

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER *for Teachers*

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.](#)

[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**

FASTalk
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Some of my teachers already use FASTalk, what's the difference between FASTalk and FASTalk Direct?

A: FASTalk Direct is a new messaging program that allows teachers to deliver text messages even in areas with limited internet access and parents who receive messages even in areas with limited internet access.

- FASTalk Direct is available in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese.
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FASTalk Direct is a new direct response version of FASTalk to support during school closures. It is a text messaging program that allows teachers to deliver text messages even in areas with limited internet access and parents who receive messages even in areas with limited internet access.

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	FASTalk	FASTalk Direct
How do parents interact?	One-way (of the school/teacher to the parent)	Out-out
How many languages are supported?	9	12 (most updated)
Who speaks the messages?	Messages to parents come from teachers	Messages to parents come from teachers
How are the content the messages?	Teacher can customize through FASTalk	FASTalk can customize messages through FASTalk
Other notes	Teacher can customize through FASTalk	Out-out only

© English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Chinese, Japanese

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.](#)

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



A founding principle of Family Engagement Lab is a commitment to 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](#)

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 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.



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



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

-Parent of Pre-K student
Desoto Parish, Louisiana

help my child out. Thank you for FASTalk!"

-Parent of Transitional
Kinder student
Oakland Unified, California

We want to hear from you!

As we're nearing the end of the school year, would you be willing to share your experiences about the Covid-19 school closures and your opinion about FASTalk in a brief, 10-minute voluntary survey? Your feedback will help us ensure that we are providing the most relevant and impactful resources for educators and families during this challenging time and moving forward! Everyone who completes the feedback form will be entered into a drawing to win a brand new iPad for yourself OR for a student in need! We will notify the winner via email.

Yes, I'd like to share my feedback

Family Engagement Resources

- Teachers, [share these strategies to practice reading and writing](#) with parents to support them as they experience different kinds of challenges.
- [10 Ways Parents Can Bring Social-Emotional Learning Home](#): Now that parents and caregivers are overseeing learning at home, we need to ensure that students continue to build and practice social and emotional skills in meaningful ways.
- [How Parents Can Help Kids Thrive in an Uncertain Future](#): Kids need resilience, compassion, humility, and a moral compass—not academic achievement at any cost.

FASTalk Tip of the Month: How to Use FASTalk to Appreciate Students' and Families' Support

An enormous amount of effort is required for families to help and support their children at home to meet nutritional, academic, and emotional needs. In a recent survey asking FASTalk parents what they wish they could tell their child's teacher, immense expressions of gratitude for teachers came pouring in. One

parent said, "Gracias por todo el esfuerzo y por tener todo organizado." (Translation: *Thank you for all the effort and having everything organized.*). Another parent said, "I appreciate all she's doing during this time. I know it's just as hard on teachers!"



The FASTalk Inbox is a great communication tool you can use to show appreciation for your students' parents and caregivers by having individual conversations with families through text:

1. Go to www.fastalk.org and log-in with your email and password.
2. Click on INBOX tab at the top of the page.
3. Select the student's name on the left, then the caregiver's name in the middle column.
4. Enter your message of gratitude in the chat box on the right side of the screen and click the paper airplane icon when you're ready to send the message.

Here are a couple ideas you can use to customize:

- Thank you for your support at home. I'm grateful for _____ and miss [student's name's] _____.
- Dear [parent/caregiver's name], You are doing a great job supporting [student's name] at home! I appreciate _____.
- You are amazing, [Parent/caregiver's name]! Thank you for supporting [student's name] by _____.

These messages will go out real-time and are automatically translated if the parent has a home language other than English (supported in 100+ languages).

For additional support, [view this "how to" video](#). Please contact support@fastalk.org with questions about FASTalk Chatbox.

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.



It's been a while with no school. What can you do at home to help your child keep learning? When in doubt, read! Here are some ways to practice reading skills from [@XceptionalLives](#): <https://tinyurl.com/yx5w6fap> #familyengagement



Parents, read this article help your children thrive by learning why they need resilience, compassion, humility, and a moral compass. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_parents_can_help_kids_thrive_in_an_uncertain_future #FELfamilies #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.

