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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER *for Champions*

Founder's Focus: *Today, November 15, is Family Engagement Lab's birthday!*

At Family Engagement Lab, we work to build bridges for every family and every classroom to support students every day. FASTalk is helping schools and teachers share weekly information and tips in families' home language that are ***explicitly connected to student learning***.

This focus is especially meaningful during the pandemic. **Since March, FASTalk has strengthened school-family partnerships to support learning for 30,000 students in grades PK-8. Schools and families have exchanged 1.1 million messages *directly related to student learning*.** For comparison, from 2017 until the start of the pandemic FASTalk supported 750K interactions for 9,000 families and teachers. Our text message library includes more than 3,000 learning tips that reinforce Common Core skills and content in 12 ELA and SEL curricula, and include culturally relevant adaptations in multiple languages.



We are also proud of FASTalk's growing evidence base. Through multiple evaluations, FASTalk has been found to meaningfully advance literacy outcomes for elementary-age students, when compared to similar peers whose families did not receive the weekly messages. Importantly, FASTalk is having a powerful impact on the achievement of English Learners, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who start the year behind their peers academically.

What do we hope the future holds? The greatest opportunity to improve student outcomes can be realized when more educators recognize, prioritize, and support the role that families play in learning. We are grateful that you all have taken this important step. But we know there is much more work to be done.

With your support, we couldn't be more ready for the opportunities ahead — including exciting new partnerships and expanding our impact in new grade levels and learning domains. We'd like to extend a special thank you to the individuals and organizations that played an especially pivotal role in our early days:

- Bill Jackson, who kicked it all off with a simple question, "Do you want to start a company?" The GreatSchools Board of Directors, led by Ann Fuell, supported a legal structure for Family Engagement Lab to operate. Special thanks are due to Matthew Nelson, Jon Deane, and LeAnn Stewart for their assistance as we spread our wings.

- Kristi Kimball, and the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, and Curtiss Sarikey (via the Stuart Foundation), whose early investments in Family Engagement Lab helped us develop FASTalk and study its impact on student outcomes.
- Mike Fee, co-founder of Spotlight Education, who lifted us up on a national stage just as we were getting started.
- NewSchools, and our mentor, Esther Tricoche, who welcomed us into a powerful community of leaders working to improve learning outcomes.
- Not enough can be said about Rinat Fried, OUSD researcher, who deftly helped us to align with OUSD's instructional plan and maintain a laser focus on improving literacy outcomes. Thanks to you and Keith Welch, it's working. All along the way, Claudia Medina, Raquel Jimenez, Bernadette Zermeño, Kimberly Allen, and family engagement champions across the country helped us to center the voices of our country's most marginalized families.
- Our early investors who saw the potential in our focus, including the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Schusterman Family Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Judy Wurtzel at Schusterman Family Foundation and Rebecca Kockler (during her time at LDOE), who connected the dots for an opportunity to align FASTalk with high-quality instructional materials, and Stacey Labit-Moorehead for making it happen in Louisiana schools.
- Rita Ferrandino and Hailey Kuhn, for lighting the path to building a financially sustainable organization.
- Rigorous research from Ben York and Susanna Loeb (READY4K), Peter Bergman, Todd Rogers, and many others who saw the potential of using SMS to engage diverse families in learning. FASTalk stands on their shoulders.
- Our own families, whose bottomless love and encouragement allow us to bring our best selves to our work every day.

So many more of you have helped us on our journey, and we are grateful to each and every one of you. Here's to the next four years!

Sincerely,

Vidya Sundaram and Elisabeth O'Bryon
Co-Founders, [Family Engagement Lab](#)

[View Blog Posts](#)

Expert Tips to Support School-Family Partnership in Flexible Learning Environments

Family Engagement Lab is curating relevant family engagement research and emerging best practices to help school leaders and educators welcome families into a new school year. We will continue to add new resources and innovative practices to our [back-to-school guide](#) regularly.

To contribute to this resource, complete this brief [survey](#).

[Tips for District & School Leaders to Support Parent-Teacher Partnerships](#)

Encourage teachers to be transparent about any missed material from 2019-2020 and invite parents into the solution. 70% of parents (and 75% of Hispanic and African American parents) want to know what material their child is missing at the end of the 2019-2020 and how their school plans to make up that material (Learning Heroes, 2020).

What can this look like in flexible and remote learning environments?

- One-on-one conversations with parents to discuss instruction that was not covered in the previous year, and any beginning of year test results.
- Have a goal-setting family meeting to set goals and identify what the teacher, student, and family will do to meet them.
- Share assessment data with parents individually. In addition to helping schools plan, EdNavigator highlights this is an important time for teachers to share and discuss test scores with parents.



Visit <http://www.familyengagementlab.org> for more information.

Meaningful Moments: Diverse Representation Matters

Family Engagement Lab believes diverse representation matters. We would like to recognize and celebrate the historic significance of the 2020 Presidential election, with a record turnout of voters electing our first female, Black, and South Asian Vice President. Madam Vice President-elect Kamala Harris is entering the second highest office, bringing lived experiences that reflect our country's growing diversity. Kamala often pays tribute to her mother, a cancer researcher who came to the United States from India in the 1960s and participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Early in the race, Kamala was one of the few candidates to bring racial equity in education into the spotlight, famously highlighting her own experience with school integration. We applaud her message to girls to "see yourself in a way that others may not simply because they've never seen it



before.” We look forward to future generations standing on her shoulders to shatter the next ceiling.

Photo: Kamala Harris’ inauguration as California Attorney General in 2010, where Vidya Sundaram performed bharatanatyam, a classical dance form from South India.

Educator Highlight: Stacey Labit Moorehead, Education Consultant and FASTalk Parent

In my work at the Louisiana Department of Education, I collaborated with FASTalk to improve literacy outcomes for students in Louisiana. This partnership with FASTalk provided the opportunity for educators to extend literacy support into the home environment and build positive relationships with families.

As a result of our partnership with FASTalk, the Department measured improvements in family engagement and increases in student performance. This fall, I found it surprising when I began to receive literacy specific text messages from my daughter's first grade teacher at Morris Jeff Community School.

Earlier this week, just as we were sitting down to dinner, I received a FASTalk message mentioning Izzy’s class was introduced to fables earlier in the day. As our family sat around the table I casually asked, “Izzy what is a fable?” My daughter responded, “It’s a story that teaches a lesson. How did you know we learned that today?” We continued the conversation, discussing books we have at home that might be fables and what type of fable my daughter might like to write to teach her little brother a lesson. I knew the work to expand FASTalk across Louisiana was important and exciting but having the personal benefit as a parent makes it so much more meaningful.

At a time that family and school connections are of utmost importance, FASTalk provides an innovative approach in supporting educators, school leaders, and parents.

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 Learning Series blog, [@FamilyELab](#) co-founders [@vidya_sundaram](#) and [@elisabeth_cady](#) celebrate turning 4 and discuss how their work builds bridges for every family and every classroom to support students every day. Read the full blog post: <http://www.familyengagementlab.org/learning-series.html> #FELfamilies

#tipsforleaders to increase #familyengagement: Have teachers share assessment data with parents individually. In addition to helping schools plan, EdNavigator highlights this is an important time for teachers to share and discuss test scores with parents: <https://www.ednavigator.com/ideas/usi>

[ng-test-results-to-help-families-forecast-long-term-student-outcomes](#)

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.



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