

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER *for Leaders*

Founder's Focus: *The joy of just one thing.*

Are you finding joy in your adapted fall school rituals?

For example, when I'm feeling overwhelmed and need to focus on an independent project (e.g., writing a report), I have a specific table at the local Panera where I go to give myself permission to focus on one thing, and one thing only. The cell reception is terrible, and the WiFi is great. Fueled by mac n' cheese, I block out those pesky electronic distractions and get my project done. It's sublime.



When I want to shift feelings of stress to joy and satisfaction, I focus on one thing at a time (and hopefully the most important thing) and create the conditions to do just that.

For educators and families, collaborating in a new normal has brought a lot of anxiety and pressure. What would focusing on one thing at a time look like for educators and families? And what should that "one thing" be?

This summer, my co-founder, Dr. Elisabeth O'Bryon and FASTalk Sr. Project Manager, Hannah Jong Lee, helped hundreds of leading early childhood educators answer that very question in a powerful workshop, "[Supporting our Youngest Readers: Use Data, not Donuts](#)" presented for the Louisiana Department of Education's Teacher Leader Summit. (OK, some of us are little obsessed with comfort food.)

In one workshop exercise, participants are asked to identify from a list which family engagement activities most powerfully contribute to improved student outcomes. The highest-impact strategies surprised many of our participants. These strategies — such as teaching parents strategies to support learning and sharing with families regular data on student skill levels — are collaborative, build parents' capacity, and are directly connected to student learning.

Stressful moments like these require us to maintain focus on what works and find joy in that focus.

What's your Panera story? If there was one thing you could do to improve teacher-family partnership, what would it be?

Sincerely,

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

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

To all of you who work in education, we know you are working day and night right now to figure out how to help our kids feel a sense of security, connectedness, and stability so they are ready to learn this fall. We see you and appreciate you!

We are adding 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](#)

Regularly update family contact information in your SIS. Maintaining up-to-date contact information along with communication preferences can save time for educators and school leaders.

What you can do this fall:

- Request that families provide email, landline and cell phone information during registration for all primary caregivers.
- Request contact information for other adults who may be supervising student learning during distance learning periods.
- Ask families their language preferences for school communications. School systems collecting “Home language” data may find that many families prefer written communications in English or a different language from their home language.



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

FASTalk Connection

FASTalk helps schools and families bring joy back into learning. Through FASTalk, schools can easily adopt the foundational pillars of high-impact family engagement by strengthening teacher-family relationships, building the capacity of families, and connecting to student learning. An “all-in-one” solution, FASTalk also provides fun and engaging professional development and support for educators to partner optimally and efficiently with families.

Interested in learning more? Visit <http://www.familyengagementlab.org>.

Meaningful Moments

Flamboyan’s Senior Director for Evaluation & Learning [Cecily Darden Adams](#) recently penned “[What Teachers Told Us](#),” where



she shares her experiences as a mom and professional over the last several months. During this time, she listened to teachers and families about what the first week of school might look like – their hopes, dreams, fears, needs, and advice for each other. What they shared is captured in two new Flamboyant resources. These resources represent the voices of nearly 900 teachers in Washington, DC, during the peak of the global pandemic’s hold on DC.

“At Flamboyant, we center listening with the intent to disrupt bias and value communities, particularly those impacted by inequity and injustice. We listen, and typically, we share our findings with our partner schools and system leaders. But this moment is different. We must share the voices of partner-school educators with a broader audience – teachers and leaders *everywhere*.”

Access Flamboyant’s new resources:

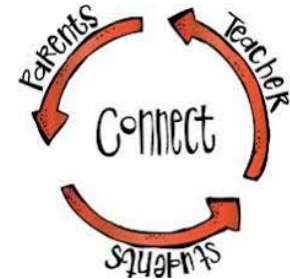
- [REAL Leadership: How Leaders Can Support Educators to Engage Families During Distance](#)
- [Learning Teachers to Teachers: Advice for Family Engagement During Distance Learning](#)

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

FASTalk Weekly Activity

Monday: Pick an object and say: I see something that starts with the letter S. Can your child guess what it is? Play anywhere!

Wednesday: After your child guesses the object have them tell you the sound the first letter makes. You’re helping your child learn about letters & sounds.



During this recent FASTalk activity, a parent of a kindergarten student in Orleans Parish, Louisiana shared the following feedback.

"We love playing this game during dinner! The whole family can participate."

"I was able to do some activities that I would not have thought of on my own to help my son learn a concept."

-Parent, Mesa Public School, Arizona



"It reminds a parent or guardian that may have a busy schedule to always set aside a little time to sit with the child to help them learn and to make sure the child is on track with school grades."

- Parent, Oakland Unified School District, California

Educator Highlight: Sara Norris, Literacy Coordinator, Oakland Unified School District



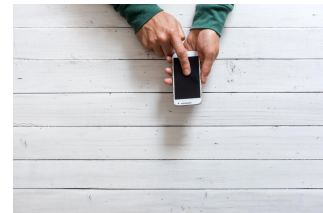
Just last week, FASTalk re-launched in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), for the fourth consecutive year, with an expanded implementation to support all PK-5 families district wide. Each year that we have implemented FASTalk in OUSD, we have seen **meaningful improvements on student outcomes** for students whose families receive the weekly messages — especially for students who do not share a home language with their child's teacher. Much of this success is due to the network of supporting champions across the district who prioritize the importance of engaging families equitably, including Sara Norris, OUSD's Network 2 Literacy Coordinator.

As the district point person for the FASTalk partnership, Sara works closely with the FASTalk team to ensure that FASTalk is part of the "system of support" in elementary literacy. She reviews the content to ensure that the FASTalk tips are reinforcing OUSD's academic goals and regularly brings in her colleagues for collaborative planning around strategic implementation. To prepare for the 2020-2021 launch, Sara facilitated communication about FASTalk with network supervisors in the biweekly newsletter and co-developed resources with the FASTalk project manager, such as a FAQ document with principals and teachers in mind.

"The power of FASTalk messaging lies in the hands of families," said Sara. "The standards-aligned texts provide a jumping off point for adult-student communication about learning that leads to more learning, forging deeper connections between school and home. The messages facilitate family engagement with the curriculum, enlivening content and directly addressing the needs of our linguistically diverse OUSD community by offering texts in more than 100 languages. We are thrilled that in just a few short years, the program has grown from serving a handful of schools and grade levels to reaching all of our more than 20K preschool through fifth-grade families!"

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.



Through #FASTalk, parents can overcome time and language barriers to engage with their child's teacher about how to effectively support learning at home. View [@FamilyELab's](#) introduction video to learn more:
<https://vimeo.com/356302351>

#tipsforleaders to increase
#familyengagement: Regularly update family contact information in your SIS. Maintaining up-to-date contact information along with communication preferences can save time.

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.

