

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

## NEWSLETTER *for Leaders*

### **Founder's Focus:** *Our Commitment to Anti-Racism in Family Engagement*

At Family Engagement Lab, we are committed to studying and supporting schools' efforts to equitably engage families in their child's learning. Our commitment extends to combating racism in this area. There is ample evidence that, despite the best intentions of schools and educators, families and children of color experience multiple layers of racism. A 2019 study by Karin Kitchens found that, at an institutional level, schools enrolling Black students receive less funding, and while their families have a higher tax burden, fewer Black students are afforded the same educational and career opportunities as their White peers.



In the area of teacher to parent communication, sociologist Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng has found that race, ethnicity, and immigration status factor strongly. In his study, teachers were more likely to reach out to parents of Black and Latino students about behavioral problems. And teachers were less likely to reach out to parents they perceived as uninterested and uninvolved.

At Family Engagement Lab, we know all families care about their children. We envision a future where communities of color are treated with compassion, dignity, and respect as individuals. We are committed to a continued investigation of how racism inhibits equitable family engagement and developing anti-racist family engagement strategies. We are currently examining our activities across research, content development, product design, and teacher training. Below is a list of books, online events, articles, and research that are informing our journey:

- "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Written as a letter to his teenage son, Coates provides a powerful perspective as a Black parent and challenges the notion of the American Dream.
- "White Fragility" by Robin Di'Angelo highlights how avoiding uncomfortable conversations sustains racism.
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation's [Healing in Action](#) event (organized by Family Engagement Lab Board Director and WKKF Program Officer, Icela Pelayo) illuminated the many ways racism affects all of us, and offered concrete steps that everyone can take to heal and fix broken systems. Educators will appreciate suggestions from Diane Wolk-Rogers, teacher and survivor of the Parkland, FL school shooting.
- [Child Trends](#) provides several resources on understanding student data from a racial equity perspective, and how to use data in ways that are empowering for marginalized communities.
- [How Discrimination Shapes Parent-Teacher Communication](#), from The Atlantic, November 15, 2016.
- Brown University economist, [Emily Oster](#), questions why more attention is placed on how to open bars and less on how to open schools, and highlights how COVID-19 learning loss disproportionately affects Black and Latino students.
- Is school funding equitable? Studies ([Kitchens, 2019](#); [Casio & Reber, 2013](#); [Gordon, 2004](#))

from the 2009 stimulus and across the history of Title I work that we have a long way to go.

Sincerely,

Vidya Sundaram

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

[View Blog Posts](#)

## In Case You Missed It



### Supporting our Youngest Readers: Use Data, not Donuts

Elisabeth O'Bryon & Hannah Jong Lee

[www.familyengagementlab.org](http://www.familyengagementlab.org) | @FamilyELab

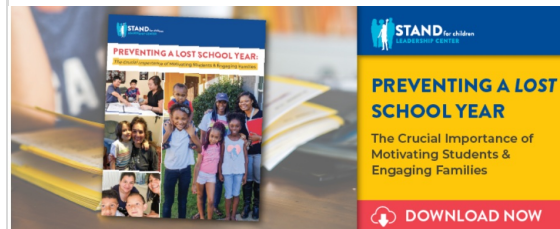
#### [Supporting Our Youngest Readers: Use Data, Not Donuts](#)

Last month, Family Engagement Lab (FEL) hosted a session at this year's Teacher Leader Summit: The Virtual Series. During the session, Supporting Our Youngest Readers: Use Data, Not Donuts, FEL shares what the latest research shows is effective when involving families to impact learning outcomes (hint: it's not donuts or free food). Participants learned how to effectively scale and sustain family engagement to promote equity and access for all students and shared best practices and work shopped new ways to engage parents.

[Materials](#) and a [recording](#) of the session are now available.



[FASTalk connects teachers and non-](#)



#### [The Guide to Preventing a Lost School Year: The Crucial Importance of Motivating Students & Engaging Families](#)

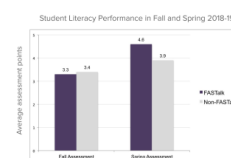
Stand for Children has [identified evidence-based actions](#) school districts can take to keep the academic success and emotional well-being of students at the forefront as decisions are made ahead of the upcoming academic year.

FASTalk was recently featured within this guide as a tool to better connect teachers, parents and students around daily classroom learning.

[Access the full guide.](#)

#### Impact Snapshot: FASTalk students made the largest literacy gains

- From 128-3/22/19, families of 99 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students in Redesign Schools Louisiana (RSL) received weekly curriculum-aligned FASTalk text messages
- Messages were aligned with ELA Guidebooks and provided tips and activities for supporting at-home learning
- Over 90% of RSL 3rd-5th graders qualified for free or reduced-price lunch during the 2018-19 school year
- FASTalk **meaningfully advanced academic achievement** as demonstrated by statistically significant higher spring iSTEEP assessment scores for participating students
- FASTalk students had **2.6x the academic gains** of non-FASTalk students



[www.familyengagementlab.org](http://www.familyengagementlab.org)

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[Study Shows FASTalk Meaningfully](#)

### [English speaking OUSD families during COVID-19](#)

Depending on the school, channels of communication between parents and teachers are often open, but it typically becomes much more difficult and complicated when parents don't speak English. In the Oakland Unified School District, that covers most families. That's why Family Engagement Lab created FASTalk, a tool that bridges the gap and helps teachers and parents who don't speak the same language communicate.

[Read the full blog.](#)

### [Advances Academic Achievement, Large Literacy Gains Observed](#)

In a recent quasi-experimental study, FASTalk was found to meaningfully advance academic achievement as shown by statistically significant higher spring assessment scores for FASTalk students.

The study outlines key findings of Family Engagement Lab's 2018-2019 FASTalk program implementation in Redesign Schools (RSL) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

[Read the full press release.](#)

## News You Can Use: Engaging Families to Increase Academic Achievement

- [‘Moments like now are why we teach’: Educators tackle tough conversations about race and violence — this time virtually](#) (Chalkbeat)
- [Educators face task of helping students cope with turmoil gripping city, nation](#) (The Notebook)
- [Parent Involvement Has Always Mattered. Will The COVID-19 Pandemic Finally Make This The New Normal In K-12 Education?](#) (Forbes)
- [COVID-19 and Children's Education](#) (Psychology Today)
- [Survey Shows Big Remote Learning Gaps For Low-Income And Special Needs Children](#) (NPR)

**[FASTalk is the only evidence-based texting tool aligned with high-quality ELA curriculum.](#)**

## FASTalk Connection: Engaging Families Through FASTalk Direct

This fall, FASTalk will offer more flexible options for school districts looking for ways to engage families. In addition to our traditional teacher-parent model, FASTalk will also make it possible for school districts to directly send academic support activities to families, significantly broadening access for families. Adopting this model in a pilot in Oakland Unified School District increased access from 2,700 families to 18,300 families during COVID-19 school closures.



**Get Started for Fall**

## FASTALK FAST Facts

In this month's FASTalk FAST Facts, FEL shares the following fact: **Texting parents literacy activities can reverse learning loss.**



Reach ALL of your students and families with FASTalk texts.

Visit [www.familyengagementlab.org](http://www.familyengagementlab.org) to learn more.

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

*"It provides good activities to do with my son that are both fun and educational."*

-Parent of Kinder student  
Oakland Unified, California



*"Creative ideas on how to teach skills that feels like playing."*

-Parent of Kinder student  
Oakland Unified, California

### **Educator Highlight:** Latoria Izzard, Fourth and Fifth Grade ELA Teacher at Lanier Elementary in Baton Rouge



Latoria Izzard teaches fourth and fifth grade ELA at Lanier Elementary—one of the Redesign Schools Louisiana (RSL) sites included in [FEL's recent impact study](#) on student achievement—in Baton Rouge. This past school year, she used FASTalk to send curriculum-aligned activities to her students' families as a way to increase family engagement and strengthen communication with families that speak a language other than her own.

"Using FASTalk has been a great experience for me," said Latoria. "It has been a very effective tool to communicate with parents and allowed me to keep them informed about what students were working on in class."

Latoria appreciates FASTalk's ability to translate messages into multiple languages. She attributes a rise in academic achievement to improved communication between her and her students' families.

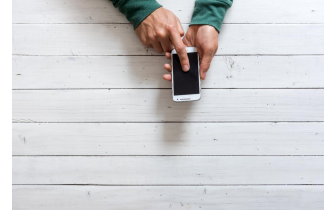
"FASTalk translated messages for my ESL students," said Latoria. "Because of this, the home/school relationship was built on a solid foundation and parents were constantly aware of academic expectations."

Latoria plans to continue using FASTalk to support her students and their families next school year, sharing that effective communication is key.

“FASTalk created an open line of communication between home and school, and built a great relationship between myself, my students, and their parents,” said Latoria.

## Share the Good News

As leaders 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.



In this month's #FASTalk FAST Facts, [@FamilyELab](#) shares: Texting parents literacy activities can reverse learning loss. <https://vimeo.com/427930371>  
#familyengagement #FELfamilies

What are parents saying about #FASTalk? Join the conversation!  
<https://twitter.com/@FamilyELab>  
#familyengagement #FELfamilies

## 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.

