After-School Multifamily Groups: A Randomized Controlled Trial Involving Low-Income, Urban, Latino Children

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This randomized controlled trial evaluated a culturally representative parent engagement strategy with Latino parents of elementary school children. Ten urban schools serving low-income children from mixed cultural backgrounds participated in a large study. Classrooms were randomly assigned either either to an after-school, multifamily support group (FAST: Families and Schools Together) or to receive eight behavioral parenting pamphlets with active follow-up (FAME: Family Education). Of 180 Latino parents assigned to FAST, 90 percent came once and 85 percent graduated. Two-year follow-up teacher data were collected for 130 Latino children. The teachers, blind to condition, evaluated the children's classroom functioning. Data were analyzed with hierarchical linear modeling, using a conservative, intent-to-treat model. On standardized mental health instruments (Teacher's Report Form of the Child Behavior Checklist; Social Skills Rating System), statistically significant differences favored assignment to FAST rather than to FAME on academic performance and classroom behaviors, including aggression and social skills.

KEY WORDS: *Hispanics; immigrants; parent involvement; protective factors; social inclusion*

A *USA Today* headline reported: "Hispanic population gains fail to translate in classroom... Hispanic children face a bleak educational future" (p. A14). Factors cited as relevant to the Latino school dropout rate were poor research, weak accountability, low expectations, and bad communication between Latino parents and schools (Hispanic Population Gains Fail, 2003). The National Center for Education Statistics reported on dropout rates in the United States: "73 percent of all Latino youth graduated from high school compared with 92% [of] white students" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, p. 42). This statistic must be considered in a social context: although 9 percent of white children reside in poverty, 27 percent of Hispanic children reside in poverty in the United States (Suarez-Orosco, Suarez-Orosco, & Doucet, 2003). Almost all growth in the number of U.S. youths over the next 20 years will be among Hispanics (Fry, 2003). Schools need evidence-based approaches to improve communication between Latino parents and schools and address the achievement gap.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) mandates the achievement of **all** children and considers parents as critical to achieving successful schools (http://www.ed.gov/print/nclb/overview). Title I specifies that 1 percent of the federal funds going to school districts to serve low-income children must be used for parent involvement. Research linking parent engagement with student outcomes supports these federal policies. Henderson and Mapp's (2002) review shows that parent involvement is positively correlated with school success, but rather than being linear, it is a complex relationship and manifests in various forms. Similarly, Christenson and colleagues' (1992) and Christenson's (2003) research describes the impact of systemic approaches to family, school, and community, which are based on relationships across systems, rather than any one specific form of parent–teacher communication. Epstein's (1991) conceptual

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framework on parent involvement with schools refers to six forms: parenting, communicating, supporting school, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

Principals, teachers, and social workers are committed to parent involvement but are frustrated with unsuccessful efforts to achieve this involvement (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 1996, Kurtz & Barth, 1989). Parents may be seen as not caring about their child's schooling, rather than as impeded by economic and social policy obstacles (Hewlett & West, 1997; Pena, 2000). Social stressors of poor housing, dangerous neighborhoods, poor transportation, and lack of "living wage" employment, interfere with parental participation in parent–teacher conferences (Garbarino, 1995; Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1999). Although parent involvement is supported by federal policies, few strategies have been tested with randomized controlled trials in urban communities.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Educational policy is shifting toward funding evidence-based approaches—that is, tested with randomized controlled trials. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funded the National Registry of Prevention Programs and Practices to rigorously assess 1,000 programs with peer reviews, regional technical assistance structures, and state implementation of evidence-based models. Only 54 programs met the criteria for being an evidence-based "model" (Schinke, Brounstein, & Gardner, 2003). Half of the models involved schools; only a few were tested with Latino youths (www.samhsamodels.org). We describe a randomized controlled trial with Latino children of a SAMHSA model, an after-school, multifamily support group model.

FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER (FAST): AN EVIDENCE-BASED SAMHSA MODEL

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an after-school, multifamily support group to increase parent involvement in schools and improve children's well-being (McDonald, Coe-Braddish, Billingham, Dibble, & Rice, 1991; McDonald, Billingham, Conrad, Morgan, & Payton, 1997). A collaborative, culturally representative, team of parents and professionals facilitates the multifamily group to engage parents into building social networks through the schools. These relationships act as protective factors at several levels of the child's social ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Teams provide home visits and lead eight weekly multifamily sessions (with five to 15 families); then for two years, parent graduates lead monthly sessions.

There is no formal curriculum or instruction at FAST. Instead, the team leads a structured package of interactive processes at the group sessions to enhance relationships. The activities are based on theory and research: family stress theory (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; Hill, 1958; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998); family systems theory (Alexander & Parsons, 1982; Minuchin, 1974; Rutter, 1999; Satir, 1983); parent-led play therapy (Kogan, 1978; Kumpfer, Molgaard, & Spoth, 1996; Webster-Stratton, 1985); group work (Gitterman & Shulman, 1994); and adult education and community development (Alinsky, 1971; Freire, 1997). Based on experiential learning principles, the repeated encounters build trusting, reciprocal relationships, called "social capital" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Putnam, 2000), which are then maintained at monthly groups. McDonald and Sayger (1998) summarize the linkages between these theories and the FAST structured activities.

For the first hour of each FAST session, parents lead communication at their family table, while sharing a meal, singing group songs, and playing family games. The child repeatedly experiences parental hierarchy, embedded compliance requests, and family cohesion, and has fun with his family while at the school. In the second hour, participants separate into peer groups: The children play, and parents meet to talk in small groups, without assigned topics. The groups provide parents with an opportunity to build social connections and a shared identity. The next activity is 15 minutes of cross-generational, dyadic time, when a parent and her child engage in uninterrupted play, in an adaptation of play therapy, with no teaching, bossing, or directing. At the parent-planned graduation, the principal congratulates the parents for their involvement, and the team members present behaviorally specific affirmations to each parent.

These group activities support parents to help their child connect the cultures of home and school (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). In the school, with school personnel present, the parents lead the table-based, family activities; without lectures or

reading requirements, participants at all levels of English literacy are equally competent. Each FAST team implements the core components (40 percent) while adapting the processes (60 percent) to fit cultural preferences. An example of a core component is "shared governance," whereby the team must represent the social ecology of a child's life, including the culture and language of the neighborhood. (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). In addition, a parent with a child at that school partners with professionals from community agencies and the school on the FAST team.

Since its development in 1988, FAST has been implemented, with on-site training and evaluation of child and family outcomes by a national, nonprofit organization (www.fastnational.org) at more than 800 schools in 45 states and five countries. Thousands of primarily low-income parents from diverse backgrounds have increased their involvement in schools through FAST: 51 percent white, 23 percent Latino, 20 percent African American, and 1 percent Asian American/Native American. On average, nationally, 80 percent of parents who attend the first session return and graduate from FAST (McDonald & Frey, 1999). In a randomized controlled trial in inner-city New Orleans, parents assigned to FAST compared with parents in the comparison condition were significantly more likely at one-year follow-up to report increased parent involvement in their communities, and to report their children as having decreased aggression and increased social skills (Abt Associates, 2001). Another randomized controlled trial of FAST was conducted in collaboration with three Indian Nations and rural American Indian families; one-year follow-up teacher data showed behavioral outcomes favoring FAST rather than control children (Kratochwill, McDonald, Levin, Young Bear-Tibbetts, & Demaray, 2004).

METHOD

Research Design

Classrooms in 10 urban, elementary schools were randomly assigned to either the treatment (FAST) or the comparison Family Education (FAME) condition. A universal recruitment strategy was used. All families with children in the treatment or comparison condition classrooms were recruited for the study. After exposure to the program, first- and second-year follow-up data were collected for both conditions. This article presents data on the subsample of Latino children. (For complete information about the larger study, see Moberg, McDonald, Brown, & Burke, 2003).

Latino Subsample Characteristics

A total of 473 Milwaukee study children and their families were involved at the baseline data collection of the larger study (FAST = 272 and FAME = 201). Of the original 180 Latino families who participated in this research study, 87 percent of the parents were successfully followed up two years later. Teacher reports could only be collected with specific release forms from the parents interviewed at the two-year point. The Latino subsample with two-year follow-up data by teachers (n = 130, with 80 assigned to FAST, 50 assigned to FAME), was similar to the original sample of 180 Latino children at baseline except on gender and grade. More boys were assigned to FAST (54 percent) compared with FAME (28 percent) and more third-graders were in FAST (51 percent) compared with FAME (38 percent). These group differences were adjusted for in the multivariate analysis described later.

One of the sociodemographic strengths of the subsample of 130 self-identified Latino families was having married parents. More than 70 percent lived in intact family homes (Table 1). The Latino families lived in a relatively stable part of the urban community, and most of their children remained in their original schools over the two years of the study. The Latino families, however, struggled with extremely low incomes: More than 70 percent had annual incomes of less than $20,000, and a third of the families reported incomes less than $10,000. The parents had relatively low educational attainment: Almost half of the parents reported that they had not completed high school, and only 20 percent had more than a high school education. Length of residence in the United States and country of origin were not assessed, although anecdotally most families were of Mexican origin. The average age for the Latino children at baseline was seven years, and slightly more than half were girls.

Procedure

The FAST research project was presented to all elementary school principals in Milwaukee, and they were invited to participate in the study. The 10 schools selected served high rates of Title 1-eligible children and served students who were primarily

Table 1: Baseline Demographics of Children and Families

Demographics	FAST (Treatment) (n = 80) (%)	FAME (Comparison) (n = 50) (%)
Household income		
Less than $10,000	37	33
$10,000 to less than $20,000	33	33
$20,000 to less than $30,000	24	22
$30,000 or more	7	13
Parent education		
Less than high school	46	49
High school grad or GED	32	33
Some college or tech school	17	13
College graduate or more	5	4
Marital status		
Married	70	69
Divorced/separated/widowed	14	10
Never married/unmarried couple	16	20
Child's gender*		
Male	54	28
Female	46	72
Child's grade		
First	13	4
Second	27	54
Third	51	38
Fourth	9	4

Notes: FAME = Family Education; FAST = Families and Schools Together. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
*Groups differ significantly at $p < .05$. Only self-identified Latino families in the larger study, with two-year follow-up teacher data, are included.

African American (4), Latino (4), and mixed heritage (2). The six schools that served Latino students implemented 12 multifamily group sessions from 1997 to 1999: Four were in Spanish and English, four were in Spanish only, and four were in English (with translators). Program manuals for the team members and all evaluation materials were translated into Spanish; adaptations of activities were planned by each local team.

To recruit families into the study, teachers at each school agreed to offer either program to all children in their classrooms. Classrooms were matched by grade and then randomly assigned to either condition: FAST (intervention) or FAME (comparison). Teachers distributed cards to children to take home to obtain parental consent to being contacted about the study. If parents agreed to participate, there were four in-home interviews: preintervention, postintervention, one year post, and two years post. In addition, parents were paid $25 for each interview. (If not enough parents responded in a school, first- or third-grade classrooms were also recruited). At the two-year postprogram interview, parents were asked to provide releases so that teachers could be contacted for follow-up evaluation. Teachers were generally unaware of the condition of the participating students.

Because randomization was of whole classrooms, parents were assigned to FAST or FAME before the home visits. As discussed in a previous section, families recruited to the FAST condition were offered eight weekly, culturally representative, team-led, after-school, multifamily group sessions and parent graduate-led monthly meetings for two years. The comparison condition families were sent eight weekly mailings of behaviorally oriented parenting skills booklets in English or Spanish (see Channing L. Bete Company, 1997), with follow-up phone calls to see whether they had read the booklets, and an invitation to a formal lecture on "parenting." To engage families in the research study for two years and maintain their addresses over time, both groups of families were mailed regular FAME or FAST newsletters and sent birthday cards from FAME or FAST coordinators.

Measures

Teachers evaluated the children's socioemotional functioning and academic performance by completing two forms that have been used with Latino populations and have been translated into Spanish: (1) the Teacher's Report Form (TRF) of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach, 1991) and (2) the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The TRF is a widely used, broad-based, standardized rating scale instrument for socioemotional problems, in the child mental health field, with 120 items that measure problem behaviors on a scale ranging from 1 = never to 3 = often. The TRF, with established validity and reliability, is used to screen children in schools for emotional disturbance. The standardized scores mean that the average level of functioning is 50; at risk is 53 to 56; high risk is 57 to 60; and higher than 60 is clinical. The primary scales are Externalizing (delinquent and aggressive behaviors) and Internalizing (withdrawal, somatic complaints, anxiety, and depression). The TRF Academic Performance scale asks the

teacher to assess a child on specific academic skills, including reading, writing, and math, relative to other children at the same grade level.

The SSRS is also a standardized, widely used, multirater instrument, with established validity and reliability. Teachers complete 57 items, including the Academic Competence subscale, which contains nine items that require comparing the child being rated to other students in that specific classroom. The Academic Competence scale includes reading, mathematics, motivation, parental encouragement, and intellectual functioning. The SSRS assesses problem behaviors in the classroom (not used in this study), but its main emphasis is on the child's social skills in the classroom. Questions are about positive behaviors scored with reference to domains of assertiveness, cooperation, and self-control. It has a three-point rating scale (0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often), indicating the extent to which each item describes a child's behavior.

Data Analysis

An intent-to-treat model was used, which means that families who agreed to be in the study and were assigned to the treatment group condition but did not actually come to any FAST sessions were included in the analysis as part of the treatment group. The classroom teachers of the focal child in either condition completed evaluation forms at pretest, at posttest about three months later, and after two years. Two years later the focal child's current teacher, who was blind to the child's condition, completed the forms. These data are the focus of this article.

Hierarchical repeated measures regression models were used to estimate the net effects of the FAST program after two years, on a range of relevant precursors of substance abuse and on child behavior outcomes based on teacher reports (Moberg et al., 2003). Twelve multifamily group cycles included Latino families, and because the families were assigned to a condition (treatment or comparison), this formed distinctive groupings. A multilevel regression model explicitly models the manner in which families are grouped within cycles and has several advantages. It enables researchers to obtain statistically efficient estimates. By using the clustering information, it provides correct standard errors, confidence intervals, and significance tests, which generally are more conservative than the traditional analyses; and by allowing the use of covariates, it can measure at any level of the hierarchy.

RESULTS

The first key outcome of this study concerns parent engagement. Of the 80 Latino families who agreed to be study participants from classrooms assigned to the FAST condition, 90 percent went once to the after school family support group; of these, 85 percent returned for at least five sessions and graduated. In addition, the FAST families attended an average of 9.9 parent-led family support groups over the next two years. In contrast, of the 50 Latino families who agreed to be study participants from classrooms assigned to FAME, 100 percent were contacted with mailed behavioral parenting booklets, and through mailed newsletters and phone calls; however, only 4 percent attended the FAME formal lecture on parenting.

Did increased parent involvement and participation in FAST affect the Latino children's school performance as assessed by their teacher two years later? To answer this question, we compared results for students in FAST and FAME, using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and intent-to-treat analyses. Although the students assigned to FAST had a slightly higher rate of completion of teacher forms than did the control condition (76 percent compared with 67 percent) at two years, this difference was not significant. The teachers were blind to condition—that is, student assignment in the study, and asked to assess the child's academic performance, social skills, and behavior problems. Means and standard deviations for teachers' ratings of students on both the TRF and the SSRS instruments at baseline and at two-year follow-up show that the children assigned to FAST tended to improve their mean scores from pretest to follow-up, whereas FAME students tended to have more negative means from pretest to follow-up (Table 2). Of most note at two-year follow-up, the means of the students assigned to FAST on the academic performance scale of the TRF were significantly higher ($p = .03$) than the means for students assigned to the comparison condition.

At the outset, the two groups were similar at baseline on four of the five teacher evaluation measures. One-way ANOVAs comparing the groups found significant baseline differences: FAME students scored higher on the SSRS at baseline than did the FAST students ($p = .054$). Note that at

Table 2: Teacher Evaluations on Classroom Behavior Scales

	Baseline		Two-Year Follow-up	
Teacher's Report Form (TRF)	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
Child Internalizing (anxiety)				
FAME	47.6	8.9	52.0	10.8
FAST	47.5	10.2	51.9	10.5
Child Externalizing (aggression)				
FAME	49.1	8.4	53.5	9.8
FAST	50.1	9.7	51.2	7.9
Academic Performance				
FAME	47.5	9.8	43.6	8.0
FAST	45.8	6.9	46.6	7.8
Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)				
Social Skills				
FAME	104.2	17.4	100.3	16.2
FAST	97.4	17.7	102.4	14.9
Academic Competence				
FAME	95.9	13.8	92.3	13.0
FAST	95.5	11.2	95.0	11.8

FAST (n = 80) FAME (n = 50)
Note: FAME = Family Education; FAST = Families and Schools Together.

two-year follow-up, the scores on social skills in the classroom were reversed: FAST students scored significantly higher (meaning that their social skills were better) than those in FAME, who were not exposed to the after-school multifamily groups.

Within group analysis using paired t tests indicated that FAME comparison group students' scores were significantly less favorable than at baseline on each of the five measures analyzed. For those students assigned to FAST, two of the five domain means showed improvement (including the TRF Externalizing scale), two showed no change, and one showed less favorable scores (the TRF Internalizing scale). The ratings were provided independently by different teachers at baseline and at two-year follow-up, but all measures for both groups were significantly correlated over time.

For a more rigorous statistical analysis, these data were analyzed with hierarchical regression models. Table 3 provides the results from the essential data analyses from complex hierarchical regression models. The models take account of the random effect of assignment to FAST or FAME cycle (the grouping variable in the design that controls for cluster rather than random assignment to condition) as well as a number of other covariates. Coefficients are provided for fixed effects of the FAST condition from hierarchical regression models. Random effects of family/student are nested within cycle of FAST implementation. Models have been adjusted for baseline value of dependent measure, family income, parent education, parent marital status, student sex and grade in school, and student baseline CBCL risk level. The hierarchical regression models indicate a statistically significant program effect of FAST on three of the five teacher variables measured, two years after the intervention (Figure 1). Specifically, on the TRF-CBCL Externalizing Scale (largely due to the aggressive behavior subscale), on the SSRS Total Overall social skills rating, and on the academic performance subscale of the TRF-CBCL. The effect size of these differences is approximately .25 standard deviation units, a moderate effect. Thus, two years after the family support groups, teachers rated Latino students assigned to FAST as having significantly more social skills, less aggressive behavior in the classroom, and better academic skills than those assigned to FAME.

DISCUSSION

High engagement and retention rates reflect a possible compatibility of this multifamily group model

Table 3: Fixed Effects of FAST Condition Based on Hierarchical Regression Modeling

	Two-Year Follow-up Teacher Evaluations	
Classroom Behavior Scales	Coefficient*	*SD*
TRF Child Internalizing	−0.92	(2.22)
TRF Child Externalizing	−4.68**	(1.57)
TRF Academic Performance	3.06*	(1.50)
SSRS Child Social Skills	4.45*	(2.12)
SSRS Academic Competence	2.48	(1.64)

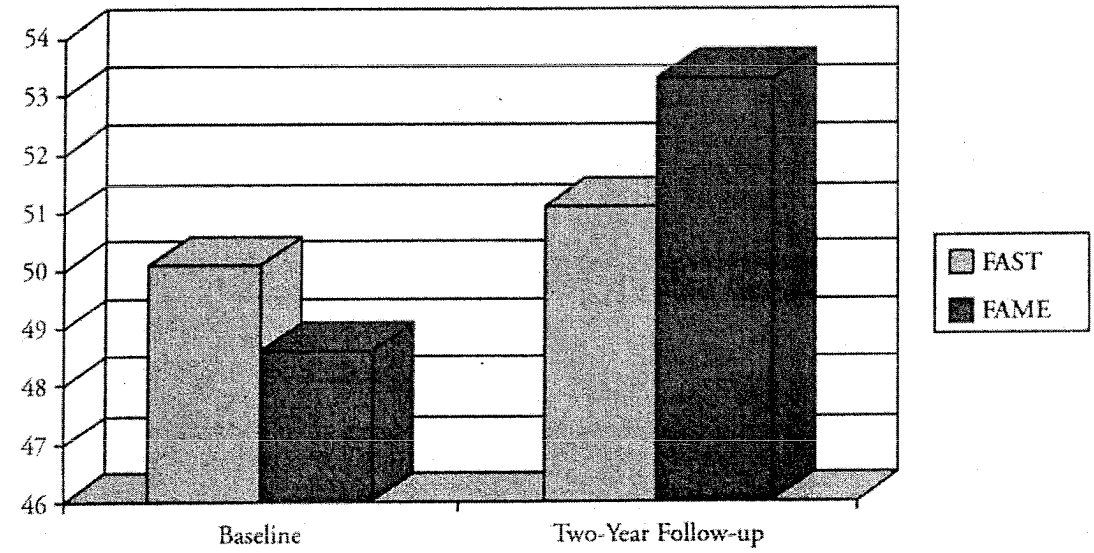
Notes: TRF = Teacher's Report Form of Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). SSRS = Gresham and Elliot's Social Skills Rating System. FAST = Families and Schools Together. FAME = Family Education. FAST (n = 80) FAME (n = 50).
*Coefficients provided for fixed effects of FAST condition using hierarchical regression models. Random effects of family/student are nested within cycle of FAST implementation. Models have been adjusted for baseline value of dependent measure, for family income, parent education, parent marital status, student sex and grade in school, and student baseline overall CBCL risk level.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

with the cultural norms of the Latino community. Researchers consistently report on the primacy of the extended family across Latino communities from Latin America, including Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (Frauenglass, Routh, Pantin, & Mason, 1997; Perez, Pinzon, & Garza, 1997; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Zambrana, 1995). The FAST process engages everyone in the family and values their perspective on the primacy of the family, which includes the nuclear and extended family, for example, fathers, mothers, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and so forth. Personally inviting the whole family to school functions may be particularly effective for Latino families rather than invitations, usually sent home on fliers, issued only to parents. For a school to take the trouble and expend the funds to make a home visit, and host family meals and group activities after school shows the community a respect for the importance of the whole family to be involved for the child's success in school.

Parent participation in after school activities is voluntary, and so attendance alone can be considered to be an objective measure of a program's acceptability in a particular community. Latino parent involvement in these elementary schools increased for parents who participated in FAST. Principals and other school personnel at the six schools serving Latino children reported being pleased with the increased parent involvement and reported increased parent engagement over time at school functions.

The school-based, culturally representative FAST team is trained with role play to show respect both nonverbally and verbally to low-income, ethnic

Figure 1: Teacher Reports of Children's Classroom Aggression (TRF Externalizing)



Notes: TRF = Teacher's Report Form of Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist. FAST = Families and Schools Together. FAME = Family Education. FAST (n = 80). FAME (n = 50). Only cases with data at both points were included; teachers at two years were not aware of the condition to which the Latino child was assigned. Between-group differences were not significant. Baseline to two-year paired t tests were significant at $p < .001$ for FAME. Hierarchical regression models showed significant effect of FAST condition.

minority parents, and to help children at FAST meetings be respectful to their parents. Respect for the parents as partners in the process of supporting the child to succeed in school is fundamental to FAST. The Latino child observes the school staff being respectful towards his or her parents who might have minimal English language skills or a minimal educational background; this observation supports the child's respect for his or her own parents. This respect for parents is congruent with the reported values of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries (Brown, 1981; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

FAST offered a structure for meeting other parents and building reciprocal relationships, when other community societal structures are often not available to immigrant parents. FAST team members go to the home and invite families to come to the school for repeated meetings, with time in the evening to network together. Researchers report that the Latino cultures recognize the importance of consistently nourishing support networks by patterns of exchange within one's local community (that is, the social importance of groups) (Gutiérrez & Ortega, 1991; Vega & Kolody, 1985). The mobility of immigration interrupts the familiar extended family and the local networks. Informal, trusted, friendship networks are critical to the survival of ethnic minority families in a majority dominant culture, particularly when struggling with economic hardship.

Chrispeels and Rivero (2000) identified five clarifications that effectively increased Latino parent engagement in schools: (1) actual and perceived school invitations and opportunities to be involved, (2) parents' sense of place in their child's education, (3) parents' knowledge and skills about how to be involved, (4) parents' concept of parenting, (5) parents' aspirations and love for their child. FAST addresses each of these five processes, thereby "helping Latino parents to shift their parenting styles and their engagement with the school, especially with the teacher, when given information and an opportunity to explore how their attitudes and practices affect their children" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 95).

In addition to effectively engaging Latino parents and increasing their involvement in schools, the teacher evaluations two years later showed that assignment to FAST resulted in significantly better academic performance, decreased problems of aggressive behaviors in the classroom, and increased social skills in the classroom compared with FAME students. The follow-up data showed positive effect in three distinct areas, suggesting that multisystemic, relationship building, multifamily groups are effective with low-income Latino children in school over time.

However, the direction of the change was troubling: By teacher report, the differences between the two conditions were significant because of worsening ratings of the comparison group. This pattern held across all three domains of functioning in the classroom: social skills, classroom aggression, and academic performance. At two years, the FAME students showed decreased academic performance and social skills and increased classroom aggression. Protective factors of multiple relationships across systems of families, schools, and communities may act to shield the FAST Latino child from some of the stresses of racism, poverty, and toxic urban environments.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The first limitation of this study concerns the comparability of the two study conditions: FAST and FAME. As described earlier, FAME was created as a comparison condition for the FAST intervention. However, a recent study shows that behavioral parenting pamphlets are effective interventions, particularly with active follow-up (Montgomery, Stores, & Wiggs, 2004). The FAME comparison condition of receiving the eight parenting booklets with the active tracking of the families over time may have functioned as an intervention with effects on the children and families. This would suggest that the impact of FAST may actually be considerably stronger than these data show, because the comparison group received a kind of intervention (behavioral parenting pamphlets) rather than treatment as usual or no treatment.

A second limitation of the study was the unknown generalizability of these classroom results to all Latino immigrant populations. A weakness of the study was our lack of specification of the country of origin of the Latino sample and our failure to determine first, second, or third generational status in the United States. In addition, the distribution of the Latino subsample was across six schools serving low-income populations. Of the 12 multifamily group cycles, one-third were in mixed cultural schools, and two-thirds were in

monocultural schools. Our sample size and the nonrandom assignment of families to these school settings prevents us from investigating the impact of the language and culture setting on parent involvement rates and classroom impact rates. This should be pursued in future research.

Another limitation was the attrition of the Latino parents over the two-year period, resulting in loss of data on 50 families from the original sample of 180 Latino students at pretest evaluations. This was partly due to family attrition and partly due to failure of some teachers to provide data even when parental release was obtained. Another issue concerns the disproportionate number of boys in the experimental condition compared with the comparison condition. This difference was controlled for in the hierarchical regression.

Although three of the five teacher-reported measures showed significant outcomes, two did not show significant differences: the TRF Internalizing Scale (depression, anxiety) and the SSRS Academic Competence Scale. The implications of the same teachers assessing the same children on two different measures of academic functioning with different results remain unclear.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study suggest that after-school, multifamily groups can increase parent involvement and may help address the achievement gap. However, the lasting effectiveness of the evidence-based intervention is contingent on successful parent engagement and social inclusion. An evidence-based model that builds relationships across systems—the family, the school, and the community—can significantly change outcomes for low-income, culturally marginalized families. This change was achieved in this study through respectful inclusion of the parents in the after-school program, and cultural representation of the child's social ecology in the implementation team. If schools serving Latino students take responsibility for providing evidence-based parent involvement practices, they can support the federal goals of improved academic achievement for all students. CS

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