

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

NEWSLETTER for Leaders

Founder's Focus: Partnership in a Pandemic and Beyond

"Is Talia paying attention?"

As we kick off a unique school year, teachers, students, and families are transitioning into new roles, taking on new responsibilities, and establishing new routines. And, as we witnessed in the spring (and will continue to witness this fall and beyond), the roles and responsibilities that teachers and parents are taking on in support of students' education have never been more intertwined. Questions like, "Is Talia paying attention? What does first grade writing look like? Is Devon confused? Is the lesson going too fast? Too slow? Is Tia falling behind?" are just as likely to be on teachers' minds as parents' minds as instruction extends beyond the classroom into families' homes.



While the parent-teacher role "convergence" prompted by distance learning sheds light on a number of challenges (e.g., parents aren't trained teachers, teachers aren't trained virtual facilitators, to name a few), it also highlights an opportunity for authentic academic partnership and underscores how truly critical it is that parents and teachers regularly share information with one another. To most effectively support their children, parents need ongoing insights from teachers: what areas need support, what strengths need cultivating, what strategies will work best for specific children. Teachers also need this information regularly from families.

It is my hope that new patterns of behavior that are initiated to address today's acute needs carry on long after the pandemic. Because the reality is that although the current educational reality has precipitated more urgency around collaboration and information sharing, parents and teachers have always shared roles and responsibilities related to supporting student success and helping children thrive.

What new parent-teacher partnership activities have you recently initiated that you intend to continue long after the 2020-2021 school year? We'd love to know — tweet us [@FamilyELab](#) or use the hashtag #PartnershipPostPandemic.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth O'Bryon
Co-Founder, [Family Engagement Lab](#)

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Hurricane Laura Recovery



Last week Hurricane Laura made landfall on the Texas/Louisiana border as a Category 4 hurricane, devastating southwest Louisiana as well as parts of north and central Louisiana and forcing thousands of residents to evacuate. Many Louisiana and Texas residents continue to face loss of electricity, running water, and structures — leaving many businesses and homes destroyed. Recovery will take time. The Family Engagement Lab team would like to acknowledge the heroic efforts many are undertaking in the area, including educators and school leaders, to rebuild their communities.

Below are some ways to [help those impacted](#) by Hurricane Laura:

- Donate
- Volunteer
- Provide Shelter
- Give Blood

Back-to-School 2020: Expert Tips to Support School-Family Partnership in Flexible Learning Environments

Parents want to redefine relationships between school & home during the upcoming school year (Learning Heroes, 2020). We are 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 this document regularly.

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

Tips for District & School Leaders to Support Parent-Teacher Partnerships

At the Start of the School Year, District & School Leaders Can...

- **Help parents understand (in friendly & accessible language) what their children are learning and how parents can help.** Experts recommend focusing on the *quality* of communication more than worrying about managing the *quantity*. For example, Spanish speaking parents have a much greater desire for communication from their children's school- 90% compared to 76% for English dominant parents (Abriendo Puertas/Latino Decisions, July 2020). In another recent study, parents of middle and high school students are interested in more communication (Brookings, July 2020).

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

Feedback Feature



Racquel Deville of Calcasieu Parish Public Schools recently completed FEL's Back-to-School 2020 Welcoming Families Survey and provided the following feedback:



"Many schools are hosting virtual events for parents (i.e. virtual meet-the-teacher, virtual open houses, etc.). To support parents of students with disabilities who need assistance with using technology, 'tech notebooks' will be provided. The notebooks will contain details to increase parents' understanding of how to navigate the various digital platforms their children will be using to access grade-level curriculum as well as the digital platforms schools will use to interact with parents."



Racquel recognized Carolyn Evans, a SPED teacher at Calcasieu Parish Public Schools for the outstanding work she does for students with exceptionalities.

"Carolyn Evans, a SPED teacher at Pearl Watson Elementary, goes above and beyond to ensure that the students with disabilities in her self-contained class are not only exposed to grade-level curriculum, but develop an understanding of the materials they are engaged in. Carolyn dresses up in costumes and provides her students with tangible visual aids that can connect to the lesson. Students returning to school for 2020-2021 will see Mrs. Evans wearing gear that relates to Science to connect to the fifth-grade text 'The Making of a Scientist' and medieval clothing to connect to the fourth-grade text 'The Whipping Boy.'"

Meaningful Moments

In July 2020, we wrote about [our commitment to anti-racism](#) and how it relates to our mission at Family Engagement Lab. We would like to share with you the steps we are taking to support families of color in the communities we serve, including:

- Examining our content with a lens towards ensuring its continued applicability and relevance across race, economic status, and language.
- Sharing resources through our Learning Series.
- Holding discussions among our staff and Board about racism.
- Increasing collection of race & ethnicity data to better understand how our services are used and valued by race/ethnicity.

[Read more about our current efforts.](#)

OUR COMMITMENT TO ANTI-RACISM IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

7/7/2020

At Family Engagement Lab, we are committed to supporting and studying schools' efforts to equitably engage families in their child's learning. Our commitment extends to combating racism in this area. There is ample evidence that, despite the best intentions of schools and educators, families and children of color experience multiple layers of racism.

A 2019 study by Karin Kitchens found that, at an institutional level, schools enrolling Black students receive less funding, and while their families have a higher tax burden, fewer Black students are afforded the same educational and career opportunities as their White peers.

In the area of teacher to parent communication, sociologist Hua-Yu Sebastian Cheng has found that race, ethnicity, and immigration status factor strongly. In his study, teachers were more likely to reach out to parents of Black and Latino students about behavioral problems. And teachers were less likely to reach out to parents

"Es una manera más fácil de comunicar a nosotros los papás y conocer sobre los trabajos de nuestros hijos."

(It is an easier way to communicate with us parents and know about our children's work.)

-Parent, Oakland Unified School District, California



"Some of the things we have done were ideas I would've never thought to do with my child."

-Parent, Lafayette Academy, New Orleans, LA

Educator Highlight: Alissa Kilpatrick, Coordinator of Student Learning, DeSoto Parish



As the site's FASTalk lead last year, Ms. Kilpatrick facilitated communication between the school system, schools and Family Engagement Lab to ensure a smooth FASTalk implementation.

After a successful pilot, Ms. Kilpatrick spearheaded the expansion of FASTalk district-wide and across multiple grade levels to make FASTalk available to all PK-8th grade teachers and families in 2020-2021.

FASTalk helps districts see accelerated gains when adopting new high-quality curriculum, as was experienced last year in DeSoto Parish, Louisiana, where they piloted both the Expeditionary Learning curriculum and FASTalk and found meaningful student growth. Overall, second grade oral reading fluency scores were stagnant or dropped across the district with the exception of second grade students at North Desoto Upper Elementary. In their early literacy screener, the North Desoto Upper Elementary second grade students that were below proficient in oral reading fluency scores dropped from 32% to 24% from fall to winter. This is the only second grade group that was enrolled in FASTalk messaging AND they are the only group using Expeditionary Learning curriculum.

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.



Did you know that [@FamilyELab](#) has a #FASTalk Teacher Resources page dedicated to providing teachers with helpful tools and information to support #familyengagement? Check it out at <http://www.familyengagementlab.org/t>

Back-to-school #tipsforteachers to increase #familyengagement: Initiate contact as soon as you know who is in your class. #FELfamilies #FASTalk

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.

