

Barbourville Independent School is located in Knox County, Kentucky. The school population of 760 in preschool through twelfth grade is predominately Caucasian with some diversity of African American, Asian and Latino students. One hundred percent of students P-12th grade receive free lunch. Serving students for over one hundred and thirty years, the district has a history of student successes in activities such as choir, art contests, gifted and talented, STEM programs, Governors and Rogers Scholars, and Odyssey of the Mind. Budget cuts and increased student needs have impacted services and resources that the district can provide. Without the added support from programs such as Knox Promise Neighborhood, the district would not be able to adequately fund many of the additional support programs that are so desperately needed by our students.

Program overview of collaboration between Knox Promise Neighborhood and Barbourville Independent Schools: Promise Neighborhood is a federally funded cradle-to-career initiative that brings a holistic approach to school and community improvement, serving youth from early childhood through career. With funding from a federal Promise Neighborhood grant, **Partners for Education at Berea College/Knox Promise Neighborhood (Knox PN)** works with **Barbourville Independent Schools**, Corbin Independent Schools and Knox County Schools to provide enriching opportunities for students, families, teachers and staff in Barbourville, Knox County, and Corbin. In collaboration with the Knox Promise Neighborhood Grant which began to provide services and resources to the Barbourville Independent School District in 2017, additional attention is paid to areas of support for students from cradle to career that the district could not otherwise adequately fund.

These collaborative efforts have resulted in numerous successful programs at Barbourville Independent Schools. One of these programs is Families and Schools Together (FAST). Because of the strong collaboration between the district and Knox PN and the support of the Barbourville Board of Education, the FAST program has shown tremendous success with increased attendance, academic achievement, and family dynamics from students/families that participated in FAST. We chose to make our FAST program the focus of this application in order to highlight the positive impact from these collaborations. FAST is an evidence-based program which provides early intervention to help students succeed by empowering parents, improving literacy, connecting families with schools, improving the school climate, and the perception of school climate. Open to all students in the district, the FAST program brings additional support to students and their families by providing strategies for parents to develop stronger parenting skills and support of instructional needs of the students. Working with classroom teacher(s), parents, and community members, FAST provides students and parents with family time to share a meal, have one-to-discussion time between the parent and child, provides literacy/math enrichment and arts inclusion activities for the student, and allows the parents to mentor each other with discussions about shared difficulties. In the spring of 2019, a FAST cycle was completed in the elementary school. Ten (10) families completed the program, and the parents comments included their desire to be more engaged.

Objectives of the program: With a district goal to increase student attendance to exceed local and state averages, a strong focus of both Knox PN and the district is to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism through consistent and focused parental and student engagement. In collaboration with the FAST program, other services provided by the Knox PN Family Navigator and school Academic Interventionists include home visits, helping students who are absent complete homework assignments, and increasing positive parental contact. These programs have helped to target chronically absent students and communicate with families to provide a variety of programs that have been developed in collaboration between Knox PN and the district to address attendance. *Improved behavior in the classroom/home:* Another important factor of the FAST program is improved behavior in the classroom/home of students who have participated in the program. Parents and teachers have commented on this improvement both on follow up surveys and in discussions about the program. Teachers also reported improvements in classroom behavior, social interactions, academic work, and family engagement from participating families. In follow up surveys, students and their families have provided positive feedback about the program.

Scope of the program: FAST and other Knox PN sponsored services are open to all students in the district (elementary, middle, and high school). *Elementary students were participants in the FAST cycle highlighted in this application. Ten families (35 students) participated in the program.* FAST students have shown improvement during the life of the project on MAP, iReady, and other academic and classroom tests. Teacher and their students who have participated in FAST have expressed that those students have improved in classroom behavior, attendance, class participation and increased times of individual reading. Students who have attended FAST have shown a marked improvement both in academic achievement and classroom interactions.

What is FAST® ? – Elementary School level reaches children ages 3-10 at early developmental stages, with the aim of reducing critical barriers to success they may encounter during their initial introduction to school. A family’s structure and stability create the foundation for children to be successful in school, and FAST Activities are designed to strengthen family bonds, empower parents, increase positive communication and improve the child’s overall academic performance and emotional functioning.

In a FAST Cycle, families meet for eight weeks, followed by two years of monthly FASTWORKS® meetings. The weekly sessions follow a prescribed format of activities whose effectiveness have been demonstrated through research. Each evening begins with parents and children participating in activities as a family unit. This builds cohesiveness and provides opportunities for parents to strengthen their role in the family hierarchy. Parents and children then participate in separate peer activities to build social capital and relationships within their communities. Next, a parent and target child (the FAST Child) come together to engage in focused one-to-one play time that enhances family interactions and often results in better behavior by the child in school and at home. The evening concludes with activities that reinforce the importance of the family unit, reciprocity, and ritual. FAST Sessions are led by a team that empowers parents and connects families to school and community. This collaborative team is culturally and ethnically representative of the families participating in the program.

Instructional strategies and resources used to engage students with disabilities. The district provides a wide range of resources for students with disabilities including in-class aides, and resource teachers. Programs such as FAST model the processes for students in discrete steps, use visual as well as verbal instruction, and provide one-on-one assistance as appropriate.

Instructional strategies and resources used to engage diverse student populations. The majority of students live within the city limits, but come from a variety of socio-economic and cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Knox PN services and programs enhance any cultural diversities and traditions as appropriate within age levels.

Cost and funding source of the program: The FAST program is funded for Barbourville Independent Schools by Knox PN from the Family Navigator’s, Whitney Wynn, budget. The program provides funding for a family meal which allows time together to share happenings of the day, materials for enrichment activities, and supplies for the family. The value of the program to the district and the families who participate is more than monetary. Increased attendance of the students who participated, and increased classroom participation are two of the most obvious changes. Family dynamics, behavior (both in the classroom and at home), self-esteem, and improved family dynamics are other positive outcomes of the FAST program.

Academic value---increase in test scores. Students who attended FAST showed an average increase of 6% on iReady. In addition, daily attendance of FAST students increased an average of 2% during the semester.

Non-monetary value—attendance, behavior, self-esteem, improved family dynamics. Students from the Union College Educational Studies Unit (ESU) played an important part in FAST by developing age appropriate instructional lessons and age appropriate activities to support the lesson. ESU students provided instructional support during FAST and worked with students while parents had shared time. A survey of ESU students revealed that they were able to observe student and parent/family dynamics, work with a variety of age/skill levels, and serve as mentors to students who often did not have that one-to-one time to talk to an adult. Students also had the opportunity to work with special needs students. One of the most heart rending moments during FAST was when a

non-verbal child took the hand of one of the ESU students and held a book that they had shared so that he could be read to again.

Degree of school board involvement:

- Barbourville’s Board of Education (BOE) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which approved the collaborative project with Knox Promise Neighborhood. This collaboration provides numerous services and resources to the students of the district with no cost to the district.
- Knox PN Program Manager provides a bi-annual status report to the full board.
- Board members volunteer their time and services to various activities.
- Board members promote FAST events through social media sharing and during board meetings.

Assessment of the Program: Parents who participated in FAST were asked to complete a pre and post-test for the program. A majority of parents (>50%) reported improvement in the following metrics: Social Relationship to FAST Child (71.4%), Family Satisfaction (71.4%), Parental Efficacy (71.4%), and Child Social Competence (85.5%), Support Received from Other Parents (57.1%). One parent also reported that their child said “we spend more time as a family doing fun things” as a result of FAST.

Strategies for helping parents and community members be aware of the project.

In addition to press releases that will be published in the local newspaper, shared with parents, and on the district website, flyers and take home information will be displayed and distributed.

Planning and Implementation

- Strategies for encouraging students’ engagement: Student participation is an important component of the program. Allowing students to interact in a less structured atmosphere provides opportunities to participate in literary and math lessons and age appropriate activities with a smaller student to instructor ratio than is available in a regular classroom.
- Strategies for engaging teachers: Teachers and administrative staff are encouraged to participate in Knox PN programs such as FAST which provides an opportunity for a relaxed meeting between family and school staff.
- Measure the impact on all participants: Parents are encouraged to participate in instruction activities and observe as the children participate. In addition, parents share ideas and suggestions in a mentoring atmosphere. School staff can also benefit from the perspective that they have the opportunity to observe the parent/child relationship and interactions. These opportunities are not available to educators in the normal setting.
- Incorporate reflection and instructional strategies gained by school staff (qualitative and quantitative data). Pre and post assessment/surveys are completed by school staff which provides feedback to improve not only the FAST program, but also the school climate, instructional strategies, and family/school collaboration which focuses on student success in the classroom and beyond.

Although qualitative and quantitative data analysis is most commonly used to identify successes and needs for improvement of programs, each of those dots on a chart represent a child. One family that participates in FAST has eleven children and adults living in one home. The grandmother is the primary caregiver and is often overwhelmed by the constant needs of the children who range in age from five to sixteen years old. This family faithfully attends every FAST session, and it was heartwarming to see those children sharing a meal that provided adequate food for each of them without the worry of there not being enough. They were excited by the opportunity to have extras and desserts. During instructional time, these children participate with enthusiasm and are always willing to be of assistance to hand out and collect supplies. By the end of the program there was a noticeable improvement in the children’s behavior and interaction with adults and other children. Giving these children that additional attention and allowing for uninterrupted time to talk to their grandmother was life changing. I wish everyone could have the opportunity to observe how such a simple concept can make a tremendous change in the lives of our students.

July 18, 2019

PEAK Award
Kentucky School Board Association

Dear PEAK Award Committee Members,

I participated in the Barbourville Independent School Families and Schools Together (FAST) program as the classroom teacher representative. Participating students in the program were either from my class during the session or had been my students in previous years. FAST is an evidence based program with an intensive training for staff and the parent volunteers. There are guidelines and performance instructions to make sure that the program is completed with fidelity.

When I was approached to participate and heard of the time commitment, one afternoon a week (two and one half hours) for eight weeks seemed like a tremendous commitment. I hesitated in agreeing to be a part of this program, but looking back, I am so happy that I didn't miss this opportunity. So often, school staff have interactions with parents after something negative has happened. Sharing a meal with families in a relaxed atmosphere allowed me to observe family dynamics and see the children and parents in a different light. FAST provides an opportunity to have positive interaction with parents and their children in a safe, close setting.

Several of the students who participated in this session were in my class. I was especially pleased to know that one young girl and her family were attending. Several times in class, I have had to caution this student because of her language and negative comments to others. She has expressed herself about her mother's disinterest in her and her siblings. On the first night of the session, my student introduced me to her mother and three younger sisters. I will admit that I had a distorted view of this family. As a single mother with four children under ten years old, she depended often on her oldest daughter to help.

Over the six weeks of FAST, this family showed a marked change in how my student related to her mother and how the younger children related to their mother and each other. The parent mentoring sessions allowed this young mother to express her concerns and ask for advice from the other parents. There was honest discussions among the families and often solutions provided that were something which they could successfully use.

Over the course of the eight weeks, I noticed that students who attended FAST were more engaged in class. Having students from the Educational Studies Unit (ESU) of Union College working with students on reading and activities was a tremendous help. Sharing books proved to have an impact on classroom reading. The ESU students and community members including the board of education members who volunteered to help during the FAST sessions will help to sustain the program because our school wants this program to thrive.

I am sure that knowing these parents and seeing how they interact with their children will help me to improve my classroom management techniques. I began this program thinking that I would be the professional and serve as a source of ways to be a better parent. Actually, the opposite was true. I was not the teacher during these sessions, but was a student who learned many valuable ways to work with students and their parents.

As a classroom teacher the benefit of getting to know these families who participated in FAST is immeasurable.

Thank you for your consideration of our application.

Rachel Andeewg

July 18, 2019

PEAK Award
Kentucky School Board Association

Dear PEAK Award Committee Members,

My teacher handed out papers about Families and Schools Together to take home to our parents. She told us that FAST was an eight week after school program and if our families were interested or wanted to know more that there was a contact number on the paper.

I'm at school all day and I didn't want to come to something for eight weeks after school. I put the paper in my backpack and didn't mean to show it to my mother. Every so often my mother looks in my backpack for stuff and that night was one of those nights. She noticed the paper and asked me about it. I told her that our teacher had told us about it that day at school and it didn't sound like fun.

I thought that my mom had forgotten about FAST, but she hadn't. I didn't know that she had called the number on the paper and had signed us up. She told me when the first meeting would be. All day at school, I dreaded that first meeting. It was supposed to be in the lunch room and I thought that would be a terrible place to meet. When we got there, my teacher, the school Family Navigator and some other adults were there. I thought this would be another boring thing to do. The ladies began to set out plates, napkins, forks and spoons. They had large pans of food, deserts and water. I thought at least the food looked good.

After we ate, they divided up in groups. Union College education students were part of our groups each week. They read a story with us and did an activity. The college students were great to work with us. They listened to us and took the time to help. It was pretty good. After the reading we got to make something. I picked out a kit to make a treasure box. I needed some help and some of the adults helped me. They just helped. They didn't make me feel that I was not smart enough to get it right or finish. One lady walked around and looked at what each of the kids was working on. She had something nice to say about everyone. I really didn't think she would be able to think about anything good to say about the kid across from me. He had painted his box and all of the colors ran together to make an ugly brown. When the lady got to his box, she said that it look like an antique. I didn't know what an antique was and she explained that it was something that was old, but that people kept things like that because they were special to them. I couldn't believe that she thought of something nice to say about that box. The kid working on it was almost crying because he thought it looked so bad. When she finished talking to him, I could tell that he was proud of his box.

I didn't think that I'd like coming to FAST, but my family didn't miss a time. We didn't come just for the food. We had fun. We learned some new things. We all got to be friends. If we have FAST again, I will come back.

Kara Smith

From the Desk of
Jason E. Reeves, Ed.D.

August 7, 2019

Dear PEAK Award Committee Members,

Please consider this letter as a formal recommendation for the 2019 PEAK Award submission from the collaborative partnership of Barbourville Independent Schools and the F.A.S.T program sponsored by the Berea College Knox County Promise Neighborhood initiative. It is with great honor and pride that I provide a recommendation.

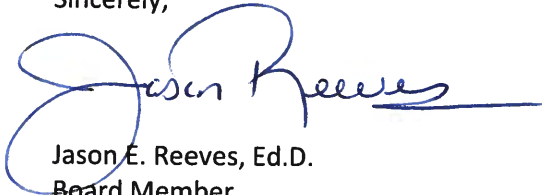
The Families and Schools Together (F.A.S.T.) program is one that I have first-hand knowledge of its impact on bridging the often difficult “gap” between teachers, students, and their families outside of the traditional four walls of a classroom. I, along with other Barbourville Independent School Board members, have lent our time volunteering with the program to not only show support for the partnership, but to learn more about the needs of the families we serve in our elected positions. As such, I can say with much certainty that the F.A.S.T. program has impacted many areas of our district including increased student attendance, increased student achievement and test scores, stronger teacher, student, and family engagement, as well as excitement among community members who see parents and schools actively working toward a common goal: giving P-12 students opportunities to succeed beyond expectation.

The design of the F.A.S.T. program offers a unique approach to bridging the gap I mentioned earlier in that students, their families, and teachers come together around a true “dinner table” each week where a nutritious and warm meal with all the trimmings is served. During the meal, conversations take place about each family’s needs, challenges, and successes. Teachers and school staff take mental note of these for future reference or referral to outside agencies who might be able to help the family. After the meal has ended, students and families are broken into groups for a weekly conversation and activity designed to encourage active participation and motivation related to P-12 learning. To this effort, the F.A.S.T program has smartly partnered with aspiring teacher education majors from the Union College Educational Studies Unit, who work alongside our districts teacher in the parents and students groups to teach and assess each group’s weekly activities. Seeing current teachers working along future teachers to advance the success of not only students but their families is truly an inspiring experience and one that undoubtedly carry the goals of F.A.S.T. across many generations of teachers.

Indeed, the F.A.S.T. program is one of our district’s resources that I receive many positive, often glowing comments about from our community when I am out and about. These comments come from all corners and from all age groups. Often, these comments focus on how much our parents seems to enjoy engaging themselves with our school and the success of the children in the classroom. As a board member, it is beyond reassuring to know that our district is perceived as an open, engaged partner with our students and their families. The F.A.S.T. program is undoubtedly a major reason for this perception within our local community. Even better still, I know that this perception is truly a reality.

In closing, the F.A.S.T. program and its staff, including Family Navigator Whitney Wynn, are very deserving of being recognized with the PEAK award. I believe they embody the goals of the PEAK award to "focus statewide attention on outstanding public school efforts aimed specifically at enhancing student learning skills and, in doing so, to promote the positive impact of public elementary and secondary education in this Commonwealth." The tireless commitment of the F.A.S.T. program to encourage and then sustain meaningful family engagement across P-12 levels is one that has and will continue to benefit our district for years to come.

Sincerely;

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason Reeves". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jason E. Reeves, Ed.D.
Board Member
Barbourville Independent Schools