

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LAB

Press Release: 4/27/2020

## **FASTalk Offers Expert Learning Tips and Resources to Maximize Learning for Families Without Internet Access**

Baton Rouge, La. -- Family Engagement Lab (FEL), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, tackles growing inequality in educational outcomes for low-income students, English Learners, and students with disabilities by engaging families in learning. FEL recognizes that schools may need additional support to reach and engage families in at-home learning during and after school closures to compensate for lost classroom learning time.

To support rapidly evolving priorities related to family communication and learning at home, [FEL offers FASTalk](#) (Families and Schools Talk), a simple, accessible, text message-based learning tool to support families with limited access to devices and the internet, as well as those facing language barriers.

FASTalk provides support for school systems experiencing challenges with:

- **Lost learning time, widening learning and opportunity gaps between well-resourced and underserved students.** More than one-third of students lack access to devices and internet used to support learning. These gaps in access represent lost learning opportunities for many students.
- **Outdated digital contact information, limiting the ability of schools to reach families and students.** School systems may be unable to reach as many as half of their students and families ([Musaddiq, Prettyman, and Smith, 2019](#)).
- **Inability to maintain focus on high-quality curriculum via distance learning.** The Louisiana Department of Education has required teachers to continue using the curricular materials currently used in the classroom.
- **Lack of available tools to provide feedback to students and families.** Nearly one-quarter of Louisiana students are not receiving feedback from their teachers about their learning progress.
- **Inability to effectively support parents with learning at home.** All parents want to help their children succeed, but many do not know how. From our 2018 survey of Louisiana teachers, 14 percent responded that parents know many strategies to support their child's learning. While parents trust teachers most for advice on how to support their child's learning at home, 84 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools need help engaging their families (Scholastic, 2016).

FEL offers tools and services that [break down the barriers to school-home partnerships](#) and provide support for school systems facing challenges during school closures.

## [FASTalk Overview](#)

A fast and easy tool that sends families weekly text messages with curriculum-aligned and standards-aligned learning activities in PK-5 supporting academic, social, and emotional skill development. FASTalk:

- supports two-way communication between parents;
- accelerates student literacy gains, especially when parents do not share a language with their child's teacher; and
- provides practical tips for parents to support high-quality instructional materials, aligned with ELA Guidebooks, EL, CKLA, Wit & Wisdom, and more.

[Preview FASTalk messages.](#)

## [FASTalk Direct Overview](#)

Free PK-5 learning and SEL tips sent by text message in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Arabic. FASTalk Direct:

- sends parents weekly tips and activities aligned to state ELA learning standards across preschool through fifth grade;
- sends activities through text message; (Parents do not need to have a smartphone or download an app to benefit)
- sends tips to support social and emotional learning, including managing stress and anxiety; and
- sends links to high-quality online learning resources recommended by school systems.

## **FASTalk Experts**

FASTalk experts in social and emotional learning, and academic support for students in grades preschool through fifth, are available to guide the school systems through the development of family-friendly tips and activities that directly support your learning goals and can easily be sent to families by text message.

FEL currently serves 22,000 students in schools in Louisiana, California, and Arizona. 85 percent of these students qualify for free & reduced-price lunch. FASTalk **has demonstrated positive outcomes** across the 20 school systems using FASTalk. [In a study](#) of FASTalk's impact, FASTalk has shown to accelerate learning by two to three months for English Learners and students whose parents had a language barrier with their teacher.

School systems interested in helping families stay engaged in learning throughout school closures are encouraged to learn how FASTalk works, schedule a demo, preview FASTalk

messages, and speak with a FASTalk expert. Visit [www.familyengagementlab.org](http://www.familyengagementlab.org) or contact [vidya@familyengagementlab.org](mailto:vidya@familyengagementlab.org) to learn more.