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***Key points:***

- Create a community of parent learners
- Show families exactly how to support learning at home
- Strive for data-driven, relationship-based model

**Want to change school-home conversations? Toss out traditional conferences**

Parent-teacher conferences largely are an unresearched tradition, and while one teacher might have an above average approach, the teacher next door could be poorly prepared, said [Maria Paredes](#), a WestEd senior program associate for family engagement in education.

Little attention is paid to family engagement during teacher preparation, so too many conferences aren't results-oriented.

Title I schools need data-driven conferences that build school-home relationships and parent networks, and guide parents in setting goals and using practical, evidence-based at-home strategies.

"Make it personal. Make it matter," Paredes said. "That's why random acts don't work. Their life is not going to change if they come to a potluck."

**Change the conversation**

Typical conferences don't address a big Title I school challenge: parents' sense of self-efficacy and their knowledge of how to help their child academically, she added. The great divide between Title I and non-Title I schools is that Title I teachers don't have the luxury of waiting for parents to come to them.

Title I parents are less likely to have a high school or college diploma. They may be new to the country, have limited English skills, and not know or believe in their ability to impact their children's academic success.

Meanwhile, students from middle and upper class families are more likely to be exposed to enrichment outside of school, and their parents know the questions to ask and how to help at home. The lives of those children "become a path to college readiness," Paredes said.

"In Title I, it becomes your role to create the conditions that bring parents in and that provide them with all the information, training, guidelines, materials, and the social networks they need to support their children," she said.

In her previous role as director of community education for more than a decade for the [Creighton \(Ariz.\) School District](#), Paredes developed the Academic Parent-Teacher Team model. It's a model that's gained national attention from the [Education Department](#), the [Harvard Family Research Project](#), the [National Education Association](#), and the [Flamboyant Foundation](#), and Paredes is fielding requests from districts in Arizona, California, Colorado, and Utah.

"The goal of the APTT model is to be honest, intentional, and strategic about building Title I families' capacity to support learning during non-school time -- that what and the how of family engagement in academics," Paredes explained.

Here is a summary of how APTT works.

### **Preparation**

- Teachers receive intense training and ongoing coaching.
- Within the first three weeks of school, teachers personally invite parents to the first APTT meeting.
- One specific skill, such as fluency, is selected. The teacher creates a class bar graph and individual, confidential folders with data showing each child's performance.
- Based on the range of student needs, teachers select at-home strategies and prepare take-home materials.

### **Meeting**

- The meeting lasts about 75 minutes as teachers review aggregate class data and help parents review their child's data.
- Parents are encouraged to share strategies. For example, the teacher may say, "I'm noticing student two performed really well on our fluency pre-assessment. Would student two's parents like to share any at-home strategies?"
- Parents set 60-day goals for their child on the targeted skill.
- The teacher models at-home learning strategies and provides the needed materials, and parents practice.
- APTT essentially creates parent learning communities as parents network and build relationships.

### **Follow-up**

- During the year, a total of three 75-minute APTT meetings are held in addition to a one-to-one 30-minute parent-teacher conference where families and teachers review student data, create an action plan, and network.
- Feedback data are shared with parents in team meetings two and three to provide updates on progress made on 60-day goals.

*Related Story:*

### **Data show impact of parent-teacher teams**

Curious about how traditional parent-teacher conference models compare to the Academic Parent-Teacher Team approach, Maria Paredes studied fluency data for 228 first-grade students from nine classrooms in nine schools.

The end-of-year first grade oral reading fluency is 62 words per minute. As school began, both APTT and non-APTT classrooms averaged about 15.5 wpm. However, by November, APTT classrooms' average wpm stood at 40.5 words while non-APTT classrooms averaged 25 words fewer.

Attendance at APTT meetings was 92 percent, and it was common for fathers to attend too.

The APTT model doesn't require extra time beyond what teachers already spend preparing for and conducting two traditional parent-teacher conferences per year. Using the APTT approach, teachers use the same amount of time but meet with parents four times.

*See examples of APTT meetings through the "MariaParedesZ" YouTube channel.*

*--Tricia Offutt covers family and community engagement and other Title I issues for LRP Publications.*

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