

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

## NEWSLETTER *for Leaders*

### Founder's Focus: *Bending the Arc of Social Progress*

This new year I've been reflecting on the passing of my dad, Dr. Panchanatham Naga Sundaram, in 2019. Born in pre-independence India in 1939, his sharp intellect and tenacity as a researcher yielded him a personal invitation from halfway around the world—UC Berkeley—to study Civil Engineering. A lot changed in his lifetime that made it possible for him to settle in the US with his family. For example, the 1965 Immigration Act finally opened the United States' doors to Asian immigration. Furthermore, while my great-grandparents' generation considered travel across oceans a strict religious taboo, my grandparents proudly encouraged my father's scholarship abroad.



During our period of mourning, I was contacted by relatives and friends offering condolences and occasionally sharing information about how to navigate the heavily codified rituals of Tamil Brahmin Hindus in modern times. One relative aptly described us as being part of the “transition generation”—one that remembered an era of arranged child marriages (my father's mother married at 12) and limited educational opportunity for girls. Thankfully, these practices have been curbed by sweeping Indian laws in support of women's rights only in the last few decades.

Perhaps it is not so remarkable that I am sitting here in Alameda, California as the co-founder and CEO of an education nonprofit organization focused on educational equity and increasing opportunity for under-served students. After all, a series of discrete societal shifts and policies in India and the United States are what brought me here. But when I reflect further on my own story in the broader context of racial and gender equity, I know that policies alone cannot bend the arc of social progress. It also takes educators, leaders, and other champions of equity engaging in radical unconventionality on a daily basis.

To help kick start the new year, we've listed some of our favorite resources in this January 2020 edition of the Learning Series that support equitable student outcomes, including clear descriptions of the skills students should be developing each year.

How will you bend the arc of history towards equity in 2020 and beyond? Drop us a line on Twitter @FamilyELab. We'd love to be unconventional with you.

Sincerely,

Vidya Sundaram  
Co-Founder, Family Engagement Lab

[View Full Blog Post](#)

## FASTalk Connection: Engaging ALL Students in Grade-Level Content

Are your teachers getting through the full curriculum and challenging students with grade-level work? According to [TNTP's Opportunity Myth](#) study, students of color and those from low-income backgrounds may be less likely than white and higher-income peers to receive grade-appropriate assignments. When students need extra support to access grade-level material, teachers should lean on parents for help.

That's where FASTalk comes in. Through FASTalk, parents receive weekly academic activities that build students' skills and confidence to engage in the classroom. In 2018-2019, FASTalk helped four times more Oakland Unified School District kindergartners, who recognized less than 25 percent of their letters and sounds in the fall, meet midyear literacy benchmarks. Could your students benefit from FASTalk? Learn more at [familyengagementlab.org](http://familyengagementlab.org).

---

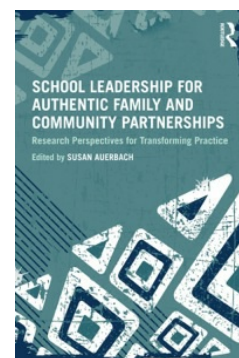
### News You Can Use: Engaging Families to Reduce Equity Barriers

- [Study shows students with more engaged parents have higher academic achievement and miss fewer days of school](#) (Nellie Mae Education Foundation)
- [The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down and How to Fix It](#) (TNTP)
- [New framework for communication about family engagement](#) (NAFSCE)
- [How School Leaders Nurture Involved Parents](#) (Room 241)
- Family Engagement Lab is looking for an account manager. Details are available on our [job openings page](#).

---

### Featured Resource: [School Leadership for Authentic Family and Community Partnerships](#) by Dr. Susan Auerbach

The increasing success of parent engagement in raising student achievement is encouraging school leaders to pursue meaningful alliances with communities and families. However, due to cultural barriers and other challenges, school leaders are often left without the skills, tools, and means to support authentic alliances. In order to establish socially-just schools, where parents are not only engaged but also leaders within the school community, school leaders must seek meaningful community-school partnerships. This book gathers the research surrounding school leadership and best practices regarding meaningful family-school collaborations.



---

### Share the Good News

As champions of family engagement, we encourage you to become a part of the conversation by sharing one of the following posts on social media, or using them as inspiration for your own unique post.



We have hit the mid-year mark. Want to know how your child is progressing? Then ask your child's teacher to complete this snapshot from @ednavigate to find out how they are doing. <https://www.ednavigator.com/downloads/Academic-Progress-Snapshot-Form-2017.pdf>



As students get back into the swing of things, it's important to talk to them about their goals for the rest of the school year. Spend some time this week talking about what they want to accomplish in each class or subject. #NewYearsResolution @ FamilyELab

## 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.

