

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

## NEWSLETTER *for Teachers*

### **Founder's Focus:** *Providing Families with an Academic Barometer for Student Success*

Across the country, parents are eager for more information about what happens inside the schools and classrooms where their children spend a significant amount of time each week. Limited time, resources, and language barriers can all inhibit regular two-way communication between schools and families, and relying on children to be the key messengers for school-related information can introduce other challenges. I know my three-year-old is unlikely to give me a detailed response to a very specific question about his day, much less a comprehensive recounting of all the week's events!



Despite the limited weekly intel that I receive from my son, I do get a unique vantage point into his “preschool life” because parents at the school regularly assist or “co-op” in the classroom. When I co-op, I have the opportunity to immerse myself in the classroom activities and actively engage with my son’s classmates, as well as his teachers. I’m having an elaborate tea party in the dramatic play area one minute, leading a sorting activity the next, and then quickly transitioning to help children manage the strong feelings associated with a block tower having been knocked down. In addition to feeling *exhausted*, I end the day feeling empowered as I come away with a much richer understanding of my child’s experience at school. I have a lot more information about what skills they are practicing that week in his classroom, what the behavioral expectations are, and how my son is getting along with the other children. I feel like I have a better sense of whether he’s “on track” and what I can do to support him.

Parents want to help their children thrive socially, emotionally, and academically and they need key information from schools and teachers in order to be effective. While co-oping in the classroom is not often feasible, the experience highlights the type of information that parents are looking for in order to understand and support their children’s educational needs. Information about what is being taught and how their child is doing – information that can be communicated in ways that are accessible and feasible for families and teachers. We know this is possible because we do it with FASTalk. Through weekly text messages from the teacher, parents are empowered with knowledge about what their child is learning and how they can help at home, and all messages come in families’ home languages.

Before traveling to California next week to meet and gather feedback from families who are using FASTalk in Oakland, I’m scheduled to co-op in my son’s class. He calls co-oping “being the helper,” and what he doesn’t know is how much it helps me.

What are you doing to communicate better with parents on how well students are on track? Tag [@FamilyELab](#) on Twitter with your ideas.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth O'Bryon

Co-Founder, [Family Engagement Lab](#)

[View Blog Posts](#)

## 2020 Family Engagement Lab Teacher Pilot Grant Program

Family Engagement Lab is offering an exciting opportunity for K-5 ELA educators—in Jefferson and Orleans Parish in Louisiana—interested in improving equitable outcomes for students by igniting the power of families to get their children excited about learning. [Learn more about the 2020 Family Engagement Lab Teacher Pilot Grant Program.](#)

### Educator Highlight: Bridgette Lott, Oakland, California



Bridgette Lott is a Transitional Kindergarten (TK) teacher at Carl B. Munck Elementary in Oakland Unified. Her students' parents rely on FASTalk as support for learning and a resource for communication.

“My classroom is filled with students from different backgrounds, meaning some families speak their native language at home. FASTalk assists in keeping those parents involved by translating and bridging the gap that may be caused by language barriers. All parents are in the loop. The text messaging app provides games and tasks that can even be done on the ride home from school. The interactive activities keep the creative juices flowing and education gears going.”

After reviewing some of the FASTalk text messages for the school year, Bridgette realized that some of them were not fully aligned with TK's partnering instructional program, SEEDS, so she created a customized playlist to better align the activities with what students were learning. Thanks to her help, and the ease in which FASTalk can be adjusted, TK teachers throughout the district are now using the revised playlist.

**Family Talk:** What are parents saying about FASTalk? [Join the conversation](#) and [share their thoughts](#) with us.

FASTalk keeps me informed about what my child is learning in school. The information provided helps me continue teaching my child at home the information she is learning



FASTalk reminds me to do little things, often things I can do without being home. They help me connect with her on the go and be in touch with what I should support at home.

in school.

-Parent of 3rd grade student  
Rapides Parish, Louisiana

-Parent of 1st grade student  
Oakland Unified, California

How can we improve your FASTalk experience? [Let us know.](#)

## Family Engagement Resource: Improving Student Outcomes through Increasing Family Engagement

- Share this [EdNavigator's Parent's Guide to Testing Season](#) with parents to help them develop strategies to create personal test prep plans that work for their families.

---

### FASTalk Tip of the Month : Using FASTalk's Polling Option to Informally Assess Student Learning



During February and March each year, teachers continually ask themselves the same question: "Are my students ready for the test?" The weekly poll reports in FASTalk can provide you with more information. Use it to poll parents on the level of difficulty of some of the activities. For example:

Can your child point to letters, words and sentences? Was this week's activity:

371: too easy

372: too hard

373: just right

374: we didn't try it yet

Based on families' responses, teachers can then work with the student in the class or even use the FASTalk chatbox to enhance communication and share resources with families for individual scaffold/support plans. For example, teachers can share:

Is your child struggling in school? Learn what you can do to help. [See this Guide from Exceptional Lives.](#)

---

### Share the Good News

As teachers, you can encourage parents to become more involved in their child's learning by providing them with quick tips on how to support learning at home. Here are a few social media posts to use this month to help build family engagement in your classroom or school.



It's school #assessment time! Learn what these tests mean for your child in this [Guide from Exceptional Lives](#). #supportingeducation



Parents, did you know that #familyengagement is linked to improved student outcomes? By using [@FamilyELab's](#) tool #FASTalk, we are able to informally assess student learning and work together to increase #academicachievement. #teamwork

## Contact Us

Have questions? Email us at [felcommunications@fastalk.org](mailto:felcommunications@fastalk.org).  
Don't forget to **follow us on social media for the latest tools and resources** to support family engagement.

