

LINKING ALLIES: SUCCESSFUL
SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
AN EVALUATION OF THE D.C. EVEREST SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER PROGRAM

by

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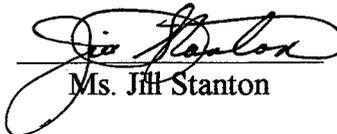


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ABSTRACT

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LINKING ALLIES: SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY
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The first purpose of this descriptive study is to examine, through a comprehensive literature review, national programs focused on improving parental participation and developing school-family-community partnerships and components of successful programs. The second purpose of this study is to assess the Family and Schools Together (FAST) program implemented in the D.C. Everest School District and compare the program evaluations of parents from the Southeast Asian (SEA) FAST program with those from the Caucasian FAST program.

At the time parent evaluations were completed, the FAST program for Southeast Asian families had been offered for two years at Weston Elementary School. At the same time, the Caucasian FAST Program was in its eighth year at four elementary schools in the D.C. Everest School District. Families were recruited to participate in the program if at least one elementary

age child was considered behind academically, socially, or behaviorally. During the final FAST session, participants were asked to complete a written evaluation of the program. An interpreter was provided for Southeast Asian parents. Because many of the Southeast Asian families did not provide a written response to the open-ended questions, additional information was collected from Southeast Asian FAST families through phone interviews. Information from the survey was collected to assess future directions for the program.

The review of the literature presents irrefutable evidence that developing school, family, and community partnerships results in beneficial outcomes by improving school programs and school climate, connecting families with others in the school and in the community, and helping teachers with their work. However, the literature indicates that the primary reason to create partnerships is to help youngsters succeed in school and later in life.

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted on the parent responses on the survey. Using this well-established process to find out whether Southeast Asian parents and Caucasian parents had different opinions about the FAST experience, the findings suggest that Southeast Asian parents were significantly more positive about the impact of the FAST program in all cases where there was a difference between the groups.

The information that is found in this study has limited application to other school districts. Since the target group for the evaluations was families that participated in the FAST program designed by Lynn McDonald, results are meant to be generalized only to other families who participate in the same program.

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My life changed direction when I entered the Educational Specialist Program in Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Initially, my goal was to simply earn the certification I needed for my position at that time. Much to my surprise, I ended up finding my “calling” as a school counselor. In addition to gaining a wealth of information and insight through my coursework at Stout, I was privileged and blessed to meet several remarkable people along the way who have enriched my life, especially my friend Deb.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leaderships, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create partnerships is to help youngsters succeed in school and later in life.

Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley stated at the ceremony commemorating the signing of Goals 2000, "Strong families make strong schools" (Families and Work Institute, 1994, p. 1). *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was signed into law on March 31, 1994. It encouraged broad-based community involvement in education. It also included a goal that urged parents and all family members to become more involved in children's education. According to a report by the Families and Work Institute (1994), research confirms what folk wisdom has been saying for a long time: families are integral to children's readiness for and success in school. Children who are most successful in school are those whose families care about their education and are involved in their learning.

In colonial times, parents were the educators of children, and despite the arrival of formal education, schools were seen as extensions of the home. Since teachers came from the community and knew children's parents personally, they reinforced parental and community values (Banks, 1989). By the mid-1800s, industrial and urban development contributed to separation between families and schools. Trying to unify diverse populations, the schools sought to maintain order by

required attendance, set curricula, and other means. According to Kagan and Lonow (1991) these bureaucratic rules further eroded the personal connections between families and schools.

In the nineteenth century, schools were located farther away from homes, and the relationship between parents and schools became more impersonal. The separation between schools and parents continued to increase at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Researchers' attention to schools, to families, and to communities has changed dramatically since 1950. Then, most studies of families, of schools, or of communities were conducted as if these were separate or competing contexts. In the late 1960s and 1970s, researchers argued about whether schools or families were more important. There was mutual agreement about the importance of families, disagreement about the effectiveness of schools, superficial attention to communities as a source of children's education, and little attention to whether or how these contexts worked together.

The topic of parent involvement gained prominence in the 1960s with the implementation of federal Head Start, Follow Through, and Title 1 programs in preschool and early elementary grades. In the 1970s, the effective schools movement captured the attention of educators and researchers interested in improving schools for traditionally underserved students. According to Epstein and Sanders (2000) the importance of improving schools for all children gained urgency in the mid-1980s, with the recognition of the need to maintain U.S. leadership and competitiveness in a global economy.

Parents are generally a child's first teachers. Unfortunately, as a child grows older, this role is often abandoned for a variety of reasons. If parents' energy, insight, and power are to be harnessed to the education of all students, new models of parent participation and involvement are necessary. Educators expect parents to participate in their children's schooling by communicating

with the schools and by helping the children at home. However, to actively participate in schools, parents must become informed about the school system and how it functions. According to Epstein and Conners (1994) teachers must guide parents in monitoring, assisting, and interacting with their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with class work or that contribute to success in school.

A study by Delgado-Gaitain (1991) indicated that parents of non-Caucasian students typically are less involved in their children's schooling than parents of Caucasian children. School activities that have been implemented to involve parents have usually ignored the needs of underrepresented groups who are unfamiliar with the school's expectations. The study also indicated that conventional school activities tend to delegate all the power to the institution and have usually ignored the needs of groups, particularly those with a different language who are unfamiliar with the school's expectations.

Today, researchers, educators, and parents cite the rich history of families and schools working together and call for more parent involvement in education. Rich and Sattes (as cited in Chavkin, 1993) found that parent involvement in education helped generate increased student attendance, decreased the dropout rate, positive parent-child communication, improvement of student attitudes and behaviors, and more parent-community support of the school.

A review of the literature suggests that many schools are finding that much can be done to help all families become partners in their children's education. However, to encourage family involvement, we must understand the needs of the family and support them. The more comprehensive and well planned the relationship between the family, the higher the student achievement. The best results in student achievement are achieved when families, schools, and community organizations work together.

This field study will explore components of successful school-family-community programs, including the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program. The study will also compare program evaluations from parents of the Southeast Asian (SEA) FAST program with those from the Caucasian FAST program.

Statement of the Problem

Most experts in the field of education recognize the vital role that families play in helping children succeed in school and the significance of having parents in school to show support and to communicate with the wider community. A review of the literature supports the benefits of creating school-family-community partnerships. According to Johnston (1994), simply leaving the door open to parental involvement isn't enough. The school must guide parents through the door. In doing so, the schools need to focus on providing meaningful roles for family involvement. These roles should include opportunities for families to assist in instructional roles at school, in volunteer roles at school, in program support roles, and as participants on decision-making teams.

At the time of this study, the D.C. Everest School District had provided FAST programs at four elementary schools for eight consecutive years. The participants included Caucasian families who were teacher-identified as having an elementary student at-risk academically, socially, or behaviorally. Also, for the second consecutive year, the school district provided a FAST program specifically for at-risk Southeast Asian students and their families.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) provided funding to the D.C. Everest School District to cover the majority of the cost of conducting the FAST programs. The funding from DPI was provided through grant dollars from the federal government. At the end of the grant period, D.C. Everest School District will need to fund FAST programs through the district budget if they want to continue the program. Since a formal evaluation of the FAST program has not

been conducted, this study is needed to provide the D.C. Everest School Board with information regarding the merits of the FAST program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive, qualitative study was two fold. First, a comprehensive literature review of nationally recognized programs focused on improving school-family-community partnerships was conducted. Second, the D.C. Everest School District's FAST programs were assessed to compare the program evaluations of parents from SEA FAST program with those from the Caucasian FAST program. This study was designed around five questions:

1. Has family communication changed in any way as a result of participation in the FAST program?
2. Has parental involvement with the school changed as a result of participation in the FAST program?
3. Has parental connection to other families or community resources changed as a result of participation in the FAST program?
4. Have there been improvements in the child's behavior and attitude towards school as a result of participation in the FAST program?
5. How do these changes compare and contrast for Southeast Asian and Caucasian program participants?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are supplied to assist the reader in better understanding this report:

Families and School Together- The FAST program is a recently developed program that addresses family-school-community interactions. Dr. Lynn McDonald, of Family Services of America, developed FAST in 1988 to serve teacher-identified, at-risk elementary school youth and their families. This national program is designed to build protective factors for children ranging in age from 4 to 12 years old and empower parents to be the primary prevention agents for their own children.

FAST Grant- The Wisconsin DPI provided seed money to develop a program for families of elementary age students, considered at-risk of failure. The program falls under the alcohol and drug prevention category. The funding is for a three year period, with 100% of the program expenses the first year, 80% of program expenses the second year, and 40% of program expenses the third year. Under DPI guidelines, a school district can develop its own program or adhere to the Family Services of America FAST program. The D.C. Everest school district chose to follow the Family Services of America FAST program.

Assumptions

At least two assumptions may be included in this study. Participants are assumed to be able to assess the level of change that occurred in their family as a result of their involvement with the FAST program. Also, participants are assumed to be able to assess specific strengths and weaknesses in the FAST program.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. Since the written evaluations were conducted immediately following the eighth FAST session, participants did not have time to reflect upon the questions. If the evaluation had been administered several weeks or more after the final session, the responses may have been different. In addition, follow-up phone calls were made to SEA

FAST participants to collect additional responses to the evaluations' open-ended questions. These individuals had additional time to reflect on their FAST experience. Finally, SEA FAST participants had the evaluation read to them through an interpreter. The interpreter also assisted in writing the responses. There is a possibility that the interpreters' written responses did not exactly convey the feelings of the participants.

Summary

Children who are most successful in school are those whose families care about their education and are involved in their learning. This study is an attempt to identify examples of successful school-family-community partnerships and compare how Caucasian and Southeast Asian parents assess the FAST program.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will cover a review of the literature in relation to the role of school-parent-community partnerships in students' success. It includes information regarding changes in the structure of American families, the traditional role of parent participation in schools, Southeast Asian parent participation in their children's education, research in the area of family-school-community partnerships, and an overview of several nationally recognized family-school-community programs.

Changes in the Structure of American Families

The past three decades have seen a significant change in the structure of American families. One in four children lives in a single-parent home, most of which are headed by women. The Center for the Study of Social Policy (1993) reports, "The increase in single-parent households is a result of both a rise in divorce rates and an increase in out-of-wedlock births" (p. 32).

In a time of changing demographics and community needs, poverty is on the increase and more children are at risk than any other group. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (2002) reported, "The poverty rate for the population age 18 to 64 rose from 9.6 percent in 2000 to 10.1 percent in 2001. Children under 18 continue to have a higher poverty rate (16.3 percent) than people 18 to 64 or 65 and over; it was unchanged from 2000. (p. 2)

The National Policy Institute (as cited in Liantos, 1992) affirms the link between poverty and school failure, saying that socioeconomic level has a greater bearing on dropout rates than race. For each year that a child lives in poverty, the likelihood that he or she will perform below grade

level increases by 2%. Thus a child whose family has lived in poverty for ten years is 20% more likely than a child in a middle-income family to be unsuccessful in school.

In a study of family involvement in student achievement, Johnston (1994) found that:

1. More children are being born into poor families than into wealthy ones, and more parents were themselves unsuccessful in school and lack the skills necessary to assist their own children in schools.
2. Parents are likely to raise their children far from extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles.
3. Parents don't know their neighbors or children's classmates.
4. Immigration from non-European countries has altered the language, customs, affiliation groups, and child-rearing practices in many communities.
5. Fewer households have children in school. Thus, fewer families feel they have an investment in the school and its students. (p. 6)

The educational needs of children cannot be separated from their social needs. Both urban and rural families are often faced with multiple problems: lack of time, energy and money; inadequate housing and schools; lack of community support; difficult family relations; innumerable social problems; and barriers related to race, class, culture, and language.

Involving parents in the school process empowers parents and appears to promote children's success in school (Delgado-Gaitain, 1991). Research has demonstrated that all children benefit from family involvement in education, but minority children and children from low-income homes have the most to gain (Henderson, 1987).

The Traditional Role of Parents in Schools

According to Jackson and Cooper (1989) the traditional hierarchical structure for organizing parents and involving them has not worked in many schools because they are too hierarchical, too critical, and too ineffective. Parents, particularly low-income, non-English speaking families, find little or no benefit from the usual parent-teachers' association, those structured institutions that require membership, occasional meetings, candy sales, and close identification with the management of the school. Additionally, parents may feel that the traditional parents' association is nothing more than an appendage of the principal, which cuts off parent dissent or criticism. Unless families are empowered and involved beyond joining the parent association, many parents find these structured, organized groups too formal, too distant, and inadequate in meeting their needs. Many families find it difficult and uncomfortable to join an organization that is dominated by middle class norms.

According to Chavkin (1993) the infrequency of minority parent involvement is not clear, but it may be the result of a stereotypical view of minority parents held by school staff and the assumption that they don't care about their children's education. Comer and Haynes (1992) state that minority parents' lack of participation in traditional parent-school activities should not be misinterpreted as a lack of interest in their children's education.

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (Harris & Associates, 1993) found that inner-city parents' desire to communicate with their children's teachers was even greater than that of wealthier suburban parents. The consistently strong interest among disadvantaged parents in being involved with their children's education and schools suggests examining other factors that may explain their lower rates of contact and collaboration. Moles (1993) cites three factors that might account for this. These include limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators

on which to build collaboration, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools.

Southeast Asian Parental Involvement in Schools

A lower level of parental involvement is also common among Asian-Americans (Ritter, Mint-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993). Since the fall of Saigon in April 1975, over 800,000 Southeast Asian refugees have settled in this country. This high incidence of immigration, added to their above-average birthrate, has increased their number to over a million (Liontos, 1992). Several demographic and social factors influence the level and quality of Southeast Asian parent involvement.

In contrast to mainstream Americans' emphasis on egocentric, independent behavior, Southeast Asian children are taught to think of family first and suppress personal desires and concerns (Liontos, 1992). Each child develops a sense of moral obligation and primary loyalty to the family, which includes unquestionable loyalty and obedience to parents, and, by extension, to all authority figures, including principals, teachers, and other school personnel.

In the United States, we expect that parents will be involved in school functions and work with their children. According to Liontos (1992), the idea of parents being involved in schools is completely counter to Southeast Asians' beliefs. Southeast Asians tend to believe that professional educators have the expertise and right to make all the decisions and know what to do with their children, without parental assistance.

Another reason Asians and other immigrant parents may be less involved in their children's education is that they may feel intimidated by their children who adapt more quickly to new ways, especially if the parents are newcomers and less affluent. Because Southern Asian and other immigrants often come from poorer countries with limited educational resources, they fail to

see that American schools do not have equal resources and that children of different backgrounds are not treated equally (Moles, 1993). Thus the immigrant parents' limited experience, cultural patterns of respect, and language difficulties combine with insensitivity and discrimination among educators to create additional obstacles to participation for many disadvantaged parents.

According to Morrow (as cited in Liontos, 1992), if schools want to involve Southeast Asian parents in their schools, it is essential to:

- (a) offer inservice training for teachers, counselors, and support personnel to raise their awareness of cultural differences;
- (b) provide resources for school personnel to help them understand cultural differences;
- (c) develop and maintain a sense of trust;
- (d) consider hiring native-speaking community and classroom aides; and
- (e) find out how Southeast Asians feel about American schools. (p. 117)

Research of Family-School-Community Partnerships

According to Henderson and Berla (1994) an essential element in a students' school achievement is the involvement of the family and community in his or her education. Their collection of research about the effects of family and community on student achievement found several recurring themes. These themes include: efforts to improve educational outcomes are more effective if they include families; when parents are involved at school, students do better in school and stay in school longer; students do best when their parents play the roles of teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers; the more comprehensive and well planned the relationship between family and school, the higher the student achievement; and the best results come when families, schools, and community organizations work together.

According to Epstein and Sanders (2000), the simultaneous influence on children of schools, of families, and of communities is undeniable, but too often the connection across

contexts is ignored in theory, in research, in policy, and in practice. Traditionally, the concept of parents' involvement focused mainly on parents' roles and responsibilities, not on the work that schools needed to do to organize programs to involve all families and engage communities in children's education. In the 1980s, studies began to redefine the emphasis from parents' involvement to school and family partnerships. It is now generally agreed that school, family, and community partnerships are needed in order to improve the children's chance for success in school.

This change in philosophy was a result of a social organizational perspective that suggested that, in education, the most effective families, schools, and communities had shared goals and a common mission concerning children's development and learning. Epstein and Sanders (2000) recognized that the three contexts of home, school, and community act as overlapping spheres of influence on children and on conditions and relationships in the three contexts.

Research conducted in the United States and other nations confirms the usefulness of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). These studies confirm four general findings that provide a base on which to build new studies. The findings were:

1. Teachers, parents, and students have little understanding of each other's interests in children and in school. Neither parents nor teachers fully understand what students think about family-school partnerships, about their schoolwork, or future plans.
2. School and classroom practices influence family involvement. On the average, families with more formal education and higher incomes are more likely to be partners with their children's school. Similarly, families with less formal education and lower incomes become involved if schools can successfully implement programs of partnership.

3. Teachers who involve parents in their children's education relate to parents more positively and stereotype families less than do other teachers. Parents and principals also give higher rating to teachers who communicate frequently with families.

4. Outcomes are linked to different types of involvement. (pp. 288-289)

According to Epstein (1992), there are six major types of involvement that fall within the overlapping spheres of influence model. They include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Families and Schools Together (FAST) Program

FAST is a collaborative parent-professional partnership. It uses a multi-family group process to reduce the risk for alcohol and other drug abuse, school failure, and juvenile delinquency in elementary youth. In 1988, while at Family Service of Madison, Wisconsin, Dr. Lynn McDonald developed the FAST program. It was developed to address many of the problems faced by elementary schools with significant numbers of students with low achievement. The program was designed around emerging research indicating that partnerships between schools, communities and parents could prevent school related performance and behavioral problems of poor children.

The FAST program draws on research from a number of behavior science disciplines including social work, family therapy, child psychiatry, and child and family psychology (Tools for Schools, 1998). The program also draws from knowledge emerging from research in other fields, including delinquency and substance abuse prevention, domestic and violence prevention, parent involvement in education and support.

Using standardized mental health instruments, site evaluation reports have shown significant improvements in classroom behaviors and at home behaviors (specifically conduct

disorder, anxiety, and attention span), and increases in family closeness and communication, as well as reduced family conflict. After six months, these gains have been maintained and there was increased parent involvement in school, increased parent self-sufficiency, and decreased social isolation (Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

FAST has been recognized as an effective model by the White House Conference on School Safety (October 15, 1988), Office of National Drug Control Policy, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Harvard University and Ford Foundation Innovation in State Government, Kraft Food Corporation, DeWitt Wallace Readers Digest Foundation, United Way of America, Family Resource Coalition, and the Harvard School of Public Health (Davenport, 2002).

Hmong FAST

In 1992, the first FAST program for Hmong families occurred in Oshkosh, Wisconsin (Thao, 2002). During the next eight years, FAST was implemented with numerous Hmong families around the United States. However, it wasn't until December 2000 that specific research was done to examine the impact of FAST on the Hmong families.

The SEA Project was a collaborative effort with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, United Refugee Services of Wisconsin, Madison Metropolitan School District, and FAST National Training Project. A team was organized with representatives from the University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin DPI, the United Refugees Services of Wisconsin and Dr. Seree Waraha. To help prepare the Hmong FAST team for the multi-family sessions, training was conducted for two days with the founder of FAST, Dr. Lynn McDonald.

After the completion of the eight-week session, information was collected from the participants through informal conversation and discussions with the Hmong FAST participants. Many indicated that they really liked and enjoyed the program. Several parents wondered if FAST could last longer than eight weeks or if they could return for a second time if they had another child that qualified. Most of the parents indicated that they enjoyed playing, being, and having fun with their children. Furthermore, they also indicated that if they had the opportunity, they would volunteer to help the FAST team conducted programs for other Hmong families. Many of the parents indicated that they would recommend the FAST program to other Hmong families because they thought that the program would be very beneficial for the Hmong community, especially with the younger Hmong generation in our society (Thao, 2002).

Family-School Programs

The FAST program is one of many nationally recognized school-family-community programs occurring throughout the United States. Several other programs are highlighted in this section to provide a sampling of the assortment of programs that have been developed around the country.

Dr. Joyce Epstein has developed a family-school model that identifies six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. According to Epstein, if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more likely to do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, learn other skills and talents, and remain in school (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

Epstein recommends that in the family-school partnership, teachers and administrators create more family-like schools, which recognize each child's individuality and makes each child

feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. Likewise, in a partnership, parents create more school-like families by recognizing that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success.

The framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools (Epstein, 1995). Each type of involvement includes many different practices of partnerships. Each type presents participant challenges that must be met in order to involve all families and needed redefinitions of some basic principles of involvement. Lastly, each type is likely to lead to different results for students, for parent, for teaching practice, and for school climate. Ultimately, schools have choices about which practices will help achieve important goals.

Epstein's framework of parental involvement was a key component of a school-family-community partnership in Baltimore, Maryland. The Baltimore schools were part of the *National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools* in which elementary, middle, and high schools, school districts, and state departments of education worked with John Hopkins University's Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships to plan, implement, and evaluate comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships.

In Baltimore, one of the first steps to implementing Epstein's framework of involvement was for each school to create an Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships. The team consisted of teachers, parents, administrators, and others needed to serve as the nucleus for planning, implementation, and evaluation. The first task for each action team was to identify the school's present strengths and weaknesses in each of the six involvement areas. Then, decisions were made about which practices to keep, which to change, and which to add to create

a balanced program of partnership and to achieve the desired goals. The action team created a three-year outline and a one-year action plan. Each year, the three-year outline was revised and a new one-year plan designed to continually increase the number of families involved and improve the quality of activities for family and community participation.

A follow-up study looked at the effects of Epstein's six types of involvement on student attendance and achievement in Baltimore schools. It found that the quality of the schools' program of school, family and community partnerships (based on an end-of-the year rating by the facilitators who assist the schools) significantly boosted attendance. Schools with stronger programs of partnerships had better student attendance regardless of the area of the city or years in the program. The study also found that the quality of the school, family, and community partnership program contributed a small but significant improvement in the percent of third graders who attained satisfactory or better scores on the Maryland State Performance Assessment (Epstein, Clark, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

Another well-known example of family-school-community partnerships was The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), enacted in 1990. KERA was the result of a comprehensive deliberation by state government on the education and welfare of its citizens. It was grounded on three fundamental precepts: all children must begin school ready to learn; parental and family involvement is critical if children are to achieve education success; and the community should form a partnership with the schools to increase the educative capacities of families and schools (Lindle & Russo, 1995).

As part of this far-reaching legislation, Kentucky developed an innovative method to address the challenge of educating students who were potentially at risk. Kentucky's Family Resource/Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs) were developed as the primary means for helping

every student come to school ready to learn. The law mandated the creation of FRYSCs on or near eligible schools to coordinate social services delivery for the families of students from preschool through high school. The hope was that these FRYSCs would empower families and communities to address the educational and other needs of all students. Specifically, the legislation called for the FRYSCs to connect families with the services necessary to meet basic needs, including: full time child care for two and three year olds, after school child care for children ages 4-12, health and education services for new and expectant parent, education to enhance parenting skills, support and training for child day-care providers, and health services or referrals (Smrekar, 1994).

Unlike other state initiatives designed to promote interagency collaboration and coordination that targets a specific locality or district, the Kentucky plan called for statewide involvement through the public school system. The FRYSCs were located in or near schools with at least 20% of the student populations eligible for free school meals. The size of an FRYSC grant was equal to the total number of students eligible for free lunch, multiplied by \$200, up to a maximum grant award of \$90,000.

The Kentucky school-linked social services program involved a decisive role for teachers in identifying students and families in need and in making an appropriate referral to the school based FRYSC coordinators. The program was designed so that once a teacher refers a child or parent to the FRYSC in a particular school, a home visit by the FRYSC coordinator (and perhaps the teacher) typically follows. This meeting is intended to build rapport with the adults in the home regardless of whether they are in fact married or related, such as in the case of grandparents, and is designed to assist them in forming a network with other parents and adults who are reaching out from their association with the FRYSC.

The FRYSC coordinators and their advisory councils provided the mandated services but often went beyond the state models. For example, the program even provided the opportunity for parents to begin working on their GED. FRYSC personnel would find toddlers and infants a nearby day-care center to allow adults to complete the GED.

The net result of all this activity located in or near the school was that the increased parental visibility in the schools had a positive impact on academic success (Lindle & Russo, 1995). Kentucky's efforts to center social and community life in schools through FRYSCs have been hailed nationally as unique in the state's efforts to empower families and communities.

Summary

There are a number of nationally recognized family-school-community programs designed to increase student success. Three of these programs have been described in this section. In addition to the FAST program, Dr. Epstein's framework of parental involvement and Kentucky's school-linked social services program have demonstrated an increase in family participation and student achievement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a description of how this study was conducted. It includes information about the research design, participants, survey instruments, data analysis and limitations. A detailed overview of the FAST program is also provided in this chapter.

Research Design

The purpose of this descriptive study was two-fold. First, a comprehensive literature review of nationally recognized programs focused on improving school-family-community partnerships was conducted. Next, the D.C. Everest School District's Families and Schools Together (FAST) program was assessed to compare the program evaluations of parents from the Southeast Asian (SEA) FAST program with those from the Caucasian FAST program.

In this study, participants were divided by ethnicity into two groups: Caucasian and Southeast Asian. All participants completed an evaluation survey regarding their involvement with the FAST program. A follow-up phone survey was conducted with Southeast Asian parents to obtain additional information. This study includes both a quantitative analysis of the survey data and a qualitative examination of open-ended questions.

Participants

Participants in this study included parents who had completed the FAST program at the elementary school that their child attended in the D.C. Everest School District in the spring of 2001. Additional information was obtained from Southeast Asian families that completed the FAST program in the spring of 2003. The D.C. Everest School District is located in north central

Wisconsin. At the time of the survey, the district had an enrollment of approximately 4,900 students in seven elementary schools, one junior high and one high school.

Instrument

The evaluation tool used in this study (Appendix A) was a modified version of the survey used by Fortier (1999) in her field study paper, entitled *Building Bridges: Developing Effective School-Family-Community Partnerships. An Evaluation of the School District of Phillips Families and Schools Together Program*. The survey consisted of eight questions divided on two pages. The first three questions relate to the goals of the FAST program. These questions asked participants to assess three different areas of change in their family on a Likert-type scale of one (none) to five (very much) and provided space to describe the change. The fourth question asked participants to rank the D.C. Everest FAST program on a scale of one (poor) to five (very good) and provided space to write additional comments. Question five listed thirteen areas of change and asked participants to rank each one on a scale of one (no improvement) to five (much improvement). Questions six and seven were open-ended questions regarding other benefits and drawbacks the family received from the FAST program. The last question asked participants to provide other comments and suggestions regarding the FAST program.

A second evaluation tool (Appendix B) was used to conduct phone interviews with Southeast Asian FAST participants. This tool included questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 from the original survey tool. These questions were assessed and addressed in a separate section of Chapter Four.

Procedures

Participants in this study included Caucasian and Southeast Asian parents who completed the FAST program at the elementary school that their child attended in the D.C. Everest School District.

FAST program overview. FAST is a collaborative parent-professional partnership that uses a multi-family group process to reduce the risk for alcohol and other drug abuse, school failure, and juvenile delinquency in elementary youth. In 1988, while at Family Service of Madison, Wisconsin, Dr. Lynn McDonald developed the FAST program. It was developed to address many of the problems faced by elementary schools with significant numbers of students showing low achievement. The five main objectives of the FAST program are: (a) strengthen the family and school relationship; (b) link families to the appropriate community agencies; (c) provide knowledge regarding ATOD (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug) abuse and its impact upon child development; (d) enhance family functioning by strengthening the parent-child relationship and reducing family stress; and, (e) improve school performance and reduce behavioral problems in school, home, and the community (McDonald, Bradfish, Billingham, Dibble, & Rice, 1991).

FAST replication, training, and quality assurance structures are now coordinated through the FAST National Training and Evaluation Center in Wisconsin. According to the Center, FAST is currently being implemented in over 600 schools in 40 states and five countries (Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). To initiate a FAST program, a school must identify and partner with community-based agencies, such as a mental health agency and a substance abuse agency, which agree to work with the school over a two to three year period. Each group must identify specific individuals to participate in a FAST training program. The cost for the initial

training for the school and its FAST team is \$3,900. In Wisconsin, schools have generally funded this program through grants from the Department of Public Instruction.

A collaborative team of parents, trained professionals and school personnel recruit and then deliver FAST program components to 5-15 families at a time. Eight scheduled meetings follow a structured, uniform agenda. The activities at each session are lively and fun and build a sense of family unity. They include eating a meal together, creating a family flag, singing, and lively exercises in communication and feeling identification. The parent-child play therapy, called "special play," is at the core of the FAST program. In 15 minutes of uninterrupted quality time, parents play one-on-one with the child in ways that build the child's self-esteem and enhance family communication. The parents are instructed to focus on child-initiated play without directing or criticizing. The meetings are led by a trained team that includes the school professional, usually a school social worker or counselor, a mental health agency representative, and the substance abuse agency representative. Often these representatives are from health care facilities that serve individuals with substance abuse issues (McDonald, 2002).

FAST programs at D.C. Everest. A team of school representatives, including the building principal, guidance counselor and classroom teachers recommended families for the FAST programs. The families were recommended because they had a child who was considered to be at least one year behind academically, socially, or behaviorally. The FAST building coordinator contacted the families by phone to share a brief overview of the FAST program and requested a home visit to provide additional information about the program. The FAST building coordinator and, occasionally, a parent who had previously completed the FAST program conducted the home visit. Families were asked to make a commitment to attend the eight-session program. When needed, an interpreter was utilized to translate information to the Southeast Asian program

participants. Two to three days prior to the initial session, the FAST program coordinator delivered a gift basket to the families, which served as a reminder of their commitment.

The program was held once a week, for eight weeks. The last session of the FAST program included a graduation ceremony. Families that attended at least six of the eight sessions were allowed to participate in the ceremony.

Data Collection

After the graduation ceremony, families were invited to complete the survey. The researcher provided an explanation of the survey and indicated that completion of the survey was voluntary. For the Southeast Asian FAST program, an interpreter was utilized to explain the purpose of the survey. Since most participants didn't read English, the survey was read to the families and assistance was provided for writing responses to the questions. Eleven Caucasian families and fourteen Southeast Asian families completed the survey. Upon later review of the surveys, the researcher decided to solicit additional information to the open-ended questions from the Southeast Asian families. To obtain the supplementary information from Southeast Asian FAST participants, the researcher recruited the assistance of a Southeast Asian guidance counselor to conduct phone interviews. Nine families participated in the phone interview.

Data Analysis

The information that the Caucasian and Southeast Asian FAST participants provided was examined to compare the responses of the two groups and the changes that occurred as a result of their involvement in the FAST program. An independent samples *t*-test was used to compare group means for each Likert-type question. The researcher examined responses to all open-ended questions and made a variety of comparisons and assessments.

Limitations

The number of participants that completed the surveys is relatively small and the geographic area is limited to north-central Wisconsin. For the Southeast Asian participants, possible language difficulties in both understanding items and generating responses may have impacted the survey results. The use of a translator for Southeast Asian participants may have introduced bias by not accurately reflecting the intent of the survey participant. Therefore, the conclusions reached will be limited by those criteria.

Summary

An introduction to the methodology utilized throughout this study has been presented in Chapter Three. The findings relating to the research questions are discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The objectives of this descriptive study were to conduct a comprehensive literature review of nationally recognized programs focused on improving school-family-community partnerships and to compare the program evaluations of parents from the D.C. Everest School District's SEA FAST program with those from the Caucasian FAST program. This chapter presents the findings from the follow-up evaluations of these two groups and significant similarities and differences in their responses.

Results

Results of the survey of D.C. Everest FAST participants are listed below. Respondents were given the following verbal and written instruction: "We are asking families' opinions of the FAST program. We are continually evaluating the program to improve it for future groups. We would appreciate your honest opinions. No names or identifiers will be placed on any of the questionnaires. Please feel free to ask any questions if you do not understand an item. In answering questions, please circle the appropriate rating." Table 1 lists how Caucasian and SEA FAST participants who completed the survey responded to the corresponding questions. A discussion regarding similarities and differences is presented later in this chapter.

Table 1
Mean Responses by Caucasian and Southeast Asian Parents to Goal Questions

In answering the following questions, please circle the appropriate rating (1 = none, 2 = slight, 3 = some, 4 = quite a bit, and 5 = very much).

| Question | Mean Rating | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Caucasian (n = 10) | Southeast Asian (n = 13) |
| 1. Has your family communication changed in any ways since beginning the FAST program? | 2.9 | 4.0 |
| 2. Has your involvement with the school changed since beginning the FAST program? | 2.3 | 4.153 |
| 3. Has your connection to other families and/or community resources changes since beginning FAST program? | 2.4 | 4.153 |
| 4. Overall, how would your rank the D.C. Everest School District FAST Program? | 4.55 | 4.5 |

Evidence from Table 1

In order to compare the mean scores of each group, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted on the parent responses to the goal questions. The *t*-test was used to determine whether the two means were significantly different at the selected probability level ($p < .05$). Using a conservative assumption that variances of the two groups were not equal, the *t*-test showed that mean scores for the Southeast Asian parents were significantly higher than mean scores for the Caucasian parent for most items. The *t*-test showed significant differences for the

following questions: question 1, change in family communication, $t(21) = -2.58, p = .022$; question 2, change in school involvement, $t(21) = -4.44, p = .000$; and question 3, connection to other families and resources, $t(21) = -3.46, p = .003$. All differences were significant at the $p < .05$ level. For question 4, overall (How would you rank the FAST program?), the difference in the group means was not significant.

After analyzing the results from Table 1, it was concluded that Caucasian parents indicated modest (some) to no change in the areas of family communication (mean 2.5), involvement with the school (mean 2.3), and connection to other families and community resources (mean 2.4) since beginning the FAST program. Southeast Asian parents ranked these same areas significantly higher, with substantial change in the areas of family communication (mean 4.0), involvement in school (mean 4.15) and connection to other families and community resources (mean 4.15). Although Caucasian parents ranked changes in family communication, school involvement, and connection to other families and community resources much lower than Southeast Asian families, their overall rank of the FAST program was slightly higher (mean 4.55) than that of Southeast Asian parents (mean 4.5). Furthermore, both groups ranked the overall program as good to very good.

Table 2 lists how Caucasian and SEA FAST participants who completed the survey responded to the corresponding items. A discussion regarding similarities and differences is presented later in this chapter.

Table 2
Mean Responses by Caucasian and Southeast Asian Parents to Specific Items

Have any of the following items improved since your involvement with the FAST program?

Please rate change from 1 (no improvement) to 5 (much improvement).

| Response Item | Mean Rating | |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Caucasian (n = 8) | Southeast Asian (n = 10) |
| 1. Household cooperation | 2.625 | 3.5 |
| 2. Household structure/rules | 2.875 | 4.1 |
| 3. Family communication | 3.0 | 3.9 |
| 4. Amount of family time | 2.75 | 3.8 |
| 5. Time spent 1:1 with your child | 2.25 | 4.3 |
| 6. Your child's completion of homework | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| 7. Your child's attitude towards school | 2.875 | 4.7 |
| 8. Your child's school attendance | 2.0 | 4.7 |
| 9. Your child's school performance | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| 10. Your contacts with school | 3.125 | 3.4 |
| 11. Your attitude towards the school | 3.375 | 4.7 |
| 12. Your contacts with your child's teacher | 2.375 | 4.4 |
| 13. Your involvement with the school | 2.875 | 4.4 |

Evidence From Table 2

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted on the parent responses to the specific items that were part of question five. The *t*-test showed significant differences for the following areas: item 5, time spent 1:1 with your child, $t(16) = -4.839$; $p = .000$; item 6, your child's completion of homework, $t(16) = -4.332$; $p = .001$; item 7, your child's attitude toward school, $t(16) = -2.777$; $p = .025$; item 8, your child's school attendance, $t(16) = -6.009$; $p = .000$; item 9, your child's school performance, $t(16) = -3.027$; $p = .012$; item 11, your attitude toward school, $t(16) = -2.965$; $p = .016$; item 12, your contact with child's teacher, $t(16) = -3.512$; $p = .006$; and item 13, your involvement with the school, $t(16) = -4.669$; $p = .001$. Using a conservative assumption that variances of the two groups are not equal, the *t*-test showed that mean scores for the Southeast Asian parents were significantly higher than mean scores for the Caucasian parents for items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 13. For all other items on the survey, the differences were not significant.

After analyzing the results from Table 2, it was concluded that Southeast Asian parents indicated a significantly higher level of improvement in many of the thirteen areas than Caucasian parents. The mean scores of Southeast Asian parents were between 3.4 and 4.7 in all areas. The mean scores of Caucasian parents were between 2.0 and 3.375. The largest discrepancy between the two groups was in the area of child's school attendance with a mean score of 2.0 for Caucasian parents compared to a mean score of 4.7 for Southeast Asian parents. The highest mean score for the Caucasian parents was in the area of your attitude toward school (3.375). This area also scored highest for the Southeast Asian parents (4.7). It received the same mean score as two other areas: your child's school attendance and your child's attitude towards school.

Written and Oral Comments to the FAST Evaluation

In addition to rating different aspects of the FAST program, the evaluation form asked participants to provide additional comments to each question. Appendix C is a complete list of the written and oral comments from the Caucasian and SEA FAST participants. As stated earlier, follow-up phone calls were conducted with SEA FAST participants because they did not provide written responses to the questions at the time the evaluations were conducted.

After analyzing the written and oral comments from the FAST evaluations, it was concluded that family communication improved for both Caucasian and Southeast Asian families. Caucasian families provided more specific information regarding how family communication had improved. Some of the comments from Caucasian parents included “The kids listen because I understand how to communicate” and “Since the FAST program has ended we try to get together once a week as a family and play games, take walks, go bowling, etc.”

The question regarding parental involvement in their child’s school suggested that the level of involvement that Southeast Asian parents have is impacted by the fact that many of them are having problems with literacy. One set of parents indicated that they are illiterate but want to be involved in their child’s school, stating, “We attend meetings and conferences at school but are unable to help with homework.” Both the Caucasian and Southeast Asian families indicated that their work schedules interfered with their ability to be more involved in their child’s school. Comments included “I work too much, not a lot of time” and “I work 2nd shift, but attend school conferences.”

Both groups indicated that they felt more connected to other families since going through the FAST program. However, more Southeast Asian parents stated they felt connected to

community resources. Some of their comments included “They taught about different community resources” and “I learned more about the community.”

When asked about other benefits that the family had received as a result of the FAST program, comments from both groups varied greatly. They included “I feel as though I am not the only parent with a child that misbehaves and has issues” and “I learned about why kids rebel to school policies.” The responses to what, if any, drawbacks the participants could see to participating in the FAST program also varied greatly in both groups. Some of the comments included “Not long enough,” “No personal attention to problems. No experts there to even talk to us,” and “My wife was not able to attend because it was offered at night only.”

When asked to provide other comments or suggestions regarding the FAST program, the Southeast Asian participants did not have any specific suggestions. However, the Caucasian parents had several specific recommendations, including “I think if expert speakers were to come in that would be helpful” and “I would like to see families be able to do it again.”

Summary of Findings

This study was designed around five research questions. An analysis of the data allowed the researcher to answer these questions. Specifically, data indicates that family communication improved, parental involvement with the school increased, parental connection to other families or community resources increased, and the student’s behavior and attitude towards school improved as a result of participation in the FAST program.

Also, the data suggest that Southeast Asian parents were significantly more positive about the impact of the FAST program than Caucasian parents. The *t*-test makes adjustments for the fact that the distribution of scores for small samples becomes increasingly different for a normal distribution as sample size becomes increasingly smaller (Gay, 1981). Using this well-established

process to find out whether Southeast Asian parents and Caucasian parents had different opinions about the FAST experience, the findings suggest that Southeast Asian parents were significantly more positive about the impact of the FAST program in all cases where there was a difference between the groups. The *t*-test conducted on the parent responses to the goal questions and the specific item rankings indicate that it is almost impossible that the Southeast Asian parents and the Caucasian parents would respond so differently just by chance. Therefore, aspects of the FAST program itself may be especially beneficial for the Southeast Asian parents.

Data collected from open-ended written and oral feedback indicated that some Southeast Asian parents have limited involvement in their child's school due to their literacy difficulties. This may explain why Southeast Asian parents indicated a higher level of feeling connected to the school and other community agencies after their involvement with the FAST program. For both Caucasian and Southeast Asian parents, work schedules limited their involvement with their child's school. Caucasian parents provided specific suggestions on how the FAST program could be improved. This could indicate that the Caucasian parents' expectations for the program were greater than that of the Southeast Asian parents.

In summary, it appears that both the Caucasian and Southeast parents and their children benefited from their participation in the FAST program. However, Southeast Asian parents were significantly more positive about the impact of the FAST program than Caucasian parents.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter contains a brief summary of the purpose of this study, the participants, and the evaluation tools used in the survey. The chapter also includes major findings, limitations, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Summary

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leaderships, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create partnerships is to help youngsters succeed in school and later in life. According to a report by the Families and Work Institute (1994), research confirms what folk wisdom has been saying for a long time: families are integral to children's readiness for and success in school. Children who are most successful in school are those whose families care about their education and are involved in their learning.

This field study explored components of successful school-family-community programs, including the FAST program. The study also compared program evaluations from parents of the SEA FAST program with those from the Caucasian FAST program.

The DPI provided funding to the D.C. Everest School District to cover the majority of the cost of conducting the FAST programs. The funding from DPI was provided through grant dollars from the federal government. At the end of the grant period, D.C. Everest School District will need to fund FAST programs through the district budget if they wish to continue the program. Since a formal evaluation of the FAST program has not been conducted, this study is

needed to provide the D.C. Everest School Board with information regarding the merits of the FAST program.

Participants in this study included parents who had completed the FAST program at the elementary school that their child attended in the D.C. Everest School District in spring, 2001. Additional information was obtained from Southeast Asian families that completed the FAST program in spring, 2003. The D.C. Everest School District is located in north central Wisconsin. At the time of the survey, the district had an enrollment of approximately 4,900 students in seven elementary schools, one junior high and one high school.

The primary evaluation tool used in this study (Appendix A) was a modified version of the survey used by Fortier (1999) in her field study paper, entitled *Building Bridges: Developing Effective School-Family-Community Partnerships. An Evaluation of the School District of Phillips Families and Schools Together Program*. The information that the Caucasian and SEA FAST participants provided was examined to compare the responses of the two groups and the changes that occurred as a result of their involvement in the FAST program. The researcher examined each question separately. In addition to comparing the mean scores of each group, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted on the parent responses to the goal questions and specific items that showed changes as a result of the FAST program.

Although Caucasian parents ranked changes in family communication, school involvement, and connection to other families and community resources much lower than Southeast Asian families, their overall rank of the FAST program was slightly higher (mean 4.55) than that of Southeast Asian parents (mean 4.5). Furthermore, both groups ranked the overall program as good to very good.

Southeast Asian parents indicated a significantly higher level of improvement in the thirteen specific item areas listed on the evaluation form than Caucasian parents. The mean scores of Southeast Asian parents were between 3.4 and 4.7 in all areas. The mean scores of Caucasian parents were between 2.0 and 3.375. The largest discrepancy between the two groups was in the area of child's school attendance with a mean score of 2.0 for Caucasian parents compared to a mean score of 4.7 for Southeast Asian parents.

Findings from the *t*-tests suggest that Southeast Asian parents were significantly more positive about the impact of the FAST program in all cases where there was a difference between the groups. The *t*-test conducted on the parent responses to the goal questions and the specific item rankings indicate that it is almost impossible that the Southeast Asian parents and the Caucasian parents would respond so differently just by chance. Therefore, aspects of the FAST program may be especially beneficial for the Southeast Asian parents. After analyzing the written and oral comments from the FAST evaluations, it was concluded that family communication improved for both Caucasian and Southeast Asian families. The question regarding parental involvement in their child's school suggested that the level of involvement that Southeast Asian parents have is impacted by the fact that many of the parents have literacy needs themselves. Both groups indicated that they felt more connected to other families since going through the FAST program. However, more Southeast Asian parents stated they felt connected to community resources.

When asked about other benefits that the family had received as a result of the FAST program, comments from both groups varied greatly. The responses to what, if any, drawbacks the participants could see to participating in the FAST program also varied greatly in both groups. When asked to provide other comments or suggestions regarding the FAST program, the

Southeast Asian participants did not have any specific suggestions. However, the Caucasian parents had several specific recommendations, including “I think if expert speakers were to come in that would be helpful” and “I would like to see families be able to do it again.”

Limitations

The number of participants who completed the surveys was relatively small, and the geographic area was limited to north-central Wisconsin. For the Southeast Asian participants, possible language difficulties in both understanding items and generating responses may have impacted the survey results. The use of a translator for Southeast Asian participants may have introduced bias by not accurately reflecting the intent of the survey participant. Therefore, the conclusions reached will be limited by those criteria.

Conclusions

The research in Chapter Four supports previous research that indicates that creating partnerships with school, family, and community can help youngsters succeed in school. The findings in this paper also support previous research that demonstrates that all children benefit from family involvement in education, but minority children and children from low-income homes have the most to gain (Henderson, 1987). According to Chagil and Perrie (1999), historically Hmong parents have not participated in school activities as expected by school personnel. However, as Comer and Haynes (1992) state, minority parents' lack of participation in traditional parent-school activities should not be misinterpreted as a lack of interest in their children's education. The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (Harris & Associates, 1993) suggests examining other factors that may explain the lower rates of contact and collaboration among disadvantaged parents in their children's education and schools. The research in Chapter Four suggests several reasons for a lower level of involvement among Southeast Asian parents.

They include the inability of many Southeast Asian parents to read or write English, the work schedules of some SEA parents, and the lack of connection to other families and community resources. All of these represent enormous barriers to the ability of Southeast Asian parents to develop school-parent-community partnerships (Liontos, 1992).

Implications

Schools, parents, and community members need to understand the importance of developing partnerships if they want students to be successful. By doing so, not only does the student benefit from the partnership, but the school, community and parents benefit as well by producing students who will be successful later in life. Research shows that children who are most successful in school are those whose families care about their education and are involved in their learning (Families and Work Institute, 1994). However, to include all students and parents in this partnership, efforts must be made to eliminate the barriers that exist for many parents, especially minority parents. Southeast Asian parents' limited experience, cultural patterns of respect, and language difficulties create additional obstacles to participation in their child's education. If schools wish to increase the involvement of Southeast Asian parents, they need to raise the awareness of cultural differences among staff members, provide resources to help staff understand cultural differences, hire Southeast Asian staff members, develop and maintain a sense of trust, and find out how Southeast Asians feel about American schools. This study, as illustrated by the findings shown in Chapter Four, suggests that by offering Southeast Asian parents an opportunity to become more involved with the school and community, both the student and parents benefit from significant increases in family communication, increased school involvement, greater connection to other families and resources, and generally more positive behavior and attitude at home and school.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that can be offered by the researcher to enhance similar studies that examine family-school-community partnerships and analyze the value of the FAST program for both Caucasian and Southeast Asian participants. To further understand the relationship between student successes as it relates to school-family-community partnerships, the following recommendations for future studies are suggested:

1. The number of participants involved in the study should be increased. This researcher feels that 30 Caucasian and 30 Southeast Asian families would have been more representative of parents in the target group from the D.C. Everest School District. By conducting the study over a two-year period, additional numbers of surveys may be attained.

2. Having a sufficient number of interpreters available at the time of the original survey would help insure immediate and timely feedback from Southeast Asian parents. The researcher may further be able to draw conclusions from this additional data. For this study, the researcher needed to conduct a follow-up survey to obtain additional information from the Southeast Asian Parents regarding their response to the open-ended questions on the original survey.

3. A follow-up study of program participants conducted one, two, and five years after their participation in the FAST program would allow researchers to determine the long-term benefits of the program.

4. The FAST Program has been funded through grant funds from the DPI. It is an expensive program to implement because of the cost of staff, materials, food, and gift baskets. Many of these grant funds are being reduced or disappearing completely. The study of a FAST-type program that utilized volunteers and community resources could provide school personnel

and the Board of Education with another option to a formal FAST Program or provide rationale for reallocating dollars within the District budget (depending on the results of the study).

Involving families in their child's education is beneficial to the student, parent, school, and community. This study has provided information regarding a number of successful family-school-community partnership programs. It also provided evidence that the FAST program has been beneficial for program participants who took part in the survey from the D.C. Everest School District.

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APPENDIX A

D.C. Everest School District FAST (Families and Schools Together)
Program Evaluation

Verbal Instructions: We are asking families' opinions of the FAST program. We are continually evaluating the program to improve it for future groups. We would truly appreciate your honest opinions. No names or identifiers will be placed on any of the questionnaires. Please feel free to ask any questions if you do not understand an item. Thank you for assisting the FAST program.

In answering questions 1-5, please circle the appropriate rating.

1. Has your family communication changed in any ways since beginning the FAST program?

| | | | | |
|------|--------|------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| none | slight | some | quite a bit | very much |

Please describe how:

2. Has your involvement with the school changed since beginning the FAST program?

| | | | | |
|------|--------|------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| none | slight | some | quite a bit | very much |

Please describe how:

3. Has your connection to other families and/or community resources changed since Beginning the FAST program?

| | | | | |
|------|--------|------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| none | slight | some | quite a bit | very much |

Please describe how:

4. Overall, how would you rank the D.C. Everest School District FAST Program?

| | | | | |
|------|--------|------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| none | slight | some | quite a bit | very much |

Comments:

5. Have any of the following items improved since your involvement with the FAST Program? Please rate change from 1 (no improvement) to 5 (much improvement). Please provide a few specific examples of the items which improved.

| | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (no improvement) | | | | (much improvement) |

Examples

- Household cooperation
- Household structure/rules
- Family communication
- Amount of family time
- Time spent 1:1 with your child
- Your child's completion of homework
- Your child's attitude towards school
- Your child's school attendance
- Your child's school performance
- Your contacts with school
- Your attitude towards the school
- Your contacts with your child's teacher
- Your involvement with the school

6. What other benefits has your family received from the FAST program?
7. What drawbacks can you see to the FAST program?
8. Please provide any other comments/suggestions regarding the FAST program.

6. Please provide any other comments/suggestions regarding the FAST program:

Thank you for taking time to answer my questions. You will receive a form in the mail that you need to sign and return so that the information you shared with me can be included in the study. A return envelope will be provided.

Name of person you contacted: _____

Phone Number: _____

Date of contact: _____

APPENDIX C

SEA Phone Interview Results

1. Has your family communication changed in any way since participating in the FAST program?
If yes, please describe how:

Southeast Asian Parents (n=8):

Yes, it helped with communication

A little bit

Yes, somewhat

We attended the meetings together with our children and we talked about what we learned from each session.

It stayed the same, but taught us how to teach our children to learn.

Yes

Yes

Yes.

2. Has your involvement your child's school changed since participating in the FAST program?
If yes, please describe how:

Southeast Asian Parents (n=8)

Yes, it improved my involvement with my children's school because I attended with them.

It helped us attend conferences at school.

Yes, illiterate, so this is the most difficult, we attend meetings and conferences at school but are unable to help with homework.

No, I have always attended school conferences for my children.

I always attend conferences at school.

I work 2nd shift, but attend school conferences. Yes, we participated and brought our children, we learn about the school.

Yes, we know more of what our children's school is like.

Yes, I know more about the school.

3. Has your connection to other families and/or community resources changed since going through the FAST Program? If yes, please describe how:

Southeast Asian Parent: (n=8)

Yes

We learned about the community programs but we don't need to use them.

Not much, it was nice to see other parents.

No

Yes, I learned more about the community.

They taught about different community resources – too many things were covered.

Too many topics were covered. Fun gathering for parents to also be together and learn new things.

No.

4. What other benefits has your family received from the FAST program?

Southeast Asian Parents (n=8):

Program offers good ways for the whole family to get together and meet with other families.

Covered very broad topics.

Information

The translation was helpful. They taught us too many topics.

They taught us a lot of things and we had t class with parents and then go back to our children. Being with other parents.

The translation into Hmong was helpful.

How to teach and discipline our children so they will do well in school.

Learn about why kids rebel to school policies to programs in the community.

A lot of information.

5. What drawbacks can you see to the FAST program?

Southeast Asian Parents (n=8)

None

None

None

None

My wife was not able to attend because it was offered at night only.

It is offered only in the evenings. Parents who work 2nd shift cannot attend the program. I do not know the rules/policies so I feel that ideas may not be within the policies and my ideas would not be supported.

None

None.

6. Please provide any other comments/suggestions regarding the FAST program:

Southeast Asian Parents (n=8)

It's a good program.

I don't know.

Good way to help Hmong parents because we are illiterate and cannot help our children much. We want to be there for our children and that's all we can do.

None

None

None

None

Good way to help parents because we do not speak English well and the school told us that they know that it is difficult for us.

None

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Project title: Linking Allies: Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships. An Evaluation of the D.C. Everest School District's Families and Schools Together Program.

Jane Freitag, a graduate student of the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Counseling and Psychological Services, is conducting research in the titled area, and would appreciate your participation in this study.

It is not anticipated that this study will present any medical risk or social risk to you. The information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and any reports of the findings of this research will not contain your name or any other identifying information.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If at any time you wish to stop participating in this research, you may do so without coercion or prejudice. Just inform the researcher.

Questions or concerns about participating in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher or research advisor, Dr. Ed. Biggerstaff, Professor of Psychology and Program Director of the Ed.S. Program, at (715) 232-2410 or second to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair of UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751. Phone: (715) 232-1126.

By signing below I verify that I am 18 years or older, in good mental and physical condition, and I agree to understand the conditions listed above.

Signature _____ Date _____

Table 1
Mean Responses by Caucasian and Southeast Asian Parents to Goal Questions

In answering the following questions, please circle the appropriate rating (1 = none, 2 = slight, 3 = some, 4 = quite a bit, and 5 = very much).

| Question | Mean Rating | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------|
| | Caucasian (n=10) | Southeast Asian (n=13) |
| 1. Has your family communication changed in any ways since beginning the FAST program? | 2.9 | 4.0 |
| 2. Has your involvement with the school changed since beginning the FAST program? | 2.3 | 4.153 |
| 3. Has your connection to other families and/or community resources changes since beginning FAST program? | 2.4 | 4.153 |
| 4. Overall, how would you rank the D.C. Everest School District FAST Program? | 4.55 | 4.5 |

Evidence from Table 1

In order to compare the mean scores of each group, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted on the parent responses to the goal questions. The *t*-test was used to determine whether the two means were significantly different at the selected probability level ($p < .05$). Using a conservative assumption that variances of the two groups were not equal, the *t*-test showed that mean scores for the Southeast Asian parents were significantly higher than mean scores for the Caucasian parent for most items. The *t*-test showed significant differences for the

following questions: question 1, change in family communication, $t(21) = -2.58, p = .022$; question 2, change in school involvement, $t(21) = -4.44, p = .000$; and question 3, connection to other families and resources, $t(21) = -3.46, p = .003$. All differences were significant at the $p < .05$ level. For question 4, overall (How would you rank the FAST program?), the difference in the group means was not significant.

After analyzing the results from Table 1, it was concluded that Caucasian parents indicated modest (some) to no change in the areas of family communication (mean 2.5), involvement with the school (mean 2.3), and connection to other families and community resources (mean 2.4) since beginning the FAST program. Southeast Asian parents ranked these same areas significantly higher, with substantial change in the areas of family communication (mean 4.0), involvement in school (mean 4.15) and connection to other families and community resources (mean 4.15). Although Caucasian parents ranked changes in family communication, school involvement, and connection to other families and community resources much lower than Southeast Asian families, their overall rank of the FAST program was slightly higher (mean 4.55) than that of Southeast Asian parents (mean 4.5). Furthermore, both groups ranked the overall program as good to very good.

Table 2 lists how Caucasian and SEA FAST participants who completed the survey responded to the corresponding items. A discussion regarding similarities and differences is presented later in this chapter.

Table 2
Mean Responses by Caucasian and Southeast Asian Parents to Specific Items

Have any of the following items improved since your involvement with the FAST program?

Please rate change from 1 (no improvement) to 5 (much improvement).

| Response Item | Mean Rating | |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Caucasian (n = 8) | Southeast Asian (n = 10) |
| 1. Household cooperation | 2.625 | 3.5 |
| 2. Household structure/rules | 2.875 | 4.1 |
| 3. Family communication | 3.0 | 3.9 |
| 4. Amount of family time | 2.75 | 3.8 |
| 5. Time spent 1:1 with your child | 2.25 | 4.3 |
| 6. Your child's completion of homework | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| 7. Your child's attitude towards school | 2.875 | 4.7 |
| 8. Your child's school attendance | 2.0 | 4.7 |
| 9. Your child's school performance | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| 10. Your contacts with school | 3.125 | 3.4 |
| 11. Your attitude towards the school | 3.375 | 4.7 |
| 12. Your contacts with your child's teacher | 2.375 | 4.4 |
| 13. Your involvement with the school | 2.875 | 4.4 |

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