

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER *for Leaders*

Founder's Focus: *Creating Moments of Meaningful Connection*

Eight weeks ago, my son Scott's preschool teacher handed me a brown paper lunch bag full of art supplies and project ideas that she hoped would help keep him busy for the (intended) 2-week school closure. As I peeked inside, I noticed my bag had a lot more yellow supplies than the other bags (a yellow flower, a yellow bunny...). A nod to his favorite color, I smiled and thanked her, feeling grateful for the personal connection and relationship she has built with my son.



Fast forward to today, and interactions with his teacher largely take the form of weekly, whole class Zoom meetings. All 12 little "Zoom squares" have a 3-year-old with a VERY important message for the teacher. Recognizing that competing for individual teacher attention is even more challenging *virtually*, Scott usually lasts about 12 minutes before he's "ready to say goodbye." As he sneaks out of the room, I wave goodbye to his classmates and wonder to myself how long these video calls last, as we've never made it to the end of one.

It is a difficult and overwhelming time right now, and taking the time to help children feel heard and valued can be challenging. The most important adults in children's lives—teachers and parents—are facing new and increased demands and levels of stress as the coronavirus-forced school closures upend familiar routines and a sense of predictability. Indeed, emotion researchers highlight a broad [shift in the emotional landscape](#) caused by coronavirus, reporting that 95% of surveyed adults are currently feeling anxiety, stress, and fear.

However, this difficult time also serves to highlight an important truth and opportunity: that emotional intelligence (a set of skills that can be practiced and developed) is essential. Our ability to manage challenging, unpleasant emotions—and to be emotion "coaches" for children—is more important now than ever before. Fortunately, we can start small by creating moments of meaningful connection with our families, our children, our students. Moments where we take time to listen and connect, model emotion skills, and foster feelings like valued and understood. These moments add up.

While our intent at Family Engagement Lab has always been for FASTalk messages to help prompt meaningful moments of connection between parents and children while building key skills, we're especially thankful to be able to play this important role during this extraordinary time. Let us know what "meaningful moments" look like in your home by tweeting [@FamilyELab](#) or [@elisabeth_cady](#) or using the hashtag #FASTalkMM.

Warmly,

View Blog Posts

In Case You Missed It

In Family Engagement Lab's most recent press release, [FASTalk Offers Expert Learning Tips and Resources to Maximize Learning for Families Without Internet Access](#), FEL shares tools and services that break down the barriers to school-home partnerships and provide support for school systems facing challenges during school closures.

[Read the full article.](#)

In ["Take your time to prepare." With Penny Bauder, Vidya Sundaram and Elisabeth O'Bryon](#), Family Engagement Lab's co-founders—featured as Inspirational Women in STEM and Tech—talk about their career paths, reflect on their experience as women in STEM, and share five leadership lessons they've learned along the way.

[Read the full article.](#)

News You Can Use: Engaging Families to Support Equity and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources for School Communities](#) (RULER)
- [SEL Discussion Series for Parents and Caregivers](#) (CASEL)
- [10 Ways Parents Can Bring Social-Emotional Learning Home](#) (EdSurge)
- [Leveraging New Parent Appreciation Benefits Students](#) (Education Dive)
- [How Parents Can Help Kids Thrive in an Uncertain Future](#) (Greater Good Magazine)

[FASTalk is supporting continuous learning through PK-5 multilingual texts with FASTalk Direct.](#)

FASTalk Direct Highlights

- **FASTalk Direct** launched on March 18, 2020 to support student learning during widespread closures
- **14,978** parents are receiving FASTalk Direct tips across the US in grades PK-5
- **9** languages are supported
- Messages support **SEL and literacy**

Based on the success of FASTalk Direct, we will be expanding the program to offer **FASTalk Direct Summer** to compensate for unfinished learning during the school year. [Learn more](#) or [schedule a demo](#).

Get My District's Custom Signup Link

	FASTalk	FASTalk Direct
How do parents interact?	One-way (if the teacher signs up for an account)	One-way
How many languages are supported?	9	10 (includes Spanish)
What type of messages are supported?	Messages to parents about their child's progress	Messages to parents about their child's progress and literacy skills
How can the content be customized?	Teacher sets content through FASTalk	FASTalk can be customized to support learning in specific languages
Other Notes	The content is designed to be used by teachers	One-way only

FASTalk Connection: Engaging Families on the Importance of Equity and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) During At-Home Learning



advancing educational equity. Our goal has always been to create a solution that easily enables educators to connect and collaborate with *all* families to support student learning, especially families from diverse linguistic backgrounds and under-resourced communities. While FASTalk's product features support this goal (e.g., pre-scheduled tips and activities delivered via SMS, automatic language translation), our content also advances our equity-focused mission. By embedding social and emotional learning tips into our weekly text messages, we help parents support the development of critical

skills that facilitate equity-driven attitudes and behaviors, such as perspective taking, empathy, and an ability to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion. Furthermore, while relationship building is critical from both an SEL and equity perspective, FASTalk is designed to promote and support strong teacher-parent relationships and parent-child relationships.

Interested in reading more about the intersection of Equity and SEL? Review these resources:

[Guiding Questions for Educators: Promote Equity Using SEL](#)

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Applying an Equity Lens to Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#)

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

"I love how we are able to communicate and see my child assignments since some parents have to work and can't really keep up, but with this, I can keep up and go back, relook at it, and help my child out. Thank you for FASTalk!"

-Parent of transitional kinder student
Oakland Unified, California



"I love how simple and easy it is to be able to do from my phone."

-Parent of pre-K student
Desoto Parish, Louisiana

Educator Highlight: Rebecca Bootes



Rebecca Bootes, Kindergarten teacher at Prescott Elementary School of Oakland Unified School District, discusses how FASTalk helps her support social and emotional learning and connect with families during school closures.

FASTalk has been such a great resource for my class this year, now more than ever with the school closures. The messaging feature has allowed me to stay in contact with parents and even allows for translations for my Arabic and Spanish speaking families. Parents reach out to me concerned about academics, worried that they are unable to adequately prepare their children for first grade next year. With distance learning we might not be able to replicate the vibrance of a classroom or the academic work that students would have engaged in, but social emotional skills can most definitely be reinforced at home. I often remind my families that social emotional

learning is just as important for them to focus on! Helping our children develop strong social emotional skills will make a world of difference when we are back in the classroom. FASTalk does a wonderful job of empowering families by providing them with engaging activities that are straightforward and easily accessible. The variety of activities reinforce developmentally appropriate learning goals and balance both academic and social emotional skills.

View [Rebecca's YouTube playlist](#) with read alouds she recorded to support her students' during school closures.



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.



ICYMI: [@FamilyELab's](#) co-founders talk about their career paths, reflect on their experience as women in STEM, and share five leadership lessons they've learned along the way in this article from [@thriveglobal](#): <http://ow.ly/vrbY50zn6tr>



Share this article by [@EdSurge](#) with parents to ensure that students continue build and practice social and emotional skills during at-home learning in meaningful ways:

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-04-02-10-ways-parents-can-bring-social-emotional-learning-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.

