

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER *for Teachers*

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

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Educator Highlight: Renata Barsanti, Batchelor, Louisiana



Upper Pointe Coupee is a very small, rural school in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. Nearly all of the school's students are minority and all are economically disadvantaged. In many cases, students come from homes where their parents either do not speak English well, or did not graduate from high school. Knowing these challenges, Upper Pointe Coupee started using FASTalk as a way to make it easier for parents to support learning at home.

Renata Barsanti is a 3rd-5th grade ELA teacher at the school and is very excited about how FASTalk is helping to forge better relationships with her students' parents, especially those students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). "The parents of my students with IEPs are some of the most involved in using FASTalk, which has been really helpful because a lot of times they'll give me feedback like, 'I did the activity and I used the word in conversation, but he's still really not sure what it means.' This feedback helps me know that I need to go back and reteach that word with that particular student. FASTalk has opened up lines of communication with my parents that maybe wouldn't have been there as easily before."

FASTalk is not just helping her engage with parents of students with IEPs, but with all parents. "The text messages are like little bite-sized pieces that parents can do with their kids. And it's special that there is such a great and simple way to take the guesswork out of supporting learning at home. They don't have to just ask 'How was school today?' Instead, they can start with, 'I know you're writing a narrative in class. Tell me about it.' It's pretty neat that parents know exactly what we're learning on the day we're learning it."

Family Engagement Resources: Engaging Families in Mid-Year Checkups

- Quick [set of 3-5 questions students answer to determine if they are mastering grade-level skills](#) in reading and math (Learning Heroes)
- Share this [Academic Progress snapshot](#) with parents to let them know how their child is doing mid-year (EdNavigator)
- [Beyond Parent-Teacher Conferences: Building Connections that Last](#) (The Teaching Channel)

FASTalk Tip of the Month: Using Chatbox to Schedule Mid-Year Check-Ups



Happy New Year and welcome to the second half of the 2019-2020 school year! We hope you spent some time over the holiday reflecting on how the school year has gone so far and what still needs to be accomplished to reach your end-of-year goals.

The middle of the year might seem like a coasting point: classroom procedures are running smoothly

and students are working towards mastering the skills they need to move on to the next grade level. But it's important not to get too complacent, or things may start to go downhill in the second half of the year. One way to prevent this from happening is to make a midyear effort to reach out to parents and remind them of how things are going with their child. Sending a midyear reminder to parents is a great way to engage them in keeping their child on-track so that little problems do not become big ones going into the spring.

FASTalk is an easy way to make this connection with your parents. Simply using the 2-way translated FASTalk Chatbox can help you reach diverse families effectively in communicating about how their child is doing academically. Here's a [short video](#) on how to send custom text messages to individual families or to your entire class.

Keep in mind that families often change their phone numbers over the holidays, so take a few moments to review your FASTalk Student Roster. Verify accuracy by logging into your account at www.fastalk.org. Contact support@fastalk.org if you have any questions.

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.



As I look forward to the start of 2020, and I am excited to see how my students will finish strong this school year. Do you have questions about how your child is doing in my class? Then message me through #FASTalk to set up a meeting.



One of my #NewYearsResolutions is to connect more with my students' parents. I am so thankful that I have #FASTalk to help me connect with them and give them easy ways to support learning at home. #familyengagement

Contact Us

Have questions? Email us at felcommunications@fastalk.org.

Don't forget to **follow us on social media** for the latest tools and resources to support family engagement.

