

FASTalk: Raising Student Achievement Through an Evidence-Based Family Engagement Program August 2019

2018-19 was an exciting school year for FASTalk. FASTalk reached the families of 3,866 students in 56 schools across all elementary grades (Transitional Kindergarten through fifth grade). Our implementations expanded from the East Bay Area to include students, families, and teachers in parishes across the state of Louisiana, as well as in individual schools in Arizona and Connecticut. Demographically, we reached a high number of students from low-income backgrounds, English Learners, and students with disabilities. FASTalk supported over 100 languages through Google Translate and our content was translated by native speakers into Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Khmer, Pashto, Amharic, Tagalog, and Mongolian. Most importantly, **FASTalk had a meaningful effect on student-level outcomes as measured through literacy benchmark assessments.**

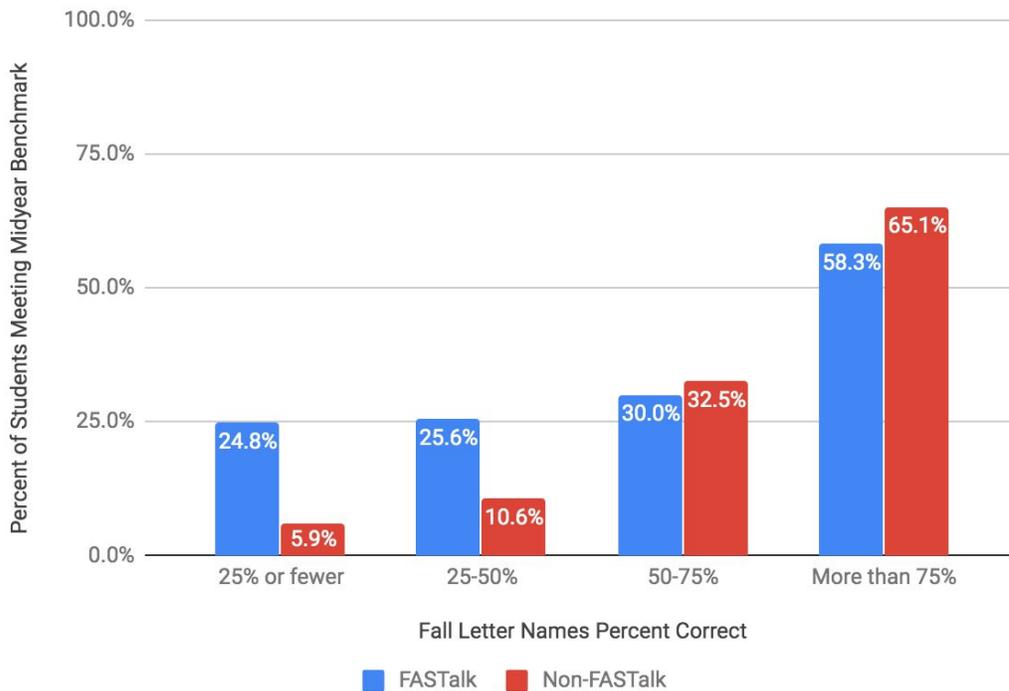
A summary of our student-level insights from our largest implementations (Oakland Unified School District and multiple Louisiana parishes) is provided below, in addition to key next steps.

Spotlight: Oakland Unified School District

While report card grades were used in 2017-18 to examine FASTalk's impact in OUSD, we were able to explore FASTalk's impact on student-level literacy outcomes during the 2018-19 school year with Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) standardized assessment data. We are pleased to share that we hit our target by identifying measurable, literacy score improvements for students whose parents use FASTalk. Using a quasi-experimental, matched comparison design, we found that low-performing Kindergarteners (as measured by Fall literacy assessments) whose families participated in FASTalk demonstrated improved student achievement on the F&P literacy assessment, as compared to similar peers. (Note: OUSD FASTalk students are more likely than their non-FASTalk peers to be Latino, Spanish speakers, and English Learners.)

A closer examination of the data highlights FASTalk's powerful impact on improving literacy outcomes for the lowest performing Kindergarten students. **Notably, FASTalk helped four times more OUSD Kindergarteners who recognized less than 25% of their letters and sounds in the fall meet midyear literacy benchmarks during the 2018-19 school year.** The graph below provides a comparison between FASTalk students (blue) and non-FASTalk students in the district (red), highlighting that FASTalk's greatest impact is seen among low performing students.

MIDYEAR - FASTalk vs. All Non-FASTalk Students



	Number of students in each letter names category			
	25% or fewer	25-50%	50-75%	More than 75%
FASTalk	230	86	90	295
Non-FASTalk	187	113	163	871

FASTalk's notable impact on lower performing students may be related to a number of factors. First, parents who have observed their children struggling academically may be especially interested in learning and applying new strategies for supporting their child's learning at home. Second, given the relationship between demographic risk factors (e.g., low SES, limited English proficiency) and low levels of student achievement, parents of lower performing students may be accessing a regular stream of learning-focused resources in their home language for the first time - making FASTalk messages more salient and engaging. To learn more about the contributing mechanisms, we will be examining FASTalk usage data to explore whether parents of struggling students were more engaged with FASTalk (as measured by the number of messages sent to their child's teacher).

Our analyses for the 2018-19 year also revealed that the F&P academic performance of low-performing Kindergarten students whose parents sent more than five messages to their

child's teacher exceeded the performance of Kindergarten students whose families sent less than five FASTalk messages. This result is consistent with our findings from the 2017-18 school year, which revealed FASTalk was more effective at improving student literacy outcomes for highly engaged families who sent five or more messages.

For 1st grade students, we did not uncover the same FASTalk effects as were found with Kindergarteners. We are continuing to run new analyses with our data to uncover whether we need to adjust the threshold of F&P growth in order to observe FASTalk's impact. It may also be informative for us to explore different outcome variables or exclude certain variables in our models in order to shed light on FASTalk's student-level impact in this grade level. Additionally, we plan to separate out the 1st grade students who are in their second year of FASTalk from those who are in their first year to identify if and how FASTalk has uniquely impacted that group of students' academic achievement.

Spotlight: Louisiana

We have learned from our teacher and parent surveys that the key adults in students' lives are observing the positive effects of FASTalk with their children. Indeed, 83% of teachers in Louisiana who implemented FASTalk with both their general education and special education students reported that they see signs that FASTalk is benefitting students. Teachers have noted that the quality of classroom discussions have improved as a function of students having the opportunity to engage their families in the curriculum and practice key skills at home. For parents, 89% reported that they believe the text messages are benefitting their child's learning. These are powerful sources of data and we look forward to having the student-level academic data to back up the observations of teachers and parents.