

PROPOSAL: Investing in Social Infrastructure: Families And Schools Together (FAST) and the Economic Stimulus Package

Summary:

We propose the Congressional budget stimulus package include job creation, job training and supervision for 20,000 parents in low-income communities to do outreach lead multi-family groups for all children in schools and increase local social capital. Results will be multiple benefits for children in families with empowered parent networks at 1000 schools. 20,000 jobs would implement FAST (Families and Schools Together) with a proven infrastructure, evidence based model for kids. The main project goal is to create jobs nationally as a part of the social infrastructure and to help increase social capital, empower groups of parents, strengthen the parent-child bond, and improve 300,000 child outcomes in 1000 schools. Costs for this would be about \$900,000,000.

Research and common sense both suggest that the current economic crisis and resulting unemployment and underemployment will increase family stress and family conflict. Stressed and isolated parents often provide compromised parenting, undermining the quality of parent-child relationships, child functioning and the child's ability to learn in school. This proposal to the administration and to Congress addresses multiple problems related to the economic downturn in one model:

1) create 20,000 new jobs (including training and supervision) for local parents and local paraprofessionals to reach out through schools to connect with parents and invite them to multi-family groups, host the multi-family groups (which have been proven to strengthen the parent-child bond, improve child behavior at home and school, and build local social capital) and use community organizing strategies with schools to build small empowered networks of parents which continue to meet over two years. Parents who have children in school hope that their children will succeed in school. The parents who show potential for leadership would be trained using a service development model to become trainers to sustain these programs over time. Twenty new jobs would be created per local school: 1000 schools could have 20,000 new jobs.

2) Each group of 20 new employees would do home visits to recruit parents, and would facilitate multi-family groups of 50 families for 8 weeks, and support empowered small groups of parents to run their own monthly groups for two years. The full time employees would run a total of 6 eight week cycles in a school per year. That would serve 300 families per school each year. The average family has approximately 4 family members. This means that we would be serving around 200 people per cycle for 8 weeks programs. Community organizers would be trained in 1000 schools or community centers to supervise the teams of full-time paid local parents in these strategies, and would hire and support 20 full time jobs per school, resulting in 20,000 new jobs while providing services to over 300,000 families, or 1,200,000 individuals.

FAST currently has the capacity to deliver this proposal. Every year, FAST receives requests over 1000 requests to do the program that go unfilled due to the lack of funds. In addition, current FAST programs in 1900 schools are usually small, serving only 10 families at a time, as all team members

are part-time. By making 20 full time jobs per school to do FAST, current FAST schools could be trained to serve 300 families a year, rather than only 10. The drivers of this goal are schools and paid, trained parents.

High social capital in a community protects members of the community from the effects of the economic crisis by weaving a network of supportive families. Family stress theory, based on interviews with families during the Great Depression, suggests that economic despair can drive a family into conflict, violence, child abuse, substance abuse and/or desertion. The two major protective factors for families in economic crisis are a) social networks of support and b) hope. In this proposal, we would create 20,000 new jobs for socially marginalized parents who are currently non-professionals. They would be trained on the job and supervised in the implementation of an evidence based group program for families under stress, which has been proven effective in federally funded randomized controlled trials, tested in 50 states in the US and 8 other countries.

The expected negative effects of the social and economic crises on children and families can be minimized by our government taking the initiative to create societal structures associated with schools that can build protective factors for children and families. Outcomes we are striving for can be achieved:

- Increased employment in the social sector; full time employment reduces family stress and social isolation, predictors of child abuse and neglect..
- Increased children's success in school is achieved by strengthening the parent-child bonds, reduced family stress levels so the child can learn, and increased parent involvement in the schools;
- Increased social capital in local communities, by supporting and empowering parent networks of local parents with the same age children attending the same school; and supporting trusting and reciprocal relationships between families, schools, and communities, including bonding within groups and bridging across groups;

Team trainings for the new jobs would be conducted by trainers and would include supervised practice held across US. The outcomes would be multi-level, as some parents would be employed, and social capital would be systematically built in every local community through the schools. The jobs would help parents to practice positive parenting to build a stronger parent-child bond, while also empowering small groups of parents to become supports for one another for the parenting process. Called FAST™ (Families and Schools Together), this approach was first developed in Wisconsin in 1988, and now has been implemented in over 1,800 schools in 8 countries. It has been continuously refined and adapted to be able to have wider benefits, while constantly evaluated for child outcomes. This multi-family group approach has been tested and refined in randomized controlled trials, as well as through thousands of evaluated implementations across widely varied communities, with ethnic, race, religion, and income diversity.

About FAST

FAST is one of about 50 evidence based prevention programs which have been proven by rigorous research peer reviews and federal standards to be effective in achieving positive outcomes for children, including preventing child mental health problems (CMHS Report to Congress, 2007) substance abuse (SAMSHA, 2002), juvenile crime (OJJDP, 2006), and school failure. Only 13 of

these evidence based approaches involve families, and FAST is one of these with the best record for engaging hard to reach families (Harvard School of Education, 2006).

Four factors make FAST most appropriate for the stimulus package, when contrasted with other evidence based programs to improve child outcomes are these:

1. **Creates More Jobs to serve more families:** Each FAST group requires hiring of a local team of four (minimum) to do outreach and to implement the groups. 20 team members at a school can host 5 hubs of 10 families each, serving about 50 families at a time. If team members were hired into full time jobs, they could host six groups of 50 at a school over 12 months, thus serving 300 families per year. FAST has a proven track record since 1988 with job creation of local people, who effect positive outcomes for children, families and communities.
2. **Engages Minority Parents Better:** FAST has a 20 year track record of engaging socially marginalized, low income, diverse parents with an average program retention rate of 80% across all communities. Respectful strategies include one to one outreach and home visits,(Saul Alinsky) required cultural representation of the families in groups on the FAST teams (more important than credentials), use of experiential learning, adult education empowerment strategies (Paulo Friere). Local teams are encouraged to adapt FAST to fit local community issues, without compromising the FAST values: All parents need support from parents (and institutions) and parents are the most effective prevention agents for their child.
3. **Builds Social Capital:** Unlike other evidence based programs, FAST is a complex, systemic intervention, which brings together multiple systems (families, schools, communities) to build trust and strengthen relationships. Outreach is followed by 8 weekly group meetings, and then the power is shifted from the team members to the parent graduates. Parent graduates are provided supports to lead monthly reunion groups to maintain the strengthened local relationships over time. FAST was developed by a social worker (McDonald) trained in community organizing; she adapted, tested and revised the strategies over time to work with schools, families and communities together.
4. **Evaluates Each Implementation to Monitor Quality Assurance:** There are quality assurance structures in place developed and tested over the past years to maximize process and outcomes in local sites. This includes multiple site visits by certified FAST trainers to each site to encourage local teams to adapt the programs to fit local priorities, while monitoring core components for program integrity, e.g. local teams are formed with high numbers of local parents on the teams with a requirement for cultural representation of the community; standardized instruments are used for pre-post evaluations by both teachers and parents to monitor consistent impact on child academic and social outcomes.

FAST infrastructure:

Families And Schools Together, Inc. (FST, Inc.) is a nonprofit organization located in Madison, WI that trains and certifies FAST trainers, provides program evaluation, and works with local communities to implement FAST programs. The office staff oversees a broad network of 300

certified FAST trainers spread throughout the country. This network of trainers enables us to scale up for new projects rapidly. Furthermore, we have over 1,900 FAST sites around the country which will be invaluable to the project. FST, Inc. is overseen by an eleven member Board of Directors; We promote fiscal responsibility and financial transparency.

This proposal calls for FAST in 1,000 schools over a two year period. Each school will have two certified FAST trainers, who are community organizers/parent trainers, twenty full time parents facilitating weekly sessions, and up to 50 families engaged in the FAST process in each cycle. Each school will offer up to 6 cycles a year, on average.

Total Budget for 24 months:

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| * 20,000 full time jobs for two years at \$25,000 annually (Based on living wage) Because employment would be staggered we estimate \$40,000 | 800,000,000 |
| *. Program costs @ 50 families per cycle for meals, transportation childcare & incentives. 6 cycles per school/300 families \$4000 per cycle, 1000 schools | 24,000,000 |
| * FAST training and supervision for 2 cycles per school (\$7000x1000) This includes 6 full days of training and supervision | 14,000,000 |
| *. FAST evaluation costs per school (6 cycles@ 2000 each) | 12,000,000 |
| * Research and Development (UW-Madison) | 1,000,000 |
| *. Parent Leadership conference—week training | 500,000 |
| *. Training of Trainers (2 per school) for 2000 trainers @ \$2000 each per school | 4,000,000 |
| *. Orienting 300 FAST trainers on this project of national significance. | 1,000,000 |
| Estimated: | \$ 856,500,000 |

