



## SUPPORTING EL STUDENTS AND FAMILIES TO BOOST LEARNING

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English learners (ELs) or ELLs (English Language Learners) bring incredible strengths to the classroom through a rich diversity of cultural and linguistic experiences. When educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognize ELs' strengths and activate their potential they can help lay the foundation for long-term academic, social, and emotional success.

### The Research on Supporting EL Students

While ELs are the most rapidly growing student subgroup, representing [nearly 10%](#) of public school students and speaking [more than 400](#) different languages and dialects, [over 30 states](#) do not require EL training for general classroom teachers beyond what is required federally. Indeed, the research on [teacher preparedness](#) and self-efficacy for teaching ELs paints a bleak picture. Despite a strong likelihood of having an EL student in their classroom, teachers are often without the necessary training and support to meet the needs of a heterogeneous EL student population with unique educational needs related to developing both English language skills and building subject area knowledge. Accordingly, national data reveal many ELs have unmet academic potential, as evidenced by academic assessment [results](#) comparing the achievement of ELs to their non-EL peers.

### How Teachers and Families Can Partner to Support EL Students' Success

It is clear that we need to do more and do better at supporting the teachers who work with ELs each day. One way to do this is to help teachers build relationships and collaborate with the other key adults in their students' lives: parents and caregivers. Parents can play a big role in supporting teachers by reinforcing classroom learning at home—and their engagement in a child's learning has consistently been shown to make a positive difference on student outcomes. Moreover, ELs have diverse needs, and parents know their children best. They know their child's motivators and their barriers and they support their child's language development every day. Partnering with the "experts" who deeply understand their child's unique strengths and struggles can help teachers ensure more ELs reach their potential.

### How FASTalk Supports EL Students

Recognizing the opportunity to support EL families, students, and teachers, Family Engagement Lab intentionally designed and developed its family engagement tool, FASTalk (Families and Schools Talk).

- FASTalk provides EL families with curriculum-aligned activities that are translated into over 100 [languages](#), boosting their confidence in supporting their child's learning at home.
- EL students whose parents used FASTalk saw an acceleration in their academic performance of 1.5-3 months ahead of their peers not using FASTalk.
- Pre-written and pre-scheduled messages from teachers ensure equitable communication to all EL families.
- The Chatbox built into FASTalk allows teachers to build relationships with EL families through one-on-one conversations with parents in their home language.

### Additional Resources to Engage Families and Support EL Students

- [Connecting with English Learner Families: 5 Ideas to Help Schools](#) (EdWeek)
- [Resources to strengthen connections with families](#) (WIDA)
- [English language learners: What you need to know](#) (NEA)
- [How to build relationships with immigrant families](#) (Colorin Colorado)
- [6 strategies for partnering with families of English language learners](#) (Colorin Colorado)

For more information on how FASTalk can support your EL students, [contact us](#) today!

### About the Author



Elisabeth O'Bryon is co-Founder and Chief Impact Officer at Family Engagement Lab. Elisabeth was previously the Director of Research and Evaluation at GreatSchools where she worked to design and implement evaluation projects, with a particular focus on rapid-cycle research approaches. Elisabeth recently co-authored [45 Strategies that Support Young Dual Language Learners](#), a resource that provides practical, developmentally appropriate strategies for supporting children and families from diverse backgrounds and creating inclusive early childhood classrooms that foster the success of young DLLs.

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