



Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) 2021-22 Implementation Brief

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Key Findings

- About a third of students in grades K-3 at APTT schools had a family member attend at least one meeting. Meeting 1 had the highest attendance, followed by Meeting 3.
- Families rated APTT positively in post-meeting surveys. Families also responded positively about the meeting structure and said they used materials from prior meetings.

Overview

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) is a family engagement program aimed at strengthening family-school partnerships by improving parent-teacher conferences in a way that expands collaboration between school and home. The goal of an APTT meeting is to build rapport with families and to build their capacity to support their students in learning foundational literacy skills. During meetings held three times a year, teachers share student data, guide data-driven conversations, and provide parents/guardians with timely information and academic resources to support student learning. Funded by the William Penn Foundation, APTT was piloted with nine schools in 2018-19 and eight schools in 2019-20 in grades K-3. Six schools continued into a second grant period from 2020-21 to 2021-22: Blaine, J.H. Brown, Carnell, Key, Kirkbride, and McClure. This effort was supported by an external partner, WestEd, who provided training and support to build the capacity of teachers, families, and administrators to effectively engage families in advancing student achievement.

As part of the APTT approach, each year parents/guardians attend three 75-minute “team meetings” with the teacher and other families and one individual session with the classroom teacher. The team meetings give families the opportunity to learn and contribute in a collaborative environment. Families learn important grade-level information about foundational skills and effective, engaging home practices. They also receive take-home activities designed to help their children improve skills.

According to the program model, an APTT meeting consists of six essential elements:

1. team building activity,
2. teaching a selected foundational grade-level skill,
3. sharing de-identified class data,
4. modeling practice activities,
5. facilitating family practice of the activities, and
6. setting SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goals.

Prior to each APTT meeting, WestEd met with K-3 teachers and principals to finalize the chosen activities for the upcoming APTT meeting. WestEd staff facilitated conversations between grade-level teachers to select which foundational grade-level skill and practice activities would be most appropriate for families. Teachers were encouraged to target skills and choose relevant activities based on current assessment data. After APTT meetings, the principal, the WestEd facilitator, and a designated APTT Champion (school staff member appointed to coordinate all APTT meetings) at each school met to debrief about how the meetings went and to set goals for the next round of planning and meetings. All schools held additional teacher debrief sessions with participating teachers.

Research Questions

In this research brief, we looked at implementation of APTT during the 2021-22 school year. Three research questions guided the analyses:

1. To what extent was the program implemented as intended?
2. To what extent were parents/guardians satisfied with the APTT model?
3. What are lessons learned from schools who implemented APTT?

Data Sources

We used three sources of data for this research brief:

- **Attendance data.** Teachers collected attendance data for each APTT meeting. APTT Champions collected this information for their school and provided it to the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE).
- **Parent/guardian surveys.** ORE collected satisfaction data via a family satisfaction survey delivered through Google forms and developed collaboratively between ORE and WestEd. Schools that hosted meetings in person used paper surveys and provided scanned copies to ORE. English and Spanish versions of the survey were available. The survey response rates were 26% for Meeting 1, 28% for Meeting 2, and 54% for Meeting 3.
- **Principal/Champion interview data.** ORE conducted interviews with two schools that WestEd indicated had strong implementation in 2021-22. The goal of these interviews was to find out if there were lessons learned at these schools that could help other schools implement APTT in the future.

Key Findings

About a third of students in grades K-3 at APTT schools had a family member attend at least one meeting.

Schools made adjustments to the APTT meetings in 2021-22 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although students generally attended school in person, some schools chose to continue having family events virtually or changed a planned in-person meeting to virtual if there was a surge in cases at the school. Schools still included all aspects of the APTT meetings; however, some schools opted to provide families with videos modeling the practice activities and have families pick up the materials at the school after the meeting. Overall, Meeting 1 had the highest attendance followed by Meeting 3 (Table 1). About a third of students had a family member attend at least one meeting. For most schools, Meeting 2 occurred during a surge in COVID-19 cases (February 2022) which likely affected attendance.

Table 1. About a third of students had a family member attend at least one meeting

School	Number of Students who had a Family Member Attend ¹			Number of Students who had a Family Member Attend at Least one Meeting	Percent of Students who had a Family Member Attend at Least one Meeting ²
	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3		
Blaine	49	-	29	60	42.3%
Brown	26	19	21	41	25.2%
Carnell	34	N/A	N/A	34	16.7%
Key	91	57	82	142	63.4%
Kirkbride	40	N/A	32	59	26.5%
McClure	54	62	47	115	30.5%
Total	294	138	211	451	33.9%

Note: N/A indicates a school did not have a meeting during that cycle. - indicates that a meeting did occur but the school did not provide attendance logs to ORE.

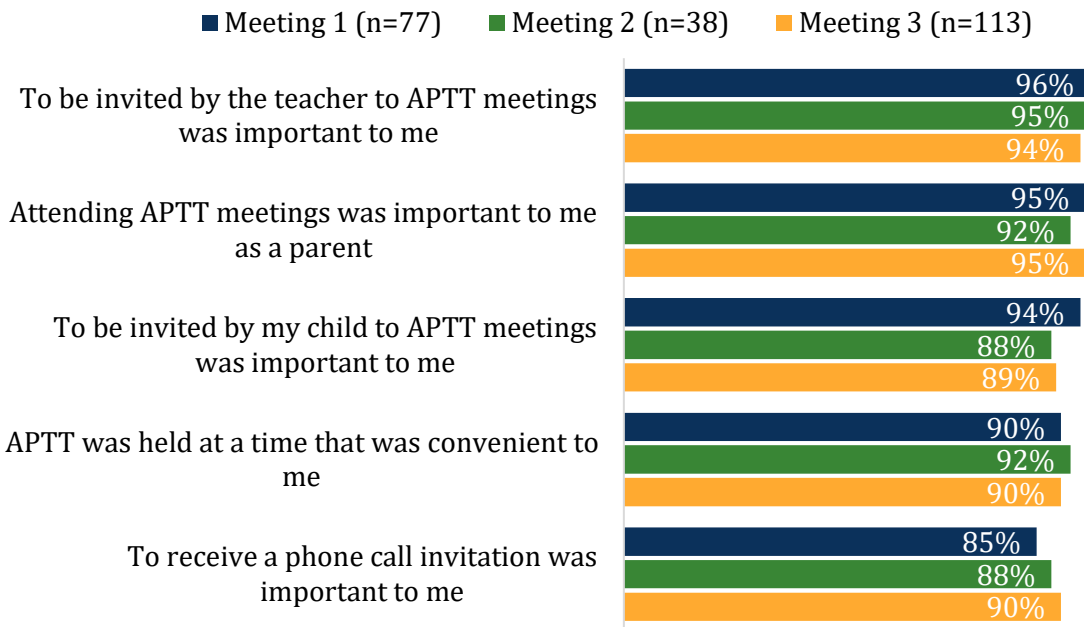
¹If a family member attended sessions for multiple students, they would be counted twice.

²This is based on student rosters that schools provided in the fall.

Families rated APTT positively in post-meeting surveys.

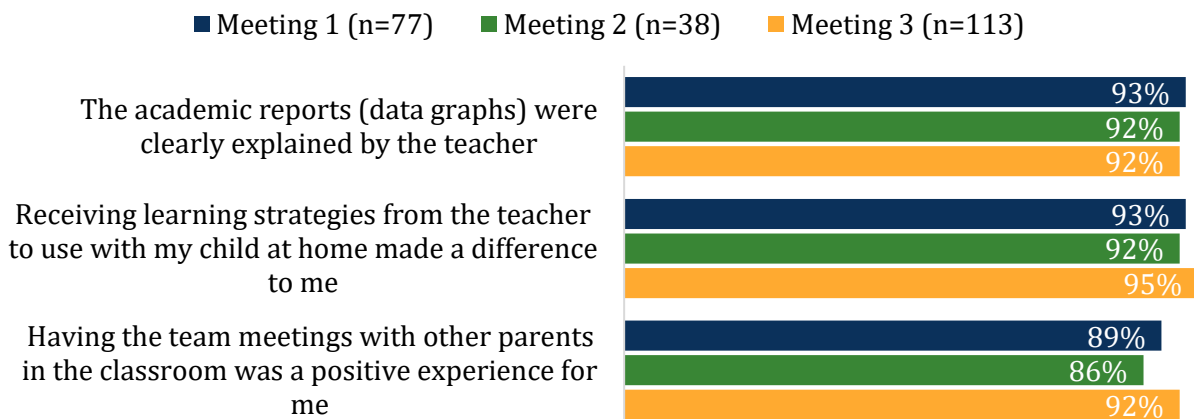
Families were given a survey at the end of each APTT meeting to collect information about their overall satisfaction (virtual meetings provided a link to a survey and in-person meetings used paper copies). Families valued being able to attend the APTT meetings (Figure 1). Almost all respondents reported that being invited to the APTT meeting by the teacher was important to them (94-96%), and nearly as many felt similarly about being invited by their child (89-94%). A slightly smaller percentage of families said receiving a phone call invitation was important (85-90%). Additionally, families felt that attending APTT meetings was important to them as parents/guardians (92-95%) and felt that the APTT meeting was held at a time convenient to them (90-92%).

Figure 1. Almost all parents/guardians who responded to the survey said being invited by the teacher to APTT meetings was important to them



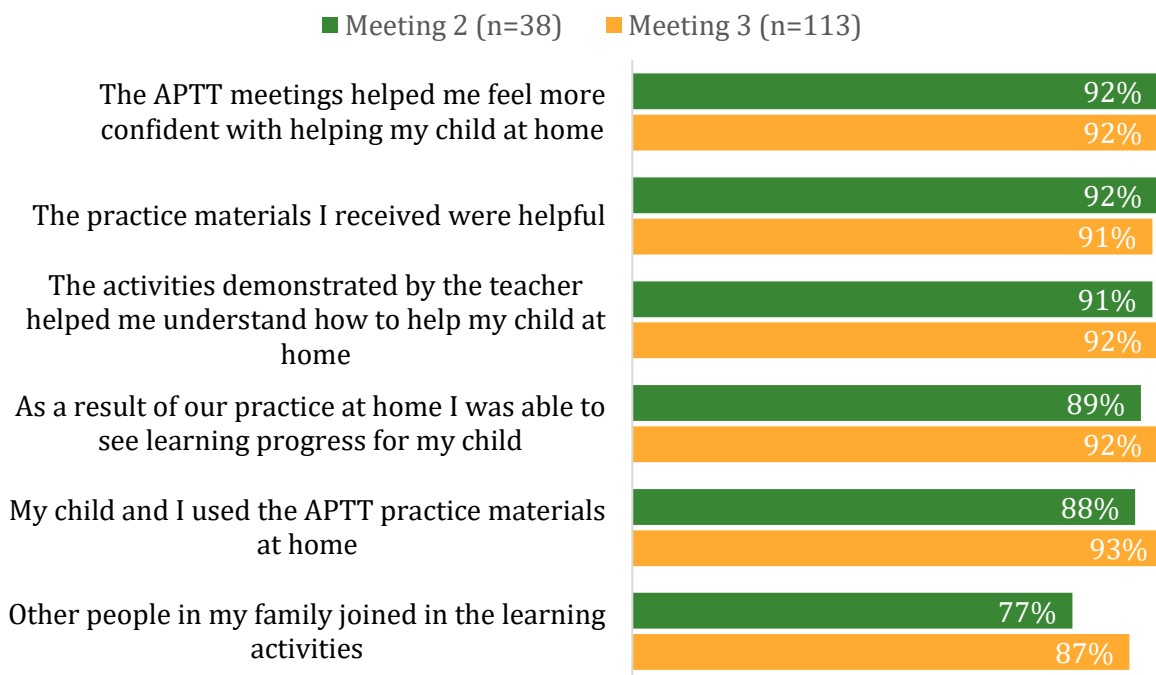
Families also responded positively to the APTT meeting structure (Figure 2). Participants said that the academic reports were clearly explained by the teacher (92-93%) and that receiving learning strategies made a difference to them (93-95%). Families also reported that having the team meetings with other parents was a positive experience for them (89-92%).

Figure 2. Parents/guardians said the data graphs were clearly explained, receiving learning strategies made a difference to them, and having the meeting with other parents was positive



Participants also responded positively to questions about the effects of APTT (Figure 3). Most families said they used the APTT materials with their child at home (88-93%), and that the meetings helped them feel more confident with helping their child at home (92%), though a smaller percentage said that other people in their family joined in the learning activities (77-87%). Families said the practice materials they received were helpful (91-92%), and that the teacher demonstrating the activities helped them understand how to help their child at home (91-92%). Finally, participants also said they were able to see learning progress for their child as a result of practicing with the activities (89-92%).

Figure 3. At Meeting 3, 93% of parents/guardians who responded to the survey said they used APTT materials with their child at home



Two schools provided six lessons learned from implementing APTT.

During the interviews, two schools were asked to share advice for other schools who may want to implement APTT and suggestions for how they might expand the model in the future.

- Build teacher ownership.** Teachers who are more invested in APTT do more to communicate with families about the program and to “sell” the program. Ownership includes shared or individual responsibility for choosing materials, choosing a skill to focus on, and preparing the presentation and data graphs. Another way that schools increased teacher ownership was to have an APTT Champion per grade rather than one for the whole school, which also decreased the burden for the one Champion and increased institutional knowledge of the program and therefore sustainability.

- **Consider ways to increase parent/guardian engagement.** One school created a Parent Ambassador position to help with materials management and outreach (one of the challenges schools cited in the past was the amount of time it takes to manage the materials and administrative side of APTT). They asked teachers to nominate two per class, with the goal of having volunteers who spoke several of the languages represented by their families. Ambassadors could choose which activities they felt most comfortable doing; some were more interested in calling families to remind them about the meeting, while others were more comfortable putting materials together, which they could do at home or in the school's parent room. During the meetings, Parent Ambassadors served as an additional resource, interpreting for a group or providing additional assistance in explaining the games, especially for families who might feel more comfortable asking a peer questions instead of a staff member. The school offered incentives to the volunteers by letting them pick out materials from Office Depot (during the pandemic, cleaning supplies were popular). Additionally, another school had a parent volunteer day where they scheduled teachers to work alongside families in putting together the materials and folders for the meetings. This gave teachers an idea of the behind-the-scenes work that went into APTT and encouraged families to spread the word about the meetings.
- **Be strategic about translation needs.** Both schools we interviewed have high English Learner populations. They found that using their Bilingual Counseling Assistants (BCAs) was more effective than hiring outside interpreters. BCAs had more familiarity with the APTT model, while outside interpreters sometimes had trouble speaking to families about the data charts and the need to celebrate small successes. Schools also need both translated materials and interpretation services, because a translated slide deck or handout may not be helpful to families with low literacy levels. Both schools said they struggled to figure out how to support when multiple languages were needed at once.
- **Find a meeting time and format that works best for your school.** Schools tried scheduling meetings during the school day, evening, and at arrival time. One school found that arrival time worked for them and felt they had better attendance at that meeting. Most of their families drop students off at the school so they are already at the building, and the meeting was held while students were eating breakfast, making additional childcare unnecessary. Some family members may be able to take off work more easily in the morning than at other times. This school found that evening meetings involved too much childcare. One school recommended spreading meetings out over several days (one grade per day) so that families who want to attend meetings for multiple children have that option. This may also make interpretation easier to offer as only one meeting is happening at a time. The two schools we spoke with also had mixed feelings about doing meetings per classroom or per grade. Having teachers conduct individual meetings encourages them to take ownership of APTT and add their own style. However, having group meetings shares the workload. Some teachers are naturally better facilitators than others, and this can be an opportunity for other teachers to learn from them. Having gradewide meetings also means that fewer interpreters are needed. Finally, while APTT was intended to replace traditional parent-teacher conferences, schools found that parents/guardians still want an individual conference and, if given the option, would choose to do that over APTT. Going forward, one

school is planning to host APTT outside of report card conferences and consider it more of a family workshop/community building activity.

- **Be thoughtful about choosing activities for the meeting.** Participants told us that activities need to be fun and not feel like homework. One school also received feedback that families like having games that did not involve materials so that they could play them while out and about (for example, they used the “I spy something that starts with s” game). Additionally, schools may not want to spend money on games that might only be played once or twice. Both of the schools we interviewed had high English Learner populations and highlighted the need to keep in mind that games like Go Fish might be new to some families and thus require explanation.
- **Use multiple forms of parent/guardian outreach.** Schools used a combination of outreach through flyers (both electronic and paper), Class Dojo messages, social media posts, asking families to RSVP, and phone calls. One school found personal phone calls from teachers and Parent Ambassadors to be the most successful way to reach families, both because texts can get lost, and because it gives them an opportunity to share that APTT is important to them and a part of the school culture.

Conclusion

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) is a family engagement program aimed at strengthening family-school partnerships by improving parent-teacher conferences in a way that expands collaboration between school and home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021-22 school year was not a typical year, so adjustments were made to the APTT meetings. For example, some APTT school-level meetings were held virtually, and some schools opted to provide families with videos modeling the practice activities and have families pick up the materials at the school after the meeting. Overall, Meeting 1 had the highest attendance, followed by Meeting 3. About a third of students had a family member attend at least one meeting. Families valued being able to attend the APTT meetings, responded positively to the APTT meeting structure, and responded positively to questions about the effects of APTT. For schools that are considering implementing APTT, the two schools we spoke with provided suggestions in six areas, around building teacher and parent/guardian engagement, language interpretation concerns, meeting times/formats, choosing activities, and family outreach.