

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

District:

Creighton Elementary School District

Location: Phoenix, Ariz.

Grades: K-8

Enrollment: 6,800

Free/reduced-price lunch: 90%

ELL: 40%

Coaching parents as team members

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

Creighton Elementary School District

Phoenix, Arizona

When parents are engaged in their child's learning, they can help their child strengthen academic skills outside of school. Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) provides a structure for parents to meet with the teacher and converse with other parents while also learning ways to support their child's academic skill development. Founded in 2008, APTT resulted from efforts to increase student learning through support beyond the school day.

The program replaces traditional parent-teacher conferences with three classroom team meetings for parents and one 30-minute individual parent-teacher conference (or more if needed). At the team meetings, the teacher models activities that parents can do at home with their children. The teacher also presents academic performance data for the class and gives parents individual information about their own child's performance.

"Many parents wonder what the parents of kids at the top of the class are doing at home to make that happen," says Maria Paredes, who started the program and until recently was the district's director of community education. "Parents give other parents ideas for successful practice at home. It forms a community." Opportunities for parents to network with one another are especially important in the Creighton Elementary School District, where 85 percent of students are Hispanic and 40 percent are English Language Learners.

How the program works

The program is led by the school district's director of community education, who provides ongoing professional development to school administrators, teachers, and parent liaisons (each school has a parent liaison on staff). Teachers participate in the program voluntarily, and 90 percent of teachers in the district are now participating.

In place of traditional, twice-a-year parent-teacher conferences, there are three 75-minute classroom team meetings and one 30-minute individual parent-teacher conference each year. Teachers send personal letters inviting parents to the meetings.



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At the team meetings, the teacher models activities that parents can do at home with their children, and parents practice the activities together in small groups. The teacher also presents academic performance data for the class as a whole and gives parents individual information about their own child's performance. The teacher helps parents set 60-day parent-student academic goals for their child.

At the 30-minute individual conference, parents and teachers create an action plan to optimize learning. Additional conferences may be arranged if needed. Because many of the parents speak only Spanish, the program provides translators for the team meetings, and when possible, makes materials available in the parents' home language. The program receives funding from the federal Title I program.

Joshua Briese, a fourth-grade teacher at Excelencia Elementary School, began using APTT last year and found it especially useful for opening a communication channel with parents early in the school year. "If I can get students doing anything at home related to what we do at school, it will have an impact," he says.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Teacher participation has grown quickly. The program began with 12 teachers in 2009-2010 and expanded the next year to include 97 teachers. All nine schools in the district are participating. For the 2011-2012 school year, 173 teachers—90 percent of all teachers in the district—have been trained to participate. Many parents have encouraged their children's teachers to take part in the program.
- ▶ Test data show remarkable short-term academic gains among first graders in APTT classes. Among 188 students tested in the fall of 2009, oral reading fluency (ISTEEP ORF) scores in APTT classrooms rose nearly 25 points, while in non-APTT

classrooms, oral reading fluency rose only about 10 points. In August 2009, all classes averaged about 15.55; by November, the ISTEEP scores in APTT classes averaged 40.31, while scores in non-APTT classrooms averaged about 25.

- ▶ Paredes says the rate of participation among fathers is higher at the team meetings than at conventional parent-teacher conferences. Fathers have said that they are very interested in academics and wanted to be involved in understanding their children's progress.
- ▶ Preliminary data shows a 92 percent parent attendance rate at the team meetings, which is much higher than participation at conventional parent-teacher conferences in the Creighton district, according to Paredes.

Exemplary practices

Encouraging teacher collaboration: Teachers meet three times a year for 90 minutes before each team meeting to plan, problem-solve, and share practices. Grade-level teams also have planning time to analyze data, develop goals, and share ideas. These meetings are facilitated by a school data expert and Title I coordinator.

Sharing student performance data with parents: The class-level and individual-level student data that teachers share with parents becomes each student's academic goals. Parents' access to student performance data encourages high expectations and increases efforts to help students practice academic skills at home.

Reaching out to families: Teachers send all families a personalized invitation to the team meetings on school letterhead and follow up with personal calls. Students also encourage their parents to come. If a family cannot attend, teachers must find an

Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0

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alternative time to share the information with them. The opportunity to receive coaching and support encourages parents to become more involved.

Forming partnerships: The APTT program has established meaningful partnerships with the local community college, Arizona State University, APIRC, Helios Education Foundation, and Rio Salado College. The partners are collaborating on a policy initiative to set higher standards for family engagement programs in Arizona.

Outlook

The APTT program has been spreading to other districts in Arizona and beyond, including Nevada, Colorado, California, and Washington, D.C. Several additional states have shown interest. The model is sustainable because teachers and parents become experts in implementing it, and because it can be supported with Title I funds.

Association perspective

Jason Schnee, president of the Creighton Education Association (CEA), says, "We in CEA fully support the APTT model and encourage all of the individuals who wish to use it to indeed do so. It is a great model and one which has sound research behind it."

Local contacts

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Note: Paredes owns the copyright to APTT materials. Contact her for more information.

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Related information

Report card: www.creightonschools.org

"Preparing Teachers to Engage Families Around Student Data," Harvard Family Research Project, <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/preparing-teachers-to-engage-families-around-student-data>

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