



Department of
Education

Parent-Teacher Engagement Pilot Program

Year Two Report

Tennessee Department of Education | July 2020



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Introduction

T.C.A. § 49-6-308 calls for the Tennessee Department of Education (department) to establish in no fewer than two public schools a three-year pilot program to improve parent-teacher engagement in any grade from kindergarten through grade two (K–2). In response to this directive, the department developed the Family Academic Support Team (FAST) pilot program. This report contains information and data from year two of the pilot program, including:

- the number and percentage of parents who participated in the program and how many steps of the program they completed;
- the number and percentage of students meeting any academic goals established by the student, parent, and teacher as part of an initial parent-teacher conference or meeting;
- the academic performance goals met by students whose parents participated in the program compared with the academic performance goals met by students whose parents did not participate in the program;
- data collected from a parent survey designed to gauge parent satisfaction with the program and to obtain suggestions from parents for ways to improve the program or to improve parent-teacher engagement; and
- data collected from a teacher and principal survey designed to gauge teacher and principal satisfaction with the program and to obtain suggestions from teachers and principals for ways to improve the program or to improve parent-teacher engagement.

To view the year one report which contains relevant research and additional background information, please see the [year one report](#).

Pilot Program Development and Implementation

Utilizing the strong research supporting families’ engagement in education as well as promising practices within the field, the department created the Family Academic Support Team (FAST) pilot program in the 2018–19 school year. The FAST pilot program is currently in year two and is being implemented in three schools across the state (see Figure 1).

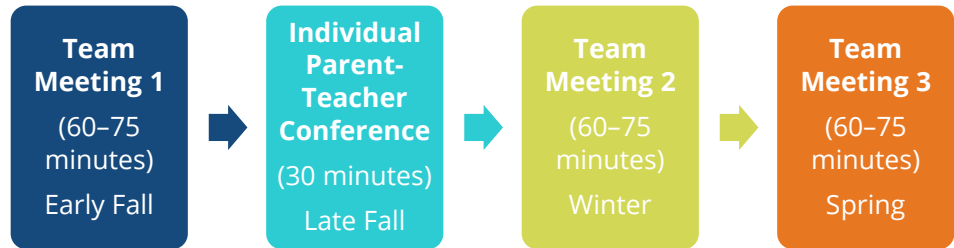
LEA Name	Grand Division	Community Type	Participating School Name	2020 21 School Designation	% Students Eligible for Free/ Reduced Price Lunch	Participating Grade Level(s)
Bedford	Middle	Rural	Eakin Elementary School	None	98.5%	Grades K–5
Loudon	East	Suburban	Philadelphia Elementary School	Reward School	58.5%	Grades K–8
Madison	West	Urban	Lincoln Elementary School	Priority School	100%	Grades K–1

The FAST Model

Based on the [Academic Parent Teacher Team](#) (APTT) engagement model developed by Dr. Maria Paredes, FAST is grounded in the idea that schools thrive when families and teachers work together to maximize student learning inside and outside of the classroom.

Figure 2: The FAST Model

Supplementing and elevating the efforts of traditional parent conferences, FAST expands opportunities for families and teachers to communicate and collaborate about student



learning by offering team meetings throughout the school year (see Figure 2). At a FAST team meeting, all families of a participating class or grade level meet with teachers to discuss student learning expectations, analyze student data, and learn how families can work with the school to improve student outcomes. In full implementation, FAST meetings replace one or more traditional parent-teacher conferences with three group meetings throughout the year.

FAST meetings can be conducted in about one hour and can take place as part of an event the school is already hosting, such as an open house or curriculum night. Each FAST meeting includes the following elements: 1) developing meaningful relationships with families, 2) focusing on grade-level learning skills, 3) modeling home learning activities, 4) practicing home learning activities, and 5) setting short-term learning goals. For more details on each step of the FAST Model, please see the [year one report](#).

Year Two Project Timeline

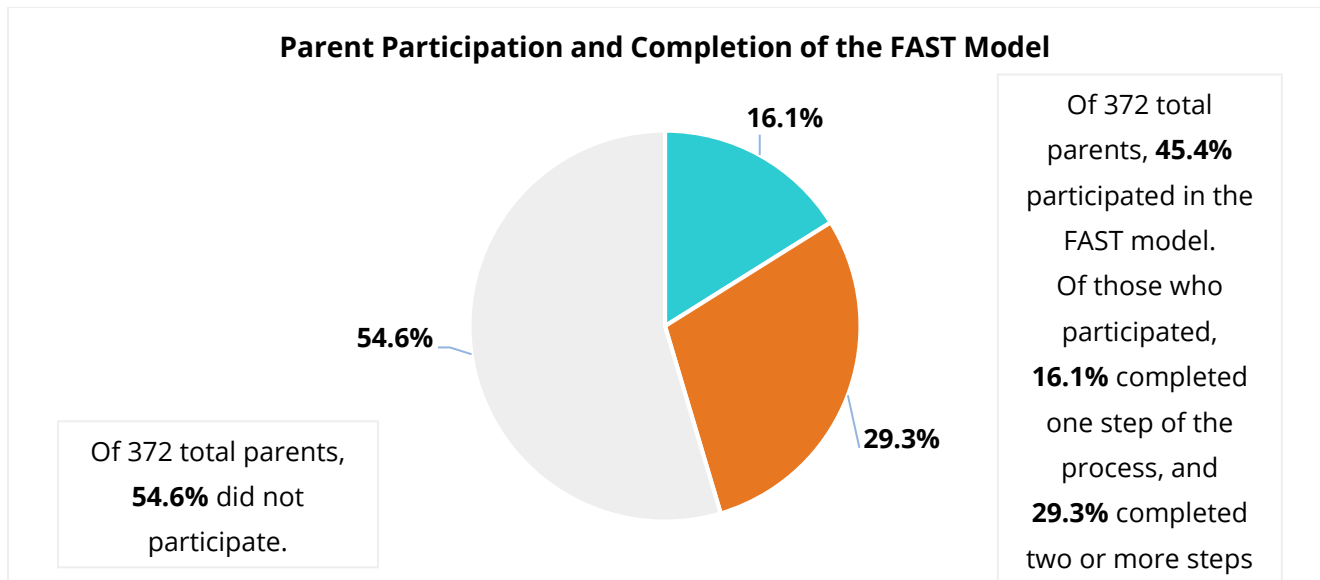
Over the summer and early fall of 2019, the department worked closely with local educational agency (LEA) and school staff to provide training and support for year two of the pilot. The department continued to develop a suite of tools and resources to help staff efficiently implement the program, and training was conducted in person and via webinar. LEA and school staff were given the opportunity to ask questions, brainstorm ideas, and explore applicable resources. Additional grade levels were added to the pilot in all three, which provided many opportunities for the department to collaborate with and support new participating teachers.

Once the 2019–20 school year was underway, school staff worked to select event dates, select focus student learning skills, collect relevant student data, create take-home activities, and develop other meeting materials. With the expectation that each school holds at least three meetings in year two, schools held their first FAST event in the fall and then worked to plan their second event over the winter. Schools planned to hold another round of FAST meetings in late winter/early spring, as well as a third culminating event before the end of the school year. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, caused many disruptions to participating schools' FAST plans and schedules. All schools were able to hold at least two meetings, but final meetings were canceled due to school closures in all participating LEAs.

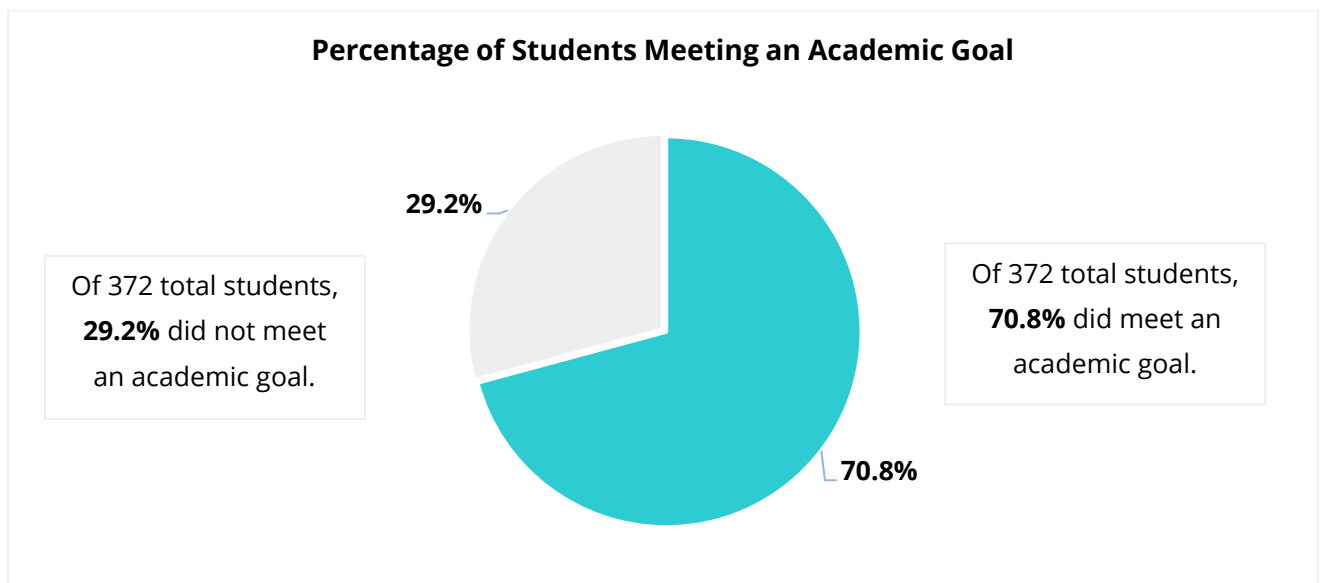
Overview of Year Two Data

Throughout year two of the pilot, the department collected and tracked data as specified under the law¹.

1. The number and percentage of parents who participated in the program and how many steps of the best practices model criteria they completed²:



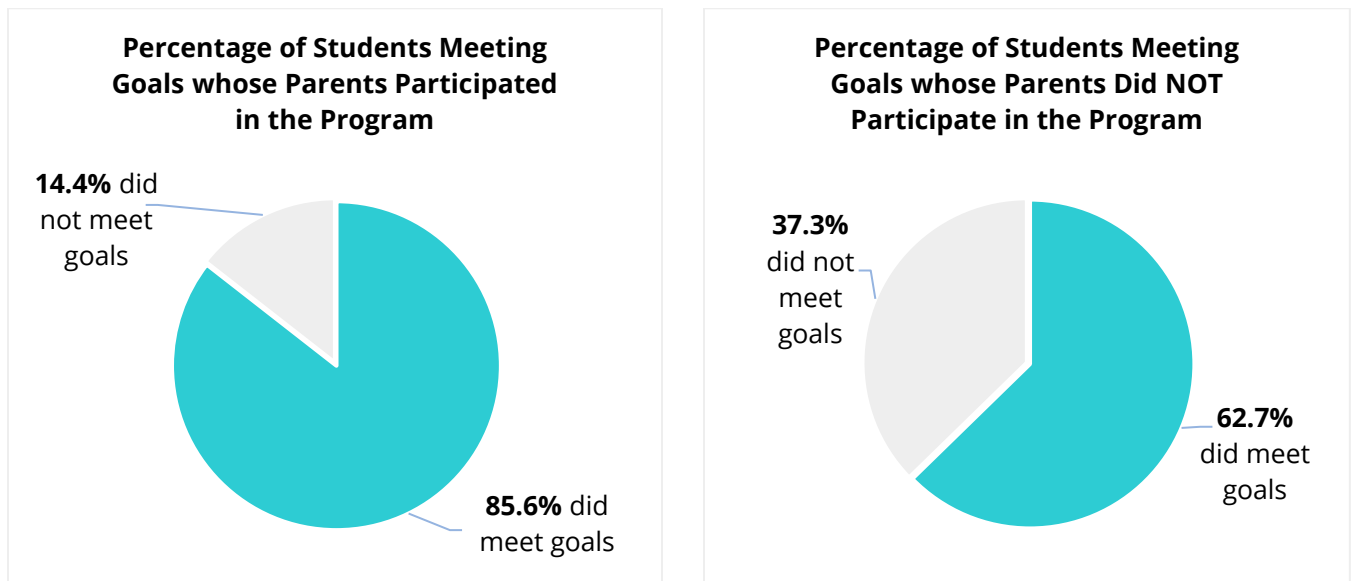
2. The number and percentage of students meeting any academic goals established by the student, parent, and teacher as part of an initial parent-teacher conference or meeting:



¹ All data provided is an average of the three participating LEAs.

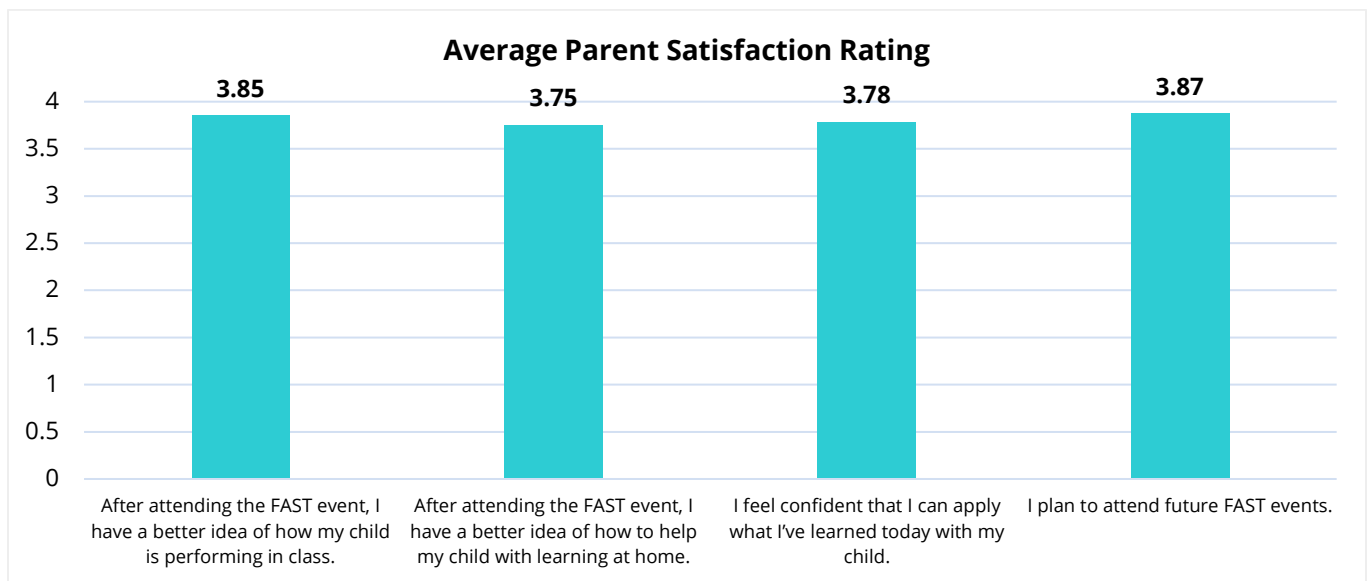
² For these purposes, "participation in the program" indicates that a parent attended at least one FAST event.

3. The academic performance goals met by students in any grade from kindergarten through grade two (K-2) whose parents participated in the program compared with the academic performance goals met by students in any grade from kindergarten through grade two (K-2) whose parents did not participate in the program:



4. Data collected from a parent survey designed to gauge parent satisfaction with the program and to obtain suggestions from parents for ways to improve the program or to improve parent-teacher engagement in any grade from kindergarten through grade two (K-2):

At each FAST event, participating families were given an evaluation survey. The data presented below is a compilation of the family evaluation data from all three participating LEAs.³



³ Ratings on the FAST evaluation survey include: 4 – Strongly Agree; 3 – Agree; 2 – Disagree; 1 – Strongly Disagree; and 0 – Not Sure.

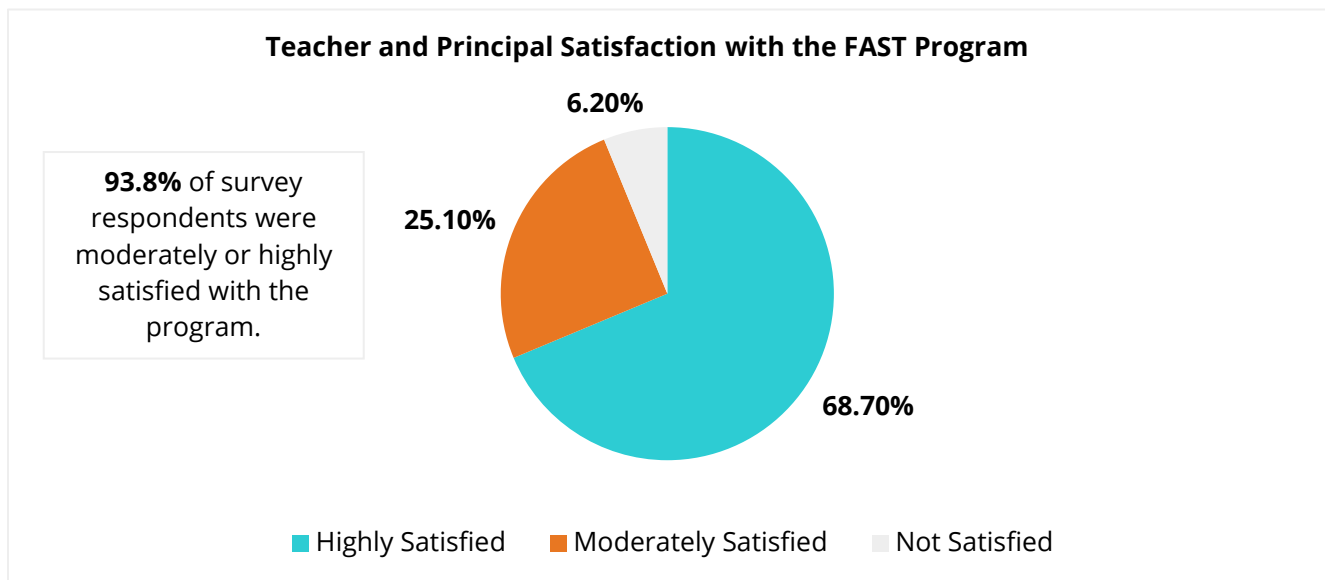
When asked what they **enjoyed most** about the FAST event, families' responses included:

- "I enjoyed the teachers taking time out of their busy schedules to inform us on how and why the FAST program is important and the sincerity they have about our children learning and achieving."
- "Learning where my child is in relation to the other kids in kindergarten and how to help at home."
- "Creating goals for my child."
- "I love seeing the progression of their learning and how they improve!"
- "The information that I was given to bring home to go over it with my son."
- "Learning that my children are growing and learning at their own paces and are continuing to get better with the help of their wonderful teachers."
- "Getting to know what goes on with my child daily."

When asked what could be done to **improve** the FAST program, families' responses included:

- "Presenting teachers could slow down a bit and explain acronyms that are used. Not everyone is familiar with educational terminology. Great conference overall!"
- "Get more parents to show up."
- "More one on one time with teachers."
- "Provide a meeting during the day for parents who work nights."

5. Data collected from a teacher and principal survey designed to gauge teacher and principal satisfaction with the program and to obtain suggestions from teachers and principals for ways to improve the program in any grade from kindergarten through grade two (K-2):⁴



⁴ In May 2020, an online survey was shared with participating school staff; 22 individuals responded, resulting in a 69% overall response rate. The data presented is a compilation of staff surveys from all three participating LEAs.

When asked what the **greatest strength** of the FAST program was, staff responses included:

- "It allows me to get to know my families on a deeper level."
- "I enjoy the sense of community these meetings help build throughout the school."
- "Being able to celebrate success with parents and showing them how much work teachers put into classroom instruction."
- "We get to show parents what they can do at home to help their child develop and grow. They walk away with actions to take."

When asked what the **greatest challenges** associated with the FAST program were, staff responses included:

- "We often struggle to have enough interpreters for our non-English speaking families."
- "A growing number of families are required to work during FAST scheduled times. Therefore, we had limited participation from the majority of our families."
- "The days that we picked had inclement weather. That kept some families from coming to school."
- "The major challenge was parent involvement. About half of my students' parents participated in the fall FAST program, but only two parents participated in the follow-up FAST program in the spring. Our school offered free food and childcare, but still had very low parent participation."
- "The program was in all accounts a success with using data, providing parents educational assistance, and family engagement. There was some need for additional planning time for teachers as well as a lack of motivation from some staff to devote the effort to commit the extra time."
- "Due to COVID-19, we had to cancel our last meeting. Everyone was disappointed!"

When asked what could be done to **improve** the FAST program in the future, staff responses included:

- "I understand the acronym for FAST; however, I think calling it Parent Night, Conference Night, etc. would be more helpful. I think when parents see FAST, it doesn't register so they don't read it. The word or letters for FAST don't grab their attention."
- "I think we need to continue doing what we are doing but continue to improve. Some families will need incentives to come. Some families need conferences offered at different times. We need to listen and respond to the feedback we get from our families."
- "Having the FAST program for all grade levels."
- "Maybe a survey sent home asking those parents who did not attend why they didn't."

Overall, the data in year two closely mirrors what was seen in year one. Family participation continues to be an issue across all LEAs and schools. The data also reflects the fact that for the second year, students whose families participated in at least one FAST meeting were more likely to meet academic goals than students whose families did not participate in at least one FAST meeting. Staff and family satisfaction with the program also remained high.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Family Participation

Year two of the FAST program started out strong, but each participating LEA experienced challenges that impacted family attendance. Many families have competing priorities that can make it difficult for them to attend school events and—as noted in the survey results above—inclement weather, family work schedules, and language barriers were all seen as obstacles to family participation. While one school noted that more families attended their first FAST meeting, two other schools had greater participation towards the end of the year, making it challenging to identify patterns in the data.

In order to address family attendance issues, all participating schools provided childcare and a meal or refreshments to families as an incentive to participate. Several LEAs also began to record FAST meetings and post them online, allowing families who were not able to make meetings to view them in their own time.

Strategies to help combat this continued challenge include:

- Holding make-up sessions when FAST meetings are impacted by inclement weather or other factors.
- Providing families with *personal* invitations to FAST events from classroom teachers, school leaders, or other school staff.
- Continuing to provide free meals, childcare, and transportation for FAST events.
- Tracking and collecting data on the number of families who participate in any online/recorded meeting options to see this is a viable and worthwhile option.

Teacher Time and Effort

Several new grade levels were added by pilot LEAs in year two, which brought on a whole new group of teachers to train and support. While it did take time for these new teachers to be trained on the program, the process was much easier than in year one simply because participating schools already had a strong grasp on the objectives and procedures associated with the FAST program. Novice teachers had the support of more experienced staff and relied on those who implemented the program in year one to provide insight and guidance. Overall, school staff expressed satisfaction on the amount of prep work it took to implement the FAST program and felt that the work they put into the meetings was worth the impact they had on students and families.

Conclusion

While the 2019–20 school year was full of challenges for pilot participants, survey data continues to show high levels of program satisfaction with both school staff and participating families. Due to COVID-19, LEAs and schools are adjusting how they will engage with families in the 2020–21 school year and changes to the FAST program may also need to be made. Each participating LEA is unique and the populations they serve are diverse. The impact that COVID-19 and related school closures have had on each community will take time to identify. LEAs and schools will face new challenges as they address the needs of their staff, students, and families in the context of the ongoing global pandemic. Over the summer, department staff will work with participating LEAs and schools to identify needs and develop an implementation plan for the 2020–21 school year. The department looks forward to working closely with LEA staff, teachers, and school leaders as we continue to develop this program.