

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER *for Champions*

Founder's Focus: *Engaging Families on the Importance of Early Literacy Development*

In this month's Learning Series, we'll be sharing information on early literacy development and how families can help build these critical foundational skills. It's a timely subject! The ongoing debate regarding how children acquire literacy skills seems to have reached a new plateau, prompted in part by last fall's [NAEP](#) scores showing declines in reading achievement for students in most of the country. The widely used Balanced Literacy approach and accompanying *Units of Study* curriculum developed by Columbia professor Lucy Calkins has been highlighted as a possible culprit. While *Units of Study* is celebrated by teachers for its ease of use in the classroom and focus on instilling a love of reading, it has received sharp criticism for not emphasizing foundational literacy skills. In response, state and local education systems have begun to shift focus toward developing skills, like phonemic awareness, while building students' content knowledge.



When I look at the literacy debate I wonder, “What does it mean for parents?”

The debate means that parents will need help grappling with conflicting information. Parents are still guided to use tools like the “[five finger rule](#)” when picking books for their children, even when such tools directly contradict new learning standards that require students to interpret complex texts. As a result, schools, community partners, out-of-school service providers, and learning apps may all be sending mixed messages about how parents can and should support their child's reading.

Schools making the shift to emphasizing foundational literacy skills and content knowledge should also consider how families and community partners are supporting efforts to help more children learn to read, and soon, read to learn. While planning these shifts, take a moment to evaluate whether your partners are supporting (or contradicting) your new approach. If you find there are no strategies in place to inform families as you implement a new curriculum, then consider adopting tools like [FASTalk](#) to share tips and learning activities aligned to your curriculum.

I'm curious to hear from you. How are you approaching literacy instruction? How are you partnering with families and community organizations to help more kids read? Join the conversation on Twitter at [@FamilyELab](#) or Facebook at [@ilovefastalk](#).

Sincerely,

Vidya Sundaram

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FASTalk Connection: Engaging Families in Literacy Development

From Pre-K through fifth grade, FASTalk has the earliest learners and their families covered. We proudly serve Frog Street and Teaching Strategies GOLD in Pre-K and Adelante, ARC Core, CKLA, Collaborative Literacy, EL, ELA Guidebooks, Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, TK Seeds, and Wit & Wisdom in grades K-5. Our PK-5 literacy activities for families combine the knowledge and skills students are working on during their reading lessons, along with the social and behavioral skills that are so integral to early literacy development. Learn more at familyengagementlab.org.



[Request A Demo](#)

Family Engagement Lab & FASTalk Updates

- Co-founder Elisabeth O’Byron recently presented at the National Association of School Psychologists’ (NASP) Annual Convention where she highlighted strategies for promoting effective school-home partnerships, and engaged in lively discussions with school psychologists, faculty, and graduate students on the successes and challenges they’ve experienced when engaging families in their communities.
- Co-Founder Vidya Sundaram will be attending the Accelerate Good Global Conference on March 17 in San Francisco. If you will be there too, send her a [note](#) so that you connect during the conference.
- Co-Founder Elisabeth O’Byron shares six strategies for supporting students and families, no matter what language they speak, in her article “Keeping the Family Close,” [featured this month in Language Magazine](#) (pages 24-27).
- Audio support for Mam-speaking families is now being piloted in four classrooms in Oakland Unified School District.

News You Can Use: Engaging Families on the Importance of Early Literacy Foundations

- [An Old and Contested Solution to Boost Reading Scores: Phonics](#) (Dana Goldstein)
- [Why Deeply Diving Into Content Could Be the Key to Reading Comprehension](#) (Katrina Schwartz)
- [Reading and Language in the Early Grades](#) (Catherine E. Snow and Timothy J. Matthews)
- [What Effective Pre-K Literacy Instruction Looks Like](#) (International Literacy Association)
- [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) (National Association for the Education of Young Children)

Featured Partner: Greater Good Science Center

[Kindergarten Early Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Pilot](#)

Through a grant from the Greater Good Science Center, Family Engagement Lab launched a FASTalk pilot in 2018 to help kindergarten students build prosocial skills like



generosity, gratitude, and forgiveness in combination with literacy and core academic skills. The pilot is part of Greater Good Science Center's *Raising Caring, Courageous Kids* initiative to help parents raise kids committed to the well-being of others.

Since its initial nine-week run during the 2018-2019 school year, the pilot has served nearly 300 kindergarten students and their families in three schools in Alameda, CA. Parents in the pilot have reported that the text messages have helped them learn new ways to support reading, writing, and character development at home. Parents also reported that they believe the messages are benefiting their child's learning, with one parent noting that the texts prompt "more meaningful conversations" with their child.

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.



In this month's edition of the Learning Series, [@FamilyELab's](#) co-founder [@vidya_sundaram](#) shares information on early literacy development and how families can help build these critical foundational skills. [Read more here.](#)



[@FamilyELab's](#) #FASTalk tool helps teachers engage diverse families to improve student outcomes. [Learn more.](#)

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.

