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Key points:

- Make time for consistent, structured interactions
- Funnel resources toward at-home learning
- Address summer and pre-K needs

Push toward the prize: Family-supported student learning

Don't make parents and community partners guess how to help students. Rather, create a comprehensive plan that revolves around family-supported student learning, said [Maria Paredes](#), a [WestEd](#) senior program associate for family engagement in education.

"Instead of just having partners give you what they think you need, you are in fact articulating to them what your needs are," she said.

When you have a practical, targeted plan, community partners will know your district is a wise investment, and families will appreciate the high-quality, focused interactions with their children's teachers, Paredes explained.

Here is an example of her comprehensive family engagement plan designed for Title I schools where the intended outcome is family-supported student learning.

- **Team up with parents.** The [Academic Parent-Teacher Team](#) model provides three structured meetings spaced evenly throughout the school year. During the 75-minute meetings, teachers share class data, academic goals and related strategies with parents. Parents get a chance to network, see their child's data, set individualized goals, practice a specific at-home strategy, and take home the materials needed to implement that strategy. The APTT framework then becomes the skeleton for your entire family engagement effort, she explained. That's because its entire purpose is to forge meaningful, ongoing conversations, supports, and action plans that directly tie to the personalized academic needs of students.
- **Align all resources.** Once you have a structured model, such as APTT in place, then you begin to wrap your resources around that effort. For example, if you need to purchase certain take-home materials related to strategies taught during APTT meetings, then you share your plan with a community partner and seek donations. In the [Creighton \(Ariz.\) School District](#), where Paredes was director of community education for more than a decade, one district partner helped fund APTT-related resources, and then the district reported out twice a year to the partner to share outcomes from those efforts.
- **Provide summer supports.** "We think of school as a 180-day kind of cycle, and we stop at that," she said. "Summer can be a huge tool that doesn't have to cost much. Parents are dying to know what to do."

Link parents to summer programs and resources that directly match their child's needs, she said. Also consider grade-level weekly guides that list skills and activities for families to work on throughout the summer.

Just as during the school year, align your summer resources to academics, Paredes suggested. For example, ask local transportation officials to let children have a free bus ride to story time at the library, to the science museum when admission is free, or to other area activities.

- Don't wait for kindergarten. "There are a lot of missed opportunities especially in Title I districts," she said. "We don't see preschool family engagement as part of our responsibility."

She suggests investing in a kindergarten-readiness model where preschoolers attend a two-hour class with their caretakers once a week for the entire school year. Thematic units address areas such as math, reading, and physical and mental development through age-appropriate games, direct instruction, and parent-child interaction. Families go home with resources and assignments to complete before the next class.

"Fifty percent of the class is to teach the child, but the other 50 percent is for the parents to be in charge of learning when the children are at home," Paredes said. "That is the whole point of family engagement: How well do you help families understand their roles?"

For more information, email [Paredes](#).

Related Story:

Don't leave parent engagement to chance

Loose conversations between school and home and family engagement strategies composed largely of random events won't close the achievement gap, said [Maria Paredes](#), a [WestEd](#) senior program associate for family engagement in education. These tend to gloss over individual needs and make little impact on student progress, she added.

Paredes said she's adamant about the need for schools and districts to move toward more structured, academically focused family engagement approaches that better inform spending and make the best use of parents' and teachers' time.

She's collecting data that clearly shows the decided impact tighter parent-teacher interactions have on student achievement in the [Creighton \(Ariz.\) School District](#) where some teachers use the [Academic Parent-Teacher Team](#) model that Paredes developed there.

In a comparison based on math and reading test data from SY 2011-12, those classes in the district that used the APTT model grew considerably more compared to non-APTT classrooms.

--[Tricia Offutt](#) covers family and community engagement and other Title I issues for LRP Publications.

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