from Turning Points for Children) are assigned to work with 5 schools each.
- At least one school partner (a teacher, counselor, or staff member). **(See Addendum, page 5, for Bonuses/incentives for teachers and school partners.)**
- Teams which work with family “hubs” of up to 10 families. Teams include: a school partner, at least one parent partner, an agency partner, and a recreation leader. Teams are ideally culturally representative of the school’s population.
- Certified FAST® Trainers and Quality Assurance Specialists are resources from the Families and Schools Together, Inc. office.

What usually happens at the 8 FAST sessions?

- Meet and Greet
- Meal (hosted by a family after the first night; funds are provided to host the meal through a “Lottery drawing”)
- Family Sing-Along
- Structured Family Communication Exercise
- Family Feelings Identification Exercise
- Parent Support Meeting while children have kids’ time

- One-to-One Quality Time
- Lottery/Winning as a family (the winning basket includes family activities and games, plus money to supply one meal to the group. In this way, families give and receive, reinforcing the value of reciprocity.)
- Closing Circle

What is the i3 Project?

The i3 project is funded by a \$15 million grant awarded through the Investing in Innovation (i3) program of the U.S. Department of Education. These funds are dedicated to establishing FAST® and FASTWORKS® programs in 60 elementary schools. To assess program impacts, the American Institutes for Research is conducting an independent evaluation. These i3 partners are collaborating on the project in Philadelphia.



The School
District of
Philadelphia



What happens after the i3 Project is over?

Turning Points for Children and FAST, Inc., are interested in continuing to work with each school leader, parents and school partners, to embed FAST in the school for long-term sustainability of the program.

For Questions About PhillyFAST i3 At Your School

Turning Points for Children

Kim Jones, FAST Program Director
kjones@tp4c.org
(also) FastForKindergarten@tp4c.org
267/236-1540
www.TurningPointsForChildren.org

The School District of Philadelphia

Dept. of Early Childhood Education
Juanita Rodrigues Romu, Program
Coordinator
jromu@philasd.org
215/400-6716

Family Recruitment RESOURCES for Principals & Schools

Principals & school partners are able to download & adapt letters & email messages from **PhillyFASTi3.com**. At the **School Portal** enter the **password FASTROCKS**.

Project website

PhillyFASTi3.com

BENEFITS for Teachers and School Staff who participate in the PhillyFAST-i3 program

K-1 teachers and school staff who participate in the PhillyFAST-i3 program on teams will receive substantive professional development training. All K-1 teachers are eligible for bonuses (in the form of gift cards), ranging from \$5 per attending family to an extra \$100 if 60% or more of their classroom families attend four or more of the 8 FAST sessions. These bonuses recognize the reality that classroom teachers—in addition to principals—have significant influence on whether families participate in FAST.

Committed teachers will also earn a Certificate (in Recognition of Exemplary Efforts to Improve School Climate) from the i3 partners. A letter describing a teacher's efforts will accompany the certificate. Both may find a place in professional portfolios.

Teachers interested in participating in the FAST program at your school should email or call Turning Points for Children: FastForKindergarten@tp4c.org, 267/236-1540; or The School District of Philadelphia, Juanita Rodrigues Romu, Program Coordinator, jromu@philasd.org; 215/400-6716. To protect teachers' and school professionals' privacy, the information will only be shared with the FAST coordinators of your school.

