

FAST Program

*Rosemont Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

Potluck dinners brought more than 190 parents and students from Rosemont Elementary together last year for some targeted discussions on family health and wellness. The school's FAST program—short for Families and Schools Together—provided a group of families with a variety of social skills and tools to help their children thrive.

The city's FAST program coordinator recruited Rosemont Elementary to join the program. As a Title I school, administrators sometimes had difficulties reaching out to parents. They hoped that with this program, families would feel more comfortable at the school and, consequently, more empowered to influence their children's education.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) advertised the program to parents through fliers and informational packets sent home. They also hung posters in the school hallways. Prior to beginning classes, staff from FAST came to the school to talk about the program with parents. They handed out gift baskets to families in the audience. Once parents indicated interest in the program, ATP members followed up with personal phone calls and fliers that reminded families of the class's start date. They also approached area grocers to solicit food donations for the event.

For nine weeks, families came to the school to attend a series of Tuesday-night workshops. Class ran from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Each session included a confidential meeting with a mental health coordinator, 15 minutes of uninterrupted parent-child activity (usually a game), and 25 minutes of parent-to-parent meetings where families could discuss child development and parenting issues without their children present. Every week, FAST staff presented information on a different topic of interest to parents, such as preventing bullying behavior among students, drug abuse prevention, and communication tools.

Potluck dinners served during every session helped the ATP and FAST staff members create a welcoming environment for all of the participants. One family created the main potluck dish per week. Staff provided each family a gift certificate to an area supermarket to cover the cost of the meal. FAST team members contributed sides and desserts to go with the meal.

Though it was difficult for some families to attend all nine sessions, everyone involved agreed that the program had a positive impact. Most parents agreed that they learned useful information about resolving conflicts that may arise at home. They also gained information about many city-wide mental and physical health services.

The program did not cost any money for the school to host. The City of Virginia Beach funded all staff and material costs associated with the classes. Donations from local grocers covered the meals.

The school plans to continue FAST in the future. They want to host more nine-week cycles and recruit parents from other schools next year.

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