

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN COLORADO SCHOOLS TARGETING
INCREASED PARENT INVOLVEMENT OR COLLABORATION AND
IMPROVED FAMILY FUNCTIONING

PREPARED FOR

*THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:
SAFE AND DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES*

BY

MYRIAM L. BAKER, PH.D.
OUTCOMES, INC.
8299 W. VIRGINIA AVE.
LAKEWOOD, CO 80226
(303) 519-0781
MYRIAMBAKER@MSN.COM

JUNE 15, 2004

This project was funded by the Colorado Department of Education, Prevention Initiatives Department, Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities. Opinions express are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of CDE or SDFSC.

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Introduction

In November 2003, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities commissioned a study of existing practices in Colorado schools that target increasing family collaboration (or family involvement) and improving family functioning. The study was necessitated by the implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and its requirements of state education agencies:

SEAs must support the collection and dissemination of effective parental involvement practices to its LEAs and schools. Those practices must be based on the most current research, meeting the highest professional and technical standards, on effective parental involvement that fosters achievement to high standards for all children. In addition, those practices must be geared toward lowering barriers to greater participation by parents in school planning, review, and improvement experiences. [Section 1111(d), ESEA]

There were four goals of this study: 1) describe the “state of the state” in terms of the work schools are doing with families in this area, 2) provide a comparative description and evaluation of components, cost, implementation, and outcomes of successful, research based family involvement programs in Colorado, 3) provide guidance to schools and districts seeking to increase their efforts to involve parents and help families, and 4) guide technical assistance efforts to schools statewide as they work to address the requirements described above as well as to:

“Involve parents in efforts to...prevent the further involvement of children in delinquent activity.” (Title 1, Part F, Section 1606)

“Include meaningful and ongoing consultation with and input from parents in the development of the application and administration of the program or activity...Activities that involve families...Professional development and training for and involvement of...parents...Expanded and improved school-based mental health services related to illegal drug use and violence...Programs that respond to the needs of students who are faced with domestic violence or child abuse.” (Title 4, Part A, Section 4115)

Parental Involvement and Collaboration

The impact of parental involvement and collaboration with schools on student academic achievement, school attendance, and behavior has been clearly documented for decades in multiple pieces of rigorous research¹ that are far too numerous to summarize in this brief overview targeting Colorado practice. The effect of parent involvement and collaboration has been demonstrated across ethnic groups, social-economic status, gender, and regular and special education populations. More important to driving practice is what “parent involvement” really means to teachers, principals, other school staff, students, and parents themselves. Specifically, what particular elements of practice or programs are key to assuring the desired impact on families and therefore on students? Before this question can be answered, “parent involvement” must be a clearly understood term. As NCLB states,

“The term “parental involvement” means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including and ensuring –

- 1. That parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;*
- 2. That parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school;*
- 3. That parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and*
- 4. The carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA. [Section 9101(32), ESEA]*

Joyce Epstein proposed a model of six types of parent involvement in her 1995 article² that includes:

1. Parenting practices, which refers to parenting and child rearing responsibilities,
2. Communication from school to home about programs and children’s progress,
3. Volunteering done by parents to assist teachers, administrators and children in classrooms or attending workshops or training events,

4. Learning at home, which includes parent-initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help,
5. Decision-making, governance and advocacy efforts done by parents such as PTA, advisory groups, and other committees, and
6. Collaboration with the community to integrate agencies and resources to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

The Nation Parent Teacher Association (PTA) built on Epstein's model to develop their very similar national standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, which includes:

1. Communicating
2. Parenting
3. Student Learning
4. Volunteering
5. School Decision Making and Advocacy, and
6. Collaborating with Community.

With these models in mind to describe the aspects of parent involvement on which a school or district can focus, what particular elements appear to be most important, or which should be implemented first? Dauber and Epstein³ found that the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and home are the *specific* (emphasis added) school programs and teacher practices that encourage parent involvement as well as guide parents in how to help their children at home. Darling and Steinberg⁴ found that activities and programs offered to parents outside of school hours are one of the most effective in affecting student achievement. Cotton and Wikelund⁵ found that the most effective forms of parent education are those that engage parents in working directly with their children at home. Finally, William and Chavkin⁶ concluded that the more parents participate in their children's school at every level and over a sustained period, the better the students' achievement.

These findings suggest that parents should be maximally involved at all of the six levels over a long period. However, it also appears that specific programs or practices that empower, teach, and guide parents to work with their children at home on a variety of issues are most effective in improving student outcomes. These practices would most likely be found in two main types of parent involvement in the Epstein model: *Parenting* and *Learning at Home*. *Parenting* practices by schools might include training on parenting and child-rearing issues, and should ideally result in increased confidence in parenting, child development, understanding of the importance of the home environment for student learning, and feelings of support from the school and other parents. *Learning at Home* practices employed by schools may include a variety of methods to give parents information on how to help their children at home with homework, decisions, and life planning. Such practices would lead to parents having increased knowledge in how to support their children at home, how to discuss school and homework, and increased participation in their child's education. Programs that focus in these two areas were the focus of this investigation, and particularly those that also include specific strategies to enhance family functioning.

Family Functioning

Programs targeting family functioning are somewhat different from those focusing on parental involvement or collaboration with the schools. Family functioning refers more to the cohesion of the family, as well as how conflict is handled. Additionally, some programs targeting family functioning also look to improve parent outcomes such as employment, education, substance abuse, violence, and mobility. Program targeting family functioning can be provided in one of three broad approaches⁷. These include:

1. Behavioral parent training,
2. Family therapy interventions, and
3. Family skills training.

Family skills training programs appear to affect the largest number of risk and protective factors in both youth and family members. Family skills training programs provide behavioral parent training, children's social skills training, and role-playing with coaching by trained facilitators. The comprehensive approach to both youth and parent skills has a greater impact on a broader range of family risk and protective factors than focusing on only the youth.⁸ Additionally, there are specific activities intended to improve the child-parent bond. Most activities are experiential in nature, as skills-based programs are far more effective than those that simply provide information or lecture to families.⁹

Examples of well-researched family skills training programs include Strengthening Families Program (SFP), Family Effectiveness Training (FET), Families and Schools Together (FAST), and Aggression Replacement Training (ART). FAST and ART are two structured programs that are in use in Colorado and are the primary subjects of this investigation due to their local relevance to the questions posed in this paper. FAST and ART are not only family skills training programs that can work to improve family functioning, but are also examples of programs that target increased family involvement and improved collaboration between home and school.

The Programs

Families and Schools Together

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a two-year, elementary or middle school level program that aims to build relationships between school, parent, community, and children.¹⁰ Additionally, the curriculum is structured to empower parents, enhance parent-child interaction,

and build support for parents through the support group design. Program goals are to enhance family functioning, prevent the child from experiencing school failure, prevent substance abuse by the child and family, and reduce the stress that parents and children experience from daily life situations.¹¹ Services offered by FAST include:

- An initial home visit to families identified by school personnel as good candidates for the program;
- Weekly 2 ½ hour sessions where families participate in structured activities such as parent to parent support, parent-child play, and group facilitation by professionals in mental health, social work, and substance abuse prevention
- Referrals to community agencies.

The weekly meetings begin with 8 structured sessions where families participate in a curriculum designed to improve family-child cohesion and communication, strengthen parent support, and empower parents. The curriculum is delivered almost entirely through activities and games, rather than lecture. The activities include eating a meal together, singing, creating a family flag, and other exercises that are intended to enhance communication and feelings identification. After the initial 8-week cycle, families are encouraged to continue to meet monthly for up to 2 years to maintain their support and bond.

The 8-week cycle serves 5-25 families at one time, and is facilitated by a trained team including school staff, substance abuse professionals, and mental health. Once families have “graduated,” parents can be invaluable as facilitators in future cycles with other families. The FAST program can be implemented in a variety of ways: universal, selective, or indicated. Some of the programs discussed below have used the universal, or school-wide approach, which others have implemented a selective focus, using screening criteria. An indicated approach would be

ideal with students and families that are currently manifesting signs of serious distress that also affect the student in school.

Aggression Replacement Training

Aggression Replacement Training (ART) is a key part of several successful programs targeting the aggression, social skills, and character development in at-risk youth. Also known as the Prepare Curriculum¹², and most recently, the Peace Curriculum¹³, ART comes from the work of Arnold Goldstein and Barry Glick¹⁴. The model originally targeted high-risk students, and provided direct instruction, role-play, and other activities to support the learning and application of anger control techniques, empathy, social skills, and character development. The program goals are to improve the behavior of students so that they can be successful in the school and community. After successful implementation of the model with a variety of youth, the authors then added Parent Empowerment Groups (PEG), which were based on the FAST model and its successes. With the addition of PEG, the ART model has proven to be even more effective in affecting the behavior and outcomes of targeted students, as well as for a longer period.

ART can be implemented in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings. School-wide approaches have been used, where the entire student body receives the curriculum once per week. From there, more targeted approaches are more commonly used in Colorado, where a specific classroom will receive ART training daily. In the programs examined in this project, groups of students that ran from 5-20 received ART for up to three hours per day, typically split between the morning and afternoon. Additionally, PEG was implemented to involve the parents of the same youth on a weekly basis with a meeting structured very much as FAST parent support group meetings. PEG sessions are scheduled to be 1 ½ hours in length, and typically adhere to a schedule similar to that of FAST:

- Group warm up
- ART mini lesson (15 minutes) involving parents
- Family game time—staff are present to assist if needed
- Student recognitions
- Family snack or meal time (students serve parents)
- Closing circle.

At this time, there are guidelines only for the minimum required sessions for parents and time for students. Like FAST, ART developers recommend a minimum of 8 weeks of instruction for students, and ideally 6-8 sessions of PEG.

Project Design

Questions

The request for this project specified key areas to be addressed within the scope of the research. These included:

- What approaches are commonly used in Colorado to target both improved family functioning and increased family collaboration?
- How many school districts are currently utilizing ART or FAST?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, and differences between ART and FAST, in relation to the feasibility of schools and districts implementing these approaches?
- What are the key outcomes shown through research and local implementation by both ART and FAST?
- What are key outcomes of other programs targeting family functioning and collaboration in Colorado?

Methods

Data Sources

The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative sources of data to answer the above questions. The key sources of quantitative data were preexisting records and evaluation reports for FAST and ART, both nationally, statewide, and at the local level in Colorado. A survey was also disseminated to all districts in Colorado querying programs in place targeting increased family collaboration/involvement and improved family functioning.

Qualitative data was provided through follow up interviews conducted with sampled survey participants, site visits to schools using FAST or ART, and interviews with school personnel that were currently or had in the past implemented FAST, ART, or other programs targeting increased family collaboration/involvement and improved family functioning.

Analysis Methods

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive techniques in SPSS. These included frequency counts, measures of central tendency, and proportional distribution of groups. Qualitative data from interviews and site visits were transcribed and reviewed for trends in responses, as well as coded for consistency in responses given.

Finally, observations by the researcher are also given, based on knowledge of the research and experience with programs targeting family functioning and collaboration. When such observations are made, they are specified as personal opinions.

Results

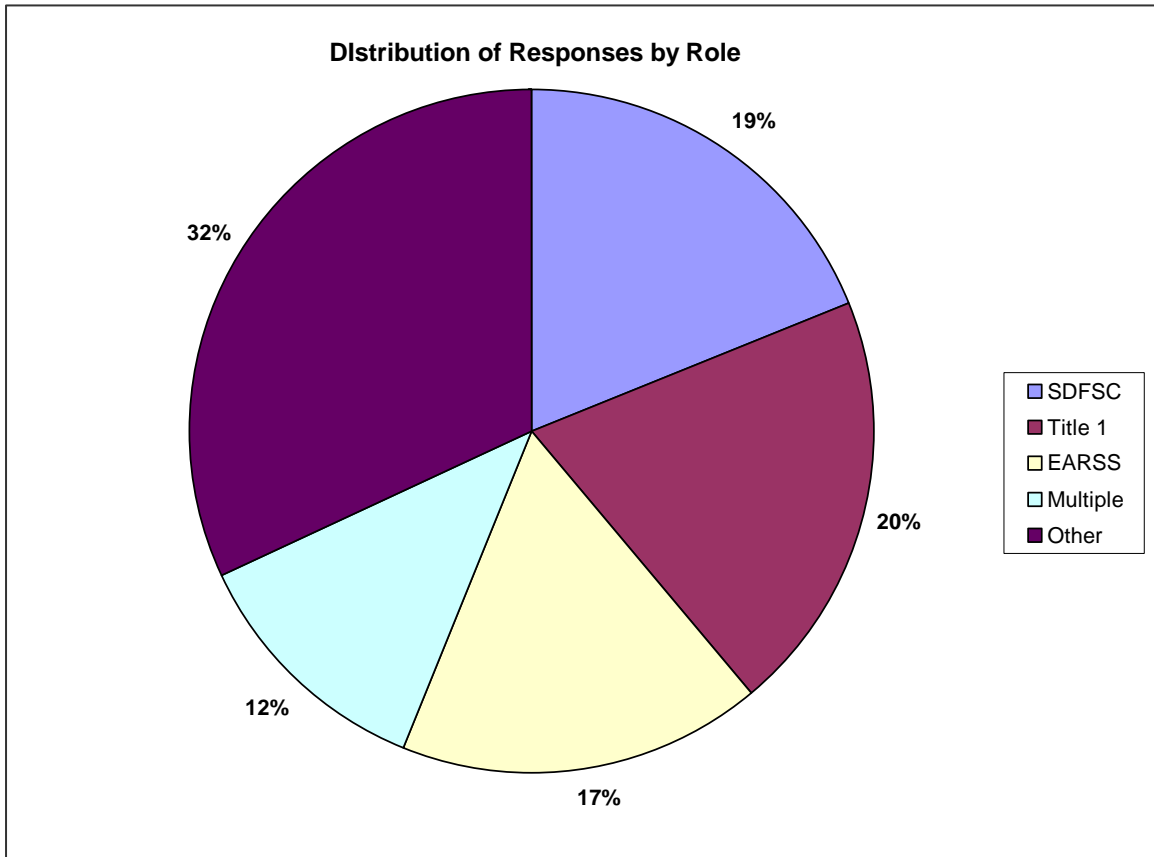
Statewide Survey

Demographics

Surveys were distributed by mail to all Title 1 Directors, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities coordinators, and Expelled and At-Risk Student Services Grant coordinators. These roles were duplicated by one person in several school districts. Consequently, the total number of surveys was somewhat less than the sum of these positions across the state. Three hundred twenty surveys were distributed in January and February of 2004. An email notice with another copy of the survey was distributed in February to encourage those that had not yet responded. A copy of the survey is included as Appendix A to this report.

Ninety-six surveys were returned for a 30% response rate, which is acceptable for survey research. Sixty-four school districts (36% of the total) were represented from across the state, including Front Range, Denver Metropolitan, suburban, and rural districts. The complete list of districts and numbers of surveys received from each is included as Appendix B to this report. The respondent roles targeted were fairly equally represented: 19% were Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities coordinators, 20% were Title 1 directors, 17% were Expelled and At-Risk Students Services Grant coordinators, 12% had multiple roles, and the remaining 32% had other roles. These included principals, superintendents, counselors, and social workers. The chart following illustrates the distribution of responses by the role of the respondent.

Figure 1.

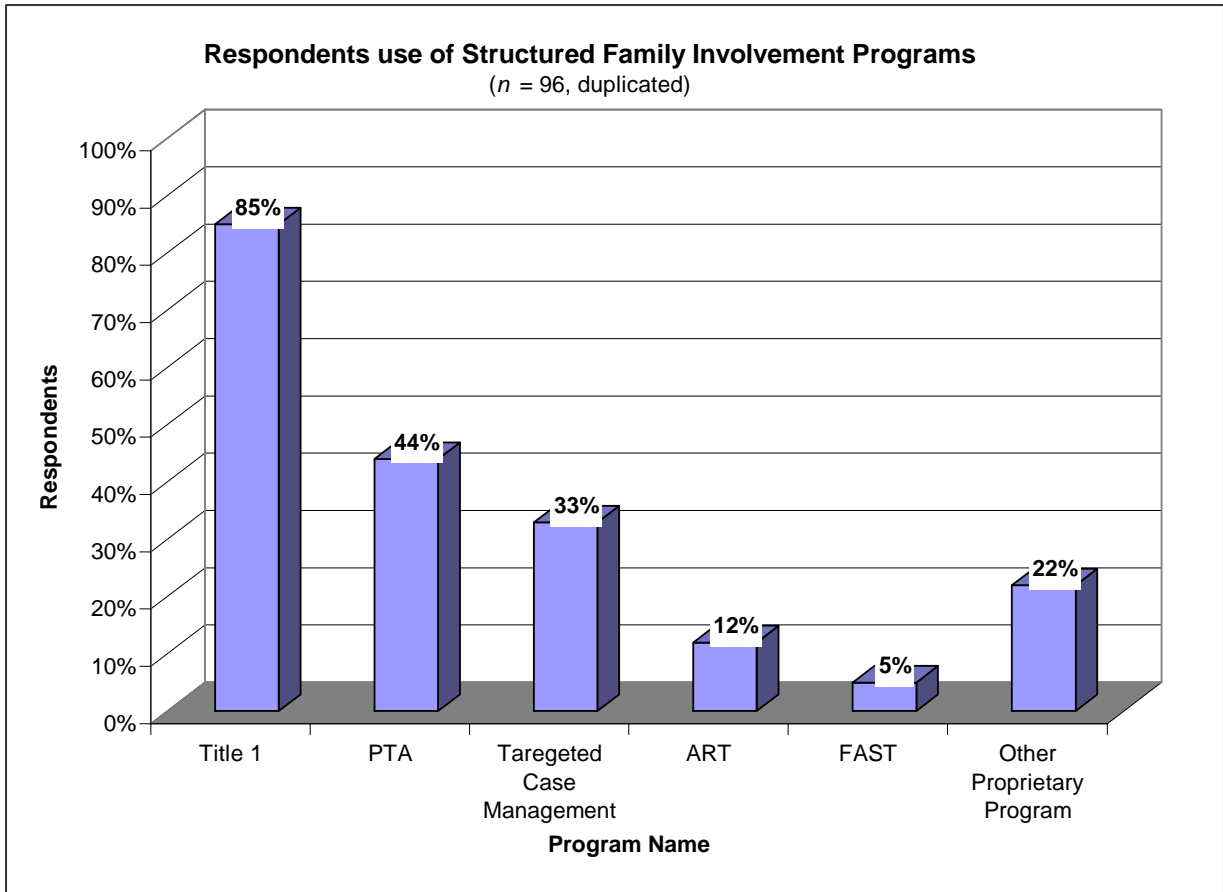


Results

Family Involvement Programs

Respondents provided information on structured programs and practices that were in place that targeted both family involvement as well as family functioning. In regards to programs targeting increased family involvement and collaboration, only 6% responded that they did not have a structured program or approach in place. The most common approaches cited were through Title 1 and the PTA/PTSO. The chart below illustrates the implemented programs and approaches.

Figure 2.

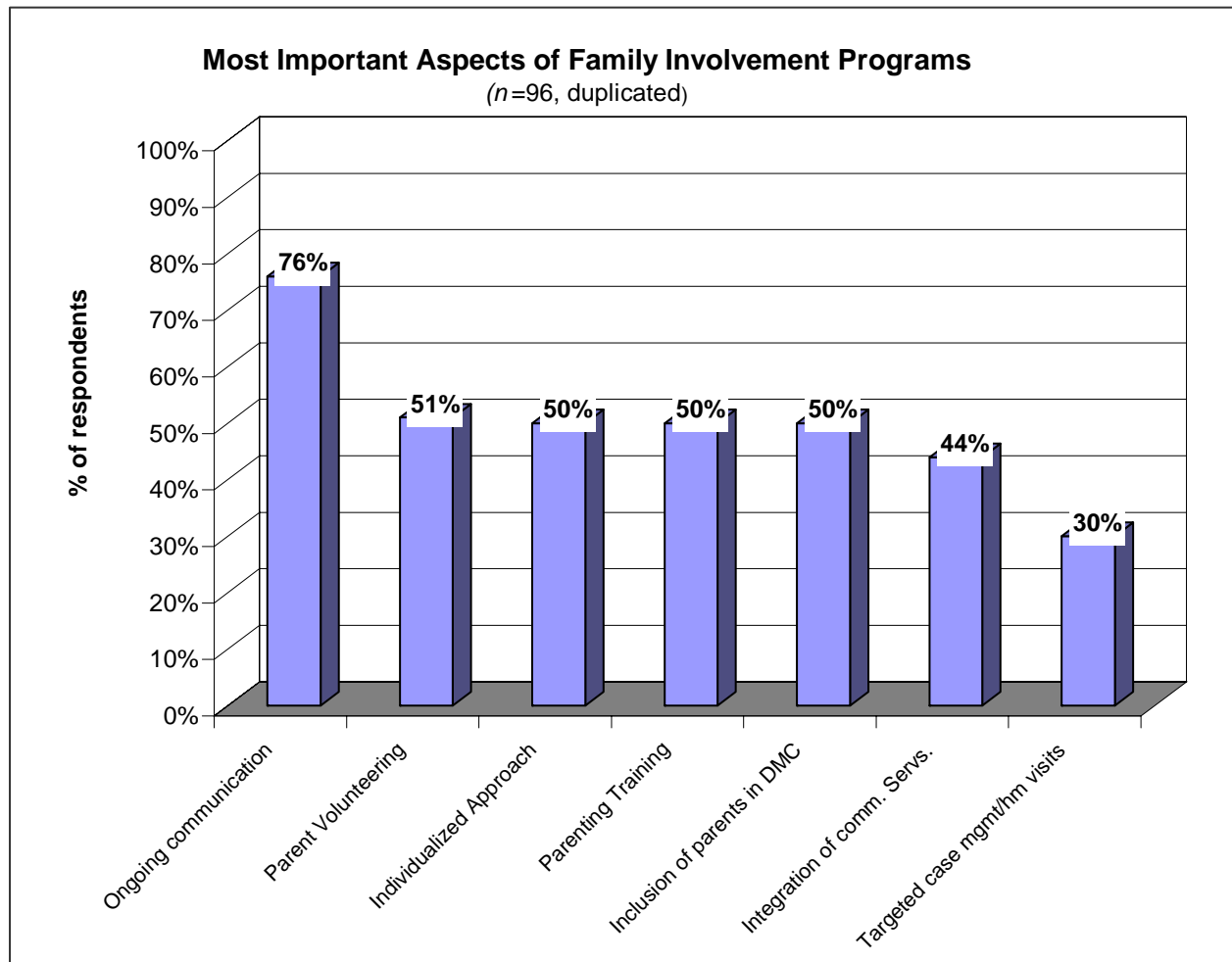


“Other” proprietary programs listed included the 21st Century grant program, accountability committees, Even Start, Lifeskills©, family literacy nights, The Incredible Years©, and a variety of other efforts targeting parents, such as Parent Partners, Parent Academy, Family Days, Family Night, Partners in Education, and Title V Parent Involvement. When asked the number of buildings in which each program was in place, the average number was 25 for PTA, 14 for Title 1, and between 1 to 6 for ART, FAST, or other proprietary programs. About half of the districts using ART indicated that the program was sanctioned or funded by the district. Targeted case management programs also reported district funding for 50% of the cases. FAST programs (5) were sanctioned by the district, but all were funded by

outside sources. Other proprietary programs varied in the level of support received from the district. Title 1 and PTA/PTSO were always district sanctioned, and had funding that comes from state, federal, and local sources.

Respondents were asked to identify the most important elements of structured programs targeting family involvement, using Epstein’s and the National PTSO models as templates for responses. Ongoing communication between school and home was identified as a key element by nearly 80% of the respondents. Targeted case management/home visits were identified by the fewest respondents as a key element. The chart below illustrates the responses to identification of key elements in these programs.

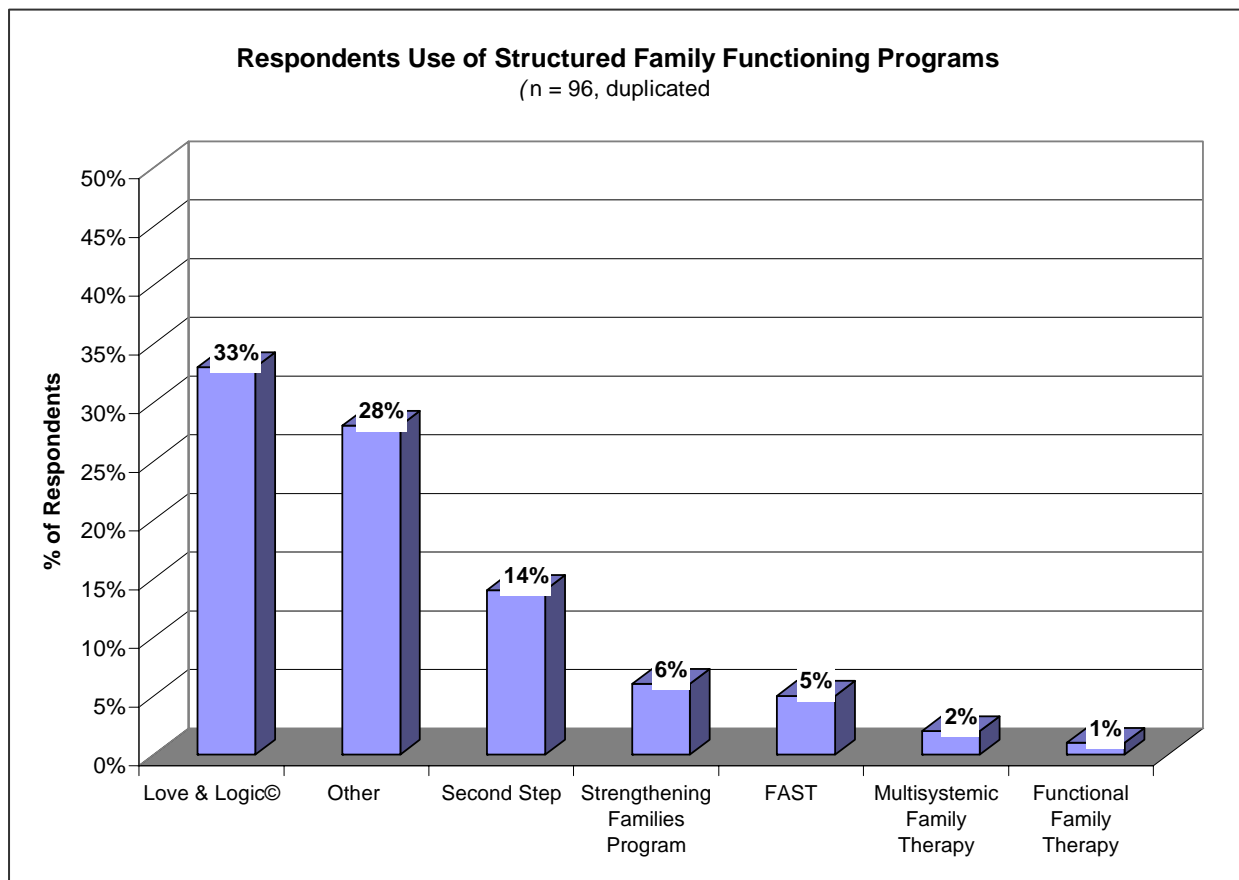
Figure 3.



Family Functioning Programs

Respondents provided information on structured programs and practices that were in place that targeted improving family functioning. Twenty percent responded that they did not have anything in place to address family functioning issues, but upon review of the “other” responses on this item, it appears that only about 40% have a truly structured approach that works systemically to affect family functioning. Many districts reported “other” approaches that addressed an aspect of family functioning such as literacy or Preparing for the Drug Free Years©, but these programs do not address the full range of functioning as defined in the survey. Love and Logic© was identified most frequently (33%), followed by Second Step© (14%). FAST was identified by three school districts in five program sites (5%). The chart below illustrates the implemented programs and approaches.

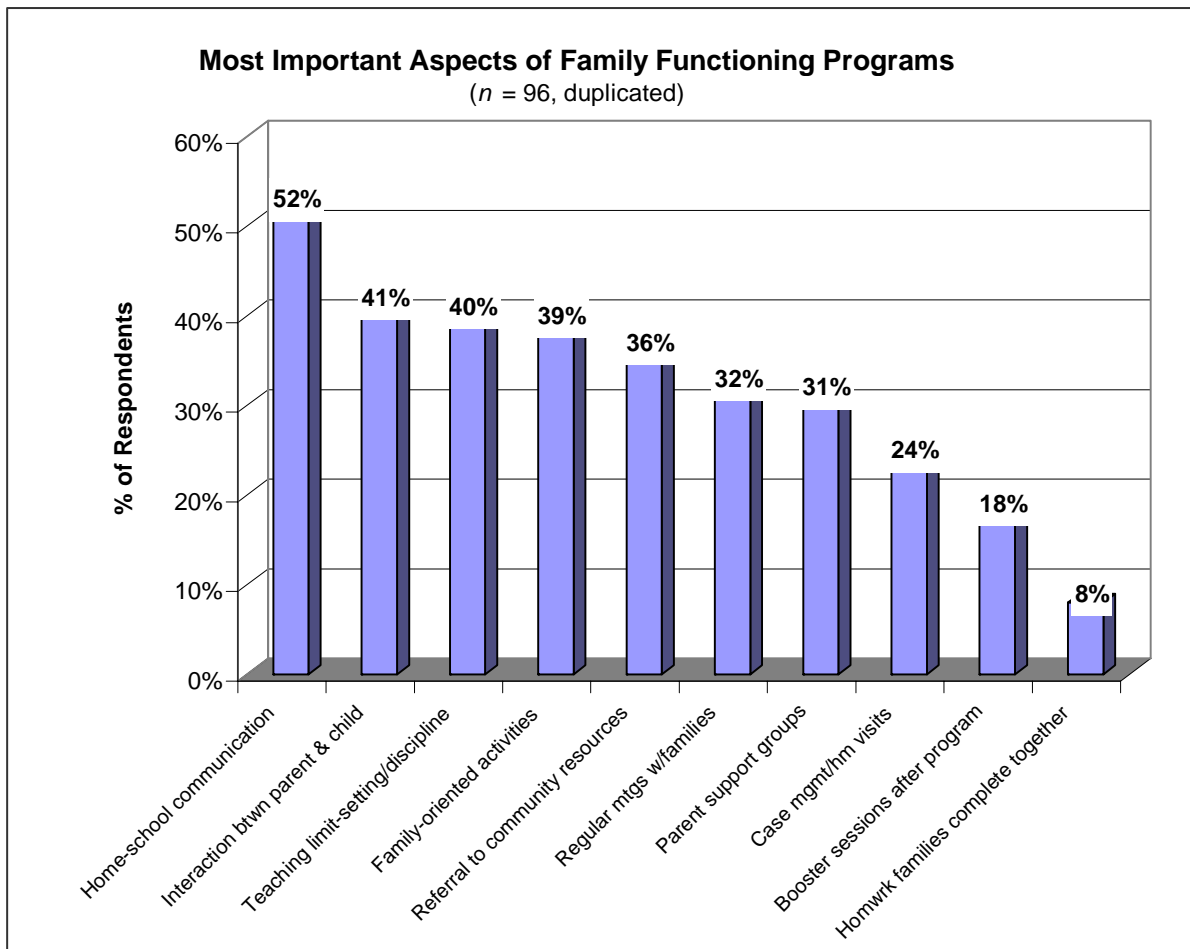
Figure 4.



When asked the number of buildings in which each program was in place, the average number was five for Love & Logic©, three for Second Step ©, and two for FAST. About half of the districts using Love & Logic© indicated that the program was sanctioned or funded by the district. Most of the other programs targeting family functioning were sanctioned by the district, but few were funded through district resources.

Respondents also were asked to identify the most important elements of structured programs targeting family functioning. The choices of elements provided came from the literature on family skills training programs as described above, as this approach is most widely used and most effective in impacting youth and families. The chart below illustrates the responses to identification of key elements in these programs.

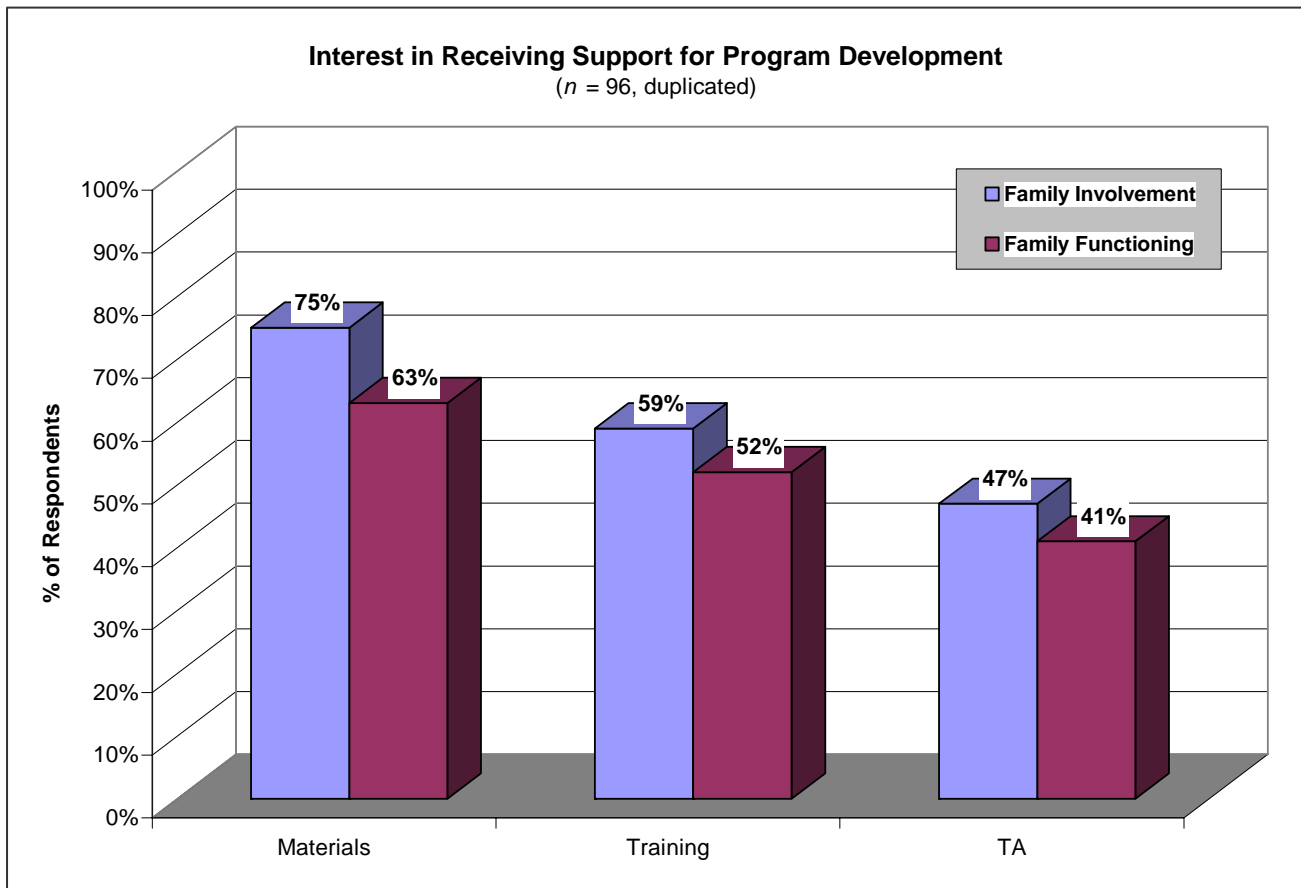
Figure 5.



The program elements identified as most critical to family functioning programs were increased home-school communication, increased parent-child interaction, and the teaching of limit setting and appropriate discipline techniques. Booster sessions for families after the program has been completed and “homework” that families work on together were not rated as critical by most respondents.

Finally, respondents were asked if they would like to receive assistance in enhancing or developing programs to increase family involvement or family functioning. The majority of respondents indicated their desire for materials regarding best practices. About half also indicated an interest in training and/or technical assistance in these areas. The chart below shows the percentage of respondents indicating interest in these areas.

Figure 6.



Colorado FAST and ART Site Interviews

Demographics

Data were collected from five FAST programs and eight ART program. The FAST programs included both an elementary and middle school program in the Boulder school district, two elementary school programs in Jefferson county schools, and one elementary program in the Mesa county school district in Grand Junction. ART programs included the Littleton, Denver, and Thompson school districts. Littleton has implemented ART at the middle and high school level over the past four years. Denver has several program sites utilizing ART that were interviewed for this project, including:

- a multi-site program at the elementary level for students identified as at-risk by counselors;
- a multi-site program targeting center-based classrooms for emotionally disturbed middle school students;
- a multi-site program targeting alternative to suspension classrooms at the middle and high school level; and
- A center-based “last chance” setting for high school and middle school students at imminent risk of expulsion from school.

Each site was contacted by telephone regarding the nature of the study, and a request was made to meet face-to-face to discuss the program, and its challenges, successes, costs, time, and training needs. All sites were interviewed face to face with the exception of the Grand Junction site.

Results

Time for Training and Start Up

FAST programs reported a far longer start-up period than did ART sites. This was primarily due to the strict requirements of the program for the development of a cross-agency group to deliver the program, as well as the training of the facilitators required. Training includes an initial two-day orientation at the FAST headquarter, three on-site visits, and an additional one-day training on debriefing and planning for the monthly follow-up program. The use of professional mental health staff is a requirement of FAST and can influence start up due to the additional time needed to identify and contract with these professionals. Time reported for initial planning, identification of interagency partners, and training for the Colorado sites interviewed ranged from 2 months up to 1 ½ years.

ART programs also require training for staff that will facilitate lessons and PEG. However, the basic training is two full days in length, and can be provided to anyone that will be working with students and their families—no special level of professional training or certification is required. Once the staff is hired, the training can commence and the program can begin. Materials are available through the ART training to provide support in the implementation of the other aspects of the program, such as daily point sheets, the level system, behavioral contracts, ongoing positive reinforcers, student recognitions, and the Presentation of Learning process.

Cost and Number of Students and Families Served

The FAST program keeps its program to a limited number of students and families served at one time, in order to foster strong parent relationships and allow the necessary time from the professionals involved to provide facilitation, referral to community resources, and support. No

more than 20-25 families can be part of any 8-week initial cycle of meetings. Over the course of a school year, there can be up to 4 cycles, or 100 families and their students, served. However, multiple groups (2-4) can be facilitated in different locations or at different times simultaneously, which significantly affects the program cost per family. The sites visited in Colorado had conducted the program in a “one cycle at a time” approach, which makes the number of students and families served over a school year very low, while the cost of the program appears very high. However, with an example budget provided by the FAST national center that consists of paying a full time coordinator, facilitators for the groups (mental health), training, evaluation, paid parent partners, substance abuse practitioners, child care costs, supplies and transportation costs for the groups, and the follow up for two years, costs to operate in 8 sites with two cycles per year serving a total of 160 families are less than \$1000.00 per family. However, if fewer families are served, the costs quickly escalate. The basic model implemented in one school only for a school year, and serving 30 families can be as much as \$10,000 per family if in-kind contributions of staff or materials are not available.¹⁵

Considering a similar model of implementation to FAST, where a group of students and their families are targeted for an intense 8-week program; ART combined with the Parent Empowerment Program (PEG) component can serve a similar number of students and families over 8 weeks. With multiple staff members trained, a PEG group can be larger than 15-20 families. If the group is large, PEG are sometimes split into smaller groups after the “mini ART lesson” to facilitate the forming of relationships and conversation between parents. Like the suggested model for FAST above, maximum cost-benefits are obtained if more than one group of students and families are being served at once. Initial training for ART/PEG facilitators ranges from \$400-\$600 per person. However, “booster” training sessions are also needed, as well as

site-based coordination, evaluation, childcare costs, transportation, and supplies for PEG. Costs for ART/PEG in the Colorado programs interviews ranged between \$1,000-\$3,000 per family. If these programs could be restructured to serve more than one group of families at once, the costs would be far less.

Evidence of Success

ART has demonstrated significant impact on students in Colorado schools in terms of improved social skills, behavior, reduced discipline referrals at school, increased attendance, and improved academic achievement^{16, 17}. These improvements have been relatively consistent across sites and populations in the state, and include elementary, middle, and high school aged students. Parents and teachers report an improvement in their student's social skills, empathy, and anger management.

FAST has been shown to be effective in affecting student grades, class behavior, and self-esteem, as well as decreasing externalizing behaviors. Additionally, FAST has shown a significant impact on family functioning through improvements in parenting skills and parent communication style, decreased social isolation, increased family cohesion, and decreased family stress. Families also demonstrated higher levels of involvement in their child's school an educational process when compared to the Epstein model.

The FAST program has a more rigorous base of research across geographic and demographic groups, and has empirical measures of change in parent involvement and family functioning and cohesion. More rigorous studies of the PEG component of ART are underway in Colorado, using methods and measures that are the same that FAST has employed. These results will be available in 2005 and should help to clarify the impact that ART can have on family functioning and parental involvement in schools.

Challenges in Program Implementation

Both ART and FAST interviewees discussed the challenges surrounding initial contact with families and maintaining family groups. The parents of identified students are often distrustful of the schools initial contact, and staff had to persevere to engage these families. Additionally, due to the demographics surrounding the at-risk youth served, mobility rates are often high, and students and families may move and drop out of the group before completing the program.

Sites interviewed that had implemented FAST in the past or were currently working to get a program up and running identified three additional key challenges to the program:

1. **Start up time:** As described above, the required inclusion of community partners, involvement of mental health and substance abuse professionals, training, and recruiting can take months or even years to complete. All FAST sites interview identified this as a challenge on some level.
2. **Cost:** The perception shared by the FAST sites interviewed is that the program is expensive. All were funded by grants outside of the school district. The estimated costs for a school offering two FAST cycles per year to serve 30 families can be as much as \$30,000.
3. **Data Collection:** Data collection is a required and expected component of the FAST program, and multiple surveys as well as an intake instrument are used to assess students and families pre and post program. The collection of the data after the initial 8-week session was described as very difficult by most of the interviewees.

Sites implementing ART with the PEG component identified only one challenge other than the family trust and mobility issue described above. Parent attendance for PEG can be a struggle for some schools and programs. PEG is not “required” from families in ART the way it is in FAST. Additionally, there are significant incentives budgeted in FAST that are believed to increase parent attendance (weekly lotteries for prizes, food, transportation, and childcare). PEGs

often may have less than 50% of families attending, and few families ever attend the recommended 8 weeks of sessions¹⁸. The impact of the PEG model cannot be significant if families do not attend to receive the benefits of the program.

The table following summarizes the feedback provided through the site interviews:

Table 1. Comparison of key considerations in implementation of ART and FAST

	Start Up Time	Training	Minimum Staff Qualifications	# Served in One Group	Cost per student	Biggest Challenges	Evidence of success: Students	Evidence of success: Families	Rigor of Research Completed
FAST	2 months-1 1/2 years	Four full days (2 at national center)	1 school professional, 1 mental health professional, 1 substance abuse professional	24	\$3000-\$10,000 per student/family.	Start up time, cost, data collection, retention of parents	Statistically significant improvement in academics, behavior, social skills	Statistically significant increase in parent involvement in school, improved family cohesion, reduced family conflict	High--control group studies, across demographic groups.
ART	1-3 months	Two days--can be on or off site	None specified--experience working with children as a teacher, psychologist, or social worker is typical	20-40	\$1000-\$3000 per student/family.	Retention of parents, parent attendance at PEG.	Statistically significant improvement in academics, attendance, behavior, and social skills.	Parent and student report improvement in parent-child communication and relationships.	Low to mid-level--the ART model has evolved significantly since last published research and PEG has not yet been thoroughly evaluated

Summary

A study of the practices and programs in place in Colorado that target parent involvement, and/or family functioning was conducted in spring of 2004. A brief review of the research on family involvement and family functioning was conducted to identify a model of key elements and common definitions for schools to reference as they work with families according to the requirements of the NCLB Act of 2001.

Title 1 Directors, Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Coordinators, and Expelled and At-Risk Students Services Grant Coordinators were surveyed regarding their use of such practices and implementation of programs. Additionally, the respondents were asked to identify what they believed were key elements for successful parent involvement programs and family functioning approaches.

Colorado sites that have implemented ART or FAST, two programs that address both of these issues, were interviewed regarding their experiences with the program implementation process, as well as their outcomes to date on students and families. These data were collected to answer four questions posed by the Colorado Department of Education, Prevention Initiatives: Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities:

- What approaches are commonly used in Colorado to target both improved family functioning and increased family collaboration?

Eighty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they used the Title 1 program to address family involvement. The PTA/PTSO and targeted case-management were also cited as common methods to increase family involvement. Ongoing communication, parent volunteering, parenting training, and an individualized approach were identified as key practices in effective parent involvement programs.

Love and Logic© was most frequently cited as an approach used to improve family functioning (33%), followed by *Second Step* (14%). The program elements identified as most critical to family functioning programs were increased home-school communication, increased parent-child interaction, and the teaching of limit setting and appropriate discipline techniques.

- How many school districts are currently utilizing ART or FAST?

Twelve school districts reported using ART, and three reported using FAST.

- What are the differences between ART and FAST, in relation to the feasibility of schools and districts implementing these approaches?

As the programs are typically used in Colorado, both FAST and ART have similar components in their approach to working with parents and increasing parent involvement and improving family functioning. Both serve approximately the same number of students and their families at a time, and both require a similar time commitment from families. However, the training, start up time, and cost of FAST can be significantly more than ART. There must be an interagency commitment to providing services and support to the families that will be served, and if such relationships do not currently exist, FAST may be much more time consuming and expensive. ART may be more quickly and easily implemented, as training is available locally and is provided throughout the year. ART also has more Colorado-based programs in existence that can provide support and mentorship to new sites.

- What are the key outcomes shown through research and local implementation by both ART and FAST?

FAST has far more evidence of successful impact on families and family functioning than does ART. A significant body of research has been gathered to show outcomes such as increased family cohesion, reduced parenting stress, increased child-parent communication, and increased family involvement in the child's school and education. ART has many anecdotal stories of success with families, but does not yet have the body of evidence found in the FAST research.

Both programs have documented success with impacting student behavior, academic performance, attendance, and social skills development, although different measures were used to demonstrate these outcomes. Both programs have described challenges with recruiting and retaining parents in their program due to high mobility rates. FAST program staff described the challenges in cost, start up time and data collection that were not mentioned by ART interviewees.

- What are key outcomes of other programs targeting family functioning and collaboration in Colorado?

Available evaluation data that is specific to family involvement and family functioning is sparse in other Colorado programs. Anecdotal report abounds at the positive responses that some programs or approaches have received. Positive responses appear to be clearly connected to a welcoming, nonjudgmental approach to families that makes them feel welcome, accepted, and empowered to improve their situation. Project Respect, in Pueblo 60, has empirical results documenting an increase in family involvement in schools such as volunteering, coaching, and participating in family activities with their children. Additionally, attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other school activities is at nearly 100% for participating families. Project Respect uses targeted case management as its primary service delivery model. They do not use specific curricula or activities, but respond to the assessed interests, strengths, and needs of each individual family and their child in the program.

Conclusion

Most school districts in Colorado (94%) assert they are actively addressing increasing parent involvement and collaboration, and the majority report using the Title I program as a vehicle for these efforts. Most respondents to the survey recognized the critical need for ongoing communication between school and home as a key element to

improving parental involvement in schools as well as positively influencing family functioning.

It is unclear how the efforts in Title 1, the PTA, or other commonly used approaches fit with best practices for parent involvement outlined in the literature by Joyce Epstein and adopted by the National PTSO. According to the literature reviewed, the six components of parent involvement efforts should be addressed simultaneously, and parents ideally empowered in all aspects of the model. However, research also suggests that the two aspects of parent involvement that have the strongest impact on students at school are *parenting practices* and *student learning/learning at home*. Within these two areas of focus, family functioning can likewise be impacted by improved discipline and limit setting, communication, family cohesion, and reduced parenting stress. Additionally, the reviewed research suggests that the best way for parents to get this information is through direct, experiential learning outside of school hours. *Family skills training* has been identified as the most impacting approach to improving family involvement and functioning as measured by student school-based outcomes. From the data collected as part of this inquiry, it is unclear if parenting practices and learning at home are directly addressed in the variety of Title 1 and PTSO programs reported, or if they are addressed through the recommended *family skills training* method.

In reference to FAST and ART in particular, which do employ *family skills training* and focus on *parenting practices* and *learning at home*, few districts are currently using either of these programs. At the time of this report, only 5 FAST sites in three districts were known to exist in Colorado. Only 13 sites reported using ART, and some of these were duplicated across districts. The data available on these programs

suggests that both are effective at influencing student outcomes, such as academics, attendance, and behavior. FAST has far more conclusive data than does ART regarding its success with positive impact on parent involvement, stress level, and family functioning.

Districts considering either of these two programs for improving parent involvement or family functioning should keep in mind cost, start up time, training, and numbers of families targeted. Both can be done for under \$1000 per student and family, but many families need to be served across several sites to achieve this lower cost. Additionally, although the research is promising for ART and its Parent Empowerment Groups, there is currently little beside anecdotal report to compare with the significant parent outcomes demonstrated by FAST.

Recommendations

For schools to meet the requirements and increasing focus on family involvement and family functioning and its impact on student learning, they must be aware of the “best practice” approaches for targeting these important aspects of student’s lives. Based on the information gathered over the past six months as part of this project, the following steps are recommended to the Colorado Department of Education, Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities.

1. Provide written materials to all school districts on the model for best practices for targeting parent involvement and collaboration (Epstein and/or National PTSO). These materials should ideally provide concrete resources, such as those available on the internet where schools can go to “assess” their current efforts and be provided with concrete steps to work on improving their efforts. Projectappleseed.org is an example of such a site. Local school districts that

have been successful in increasing their parent involvement and collaboration should also be used as resources to those working on enhancing their efforts.

2. Provide opportunities for districts to receive specific training in improving family involvement and family functioning, again tapping successful models in the state for mentoring, as well as effective, research based programs that may be state or nationally implemented.
3. Provide support for school districts in evaluating their efforts at increasing parent involvement or improving family functioning, through materials, training, and technical assistance.
4. Support school districts through ongoing technical assistance as they wrestle with compliance with the NCLB Act, as well as begin to focus on the specifics of parent involvement or family functioning on which they need to prioritize.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL SURVEY

MARCH 8, 2004

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE), Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities is conducting a study of existing practices in Colorado schools that target the increase of *family collaboration (or family involvement)* and improvement of *family functioning*. The results of this survey will be used to describe the “state of the state” in terms of work with families, and to drive technical assistance efforts to schools statewide. In addition to providing critical information for schools in Colorado about effective programs targeting these practices, this information is needed to address the requirements of No Child Left Behind, which requires that schools:

“Involve parents in efforts to...prevent the further involvement of children in delinquent activity.” (Title 1, Part F, Section 1606)

“Include meaningful and ongoing consultation with and input from parents in the development of the application and administration of the program or activity...Activities that involve families...Professional development and training for and involvement of...parents...Expanded and improved school-based mental health services related to illegal drug use and violence...Programs that respond to the needs of students who are faced with domestic violence or child abuse.” (Title 4, Part A, Section 4115)

Programs or practices targeting *family involvement* include those addressing 1) parenting practices, 2) communication between home and school, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home/help with homework, 5) decision-making (PTO, advocacy groups, and advisory councils), and 6) collaboration with the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Programs targeting *family functioning* aim to 1) strengthen the parent-child relationship, 2) empower parents to act as prevention agents for their children, 3) connect parents with needed services, such as counseling, 4) increase employment rates in families, 5) increase education level in families, 6) increase family involvement in community activities such as church or other groups.

Your responses to the few questions on the attached survey will greatly assist CDE in describing what is currently in place and working in Colorado schools. Your participation in the survey is voluntary. Although you are asked to identify the school district you serve, and your position, this is for the purposes of describing geographic diversity in responses. Please fill out the survey based on **your** role and experiences. No individual responses will be identified in the report provided to CDE, but rather will be combined based on professional role and geographic area of the district. **Please return this survey by March 25th by email to OutcomesInc@aol.com, regular mail to Outcomes, Inc. 8299 W. Virginia Ave. Lakewood, CO 80226, or fax to Family Collaboration Survey, CDE/SDFS 303-866-6785.** If you have questions about the study, please contact Myriam Baker, Ph.D. at Outcomes Inc., 303-519-0781 or OutcomesInc@aol.com or Cindy Wakefield at CDE, (303) 866-6750 or Wakefield_C@cde.state.co.us.

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL SURVEY

Please provide your responses in the shaded areas: click with your cursor on the boxes, and enter text by placing your cursor in the shaded areas and typing as usual.

My school district

My position/role in the district:

- Safe & Drug-Free Schools Coordinator
 Title 1 Director
 Expelled & At-Risk Students Grant Coordinator
 Other

1. We have the following *structured* programs or practices in place to improve family collaboration or involvement with the schools (as defined above). Please check all that apply.

PROGRAM	AT WHAT LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION? (Check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Aggression Replacement Training (ART)/PEACE Curriculum ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Families and Schools Together (FAST) ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> PTA/PTO	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Title 1	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Other proprietary program (name below)	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted case management/home visits	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Other efforts (describe briefly)	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded

We do not currently have a structured program or practice addressing family involvement

2. If you have a structured program or practice in place to address family involvement, what do you believe are the most important elements? Please check all that apply.

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individualized approach | <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Targeted case management/home visits | <input type="checkbox"/> increasing/enhancing parent volunteering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting training | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion of parents in school decision-making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integration of community services in schools to strengthen families | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe briefly) | |

3. We have the following *structured* programs in place to improve family functioning (as defined above). Please check all that apply.

PROGRAM	AT WHAT LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION? (Check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Families and Schools Together (FAST) ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Multisystemic Family Therapy (MST) ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Functional Family Therapy (FFT) ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Strengthening Families Program ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Structural Family Therapy ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Parents Anonymous ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Second Step ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Love and Logic ©	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Other proprietary program (Name)	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Other efforts (describe briefly)	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded
<input type="checkbox"/> Other efforts (describe briefly)	<input type="checkbox"/> in	buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> district sanctioned <input type="checkbox"/> district funded

We do not currently have a structured program or practice addressing family functioning.

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL SURVEY

4. If you have a structured program or practice in place to address family functioning, what do you believe are the most important elements?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family-oriented activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching limit setting and appropriate discipline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Targeted case management/home visits | <input type="checkbox"/> Support groups for parents and/or children in families |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homework for families to complete together | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular meetings with families |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Booster sessions for families after program completion | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased verbal interaction between parents and children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to community resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased school-home communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe briefly) | |

5. Are you interested in receiving support in your district to increase family involvement or improve family functioning, such as materials, training, or technical assistance provided by CDE? (check all that apply)

Increasing family involvement and collaboration

- Materials
- Training
- Technical Assistance

Improving family functioning

- Materials
- Training
- Technical Assistance

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL SURVEY

6. Is there anything else you think we should know about working with schools to increase family collaboration and improve family functioning?

Thank you for your time! ☺

Please return this survey

By email to

OutcomesInc@aol.com

By mail to:

Outcomes, Inc. 8299 W. Virginia Ave. Lakewood, CO 80226

FAX to

Family Involvement Survey, CDE/SDFS 303-866-6785

PLEASE RETURN BY MARCH 25TH 2004

WE WOULD LIKE TO FOLLOW UP THIS SURVEY WITH A BRIEF (15-20 MINUTES) TELEPHONE INTERVIEW IF YOU ARE WILLING. PLEASE INDICATE BELOW IF YOU ARE WILLING TO BE CALLED, AS WELL AS THE TELEPHONE NUMBER AND BEST TIME OF DAY FOR US TO CONTACT YOU.

YES I AM WILLING TO BE CALLED FOR A BRIEF, CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW

NAME

TELEPHONE NUMBER

BEST TIME TO CALL

APPENDIX B :DISTRICTS RESPONDING TO SURVEY

DISTRICT	<i>Frequency</i>
ACADEMY 20	1
ADAMS (did not specify)	3
ADAMS 50	1
ADAMS12	2
AGUILAR	1
ALAMOSA	2
ARCHULETA	1
ARRIBA/FLAGLER	1
AURORA	1
BOULDER	3
CAMPO	1
CENTENNIAL	1
CENTENNIAL BOCES	1
CENTER	2
CHERRY CREEK	2
CROWLEY	2
DELTA	1
DENVER	6
DOLORES	1
DOLORES RE2J	1
DPS	1
DURANGO	1
EAGLE	1
EAST OTERO	1
FOUNTAIN-FTCARSON,EL	1
FREMONT	2
GRANADA	1
HARRISON	2
HAYDEN	1
HUERFANO RE1	1
IGNACIO	1
LAKE	1
LAMAR RE 2	1
LITTLETON	1
MANCOS	1
MCCLANE,RE2	1
MOFFAT	2
MONTE VISTA	2
MONTEZUMA CORTEZ RE1	1
MONTROSE	1

APPENDIX B :DISTRICTS RESPONDING TO SURVEY

NE COLO BOCE	1
OURAY R2	1
PEUBLO,#70	1
PIKES PEAK BOCES	1
PRITCHETT	1
PUEBLO D60	1
RE1,VALLEY	1
RIO GRANDE C-8	1
ROCKY FORD	1
S. CONEJOS	3
SALIDA	1
SAN JUAN SILVERTON	1
SARGENT JR/SR HIGH	1
SOUTH ROUTT	1
SPRINGFIELD RE4	1
ST VRAIN	1
SWINK	1
TELLURIDE	2
THOMPSONR2J	2
VILAS RE 5	1
WALSH	2
WELD	1
WELD RE35	1
WIDEFIELD 3	1
WILEY	1
WINDSOR	1
WOODLAND PARK	1
WRAY RD2	1
YUMA	1

Footnotes

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