

Subscribe to Families First's Blog!

As you may already know, Families First recently launched a blog! In today's media environment, we are less likely to receive traditional coverage by print or broadcast outlets. Thankfully, there are also many more free channels than ever before—our website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and so on—through which to share our message and engage prospective donors, supporters, and partners. For all of these, having some original content to offer is the key to gaining attention and respect for the organization. So we're blogging.

I've written a few posts. Other staff members—and even a board member—have begun to contribute, and we plan to prevail upon partners and friends to do so as well.

You can help us get mileage out of these efforts by sharing our posts through email and social media. Perhaps even more important in these early days, is having you comment on the posts. The more interest we are perceived to have, the more we are likely to get. So please subscribe, read our brief posts, and join the conversation!



Liz Cohen with client Sylvia Smith and her daughter

You can find the blog through our website or at this link:

<http://www.familiesfirstblog.org/>

Thanks so much for all you do,

P.S. Please also like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter!



With your support this year, Families First has launched some exciting new work focusing on improving family engagement in schools. FUSE, or Families United with Schools for Education, draws on Families First's highly-developed cultural competency, as well as its expertise with both parenting education workshops and professional development.

FUSE is built on the idea—well supported by research—that when

FUSE-ing Schools and Families

families are involved at school, their children actually do better academically. We are not talking about perfunctory spaghetti dinners, however. True family engagement means making a school more welcoming to parents of all backgrounds, fostering effective communication between families and teachers, and developing student-focused partnerships that include two-way communication and shared decision-making. All content is grounded in accepted national standards.

Three levels of services allow schools and districts to choose the appropriate level of assistance. Families First worked with Boston Arts Academy (BAA), a small high school in the Boston Public

Schools (BPS), on the initial pilot of its comprehensive "Level 1" services. Level 1 is a long-term consulting engagement encompassing assessment, planning, plan implementation, and evaluation. According to BAA Family Engagement Coordinator Stacy Calhoun, in just the first year of FUSE work, "BAA went from reaction-based family engagement to being a school with a vision of how to welcome and support students' families."

The pilot's success has generated a great deal of excitement, and two Level 1 pilots are planned at BPS elementary schools this fall. Now a key partner in BPS's family engagement efforts,

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A Plan to Re-engage Families

Parents of 40 Boston Arts Academy students failed to attend parent-teacher conferences last fall. BAA's new Family Engagement Committee found that their students were also among the lowest performing in the small Boston Public Schools magnet high school.

Like many schools, Boston Arts Academy has tended to triage parents. "...We would often interact with parents on a crisis-need basis," said Family Engagement Coordinator Stacy Cahoun.

With the help of Families First's FUSE program during the 2013-14 school year, the school has developed a vision and begun to plan for systemic, proactive family engagement. Already they have established a permanent Family Engagement Committee made up of staff members and parents and developed an overall plan for improved family engagement. They also launched a targeted effort to reach out to 15 of the disengaged families.

Developing systemic family engagement and a welcoming climate in a school is always a long-term process—BAA's relationship with FUSE will last 2-3 years. Full results aren't in yet, but BAA leaders feel the momentum building and know the work is making a difference. "At the beginning of the process... we did not know what Family Engagement was," said one committee member. Now, says Calhoun, every staff member is "understanding the concepts and working toward intentional Family Engagement."



Meryl Kessler and Anne Marcus at the Leadership Circle Thank You event.

a new tradition of a spring gathering with the primary purposes of coming together in celebration and saying thank you. Special thanks to our hosts Meryl Kessler and Scott Oran for their hospitality this spring!

The members of the Leadership Circle have indeed made a critical difference in the lives of families and children in our community by supporting Families First. As we plan for the future, we are deeply grateful for their continued involvement and we hope to welcome new members to the Circle.

Leadership Circle

Since its inception, Families First has been lucky to have a committed group of friends and volunteers who support the organization at a high level. Last year we put a name to the group—the Leadership Circle—and started

Board of Directors

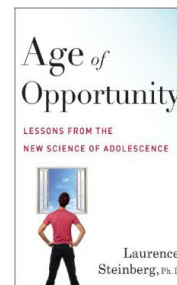
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SAVE THE DATE:

Fathers' Breakfast 2014

Families First serves a diverse group of parents and caregivers, but every fall, we turn the spotlight on fathers at our signature Fathers' Breakfast.



More than 200 community leaders join us to celebrate the importance of fathers and support the critical parenting education Families First provides.

This year, the event will feature Dr. Laurence Steinberg, distinguished professor of Psychology at Temple University and a nationally recognized expert on parent-child relationships and adolescent development. Dr. Steinberg will speak about the opportunity for increased school achievement presented by the newly discovered second period of brain plasticity in adolescence. His new book on the subject, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, will be released just before the event, in September.

The 2014 Fathers' Breakfast will be held at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Boston on October 30, 2014, from 7:30-9:00 AM. To purchase tickets or inquire about the event, contact Amber Pittenger (617-868-7687 x 24 or apittenger@families-first.org).

FUSE-ing Families, *continued*

Families First will also provide Level 2 and 3 services to a total of 25 schools. Through FUSE we estimate that your donations will benefit more than 12,000 children in the coming year alone!