# Evaluation of Academic Parent-Teacher Teams in New York City Middle Schools

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

The Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation at New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU Metro Center) conducted an evaluation of the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) parent engagement model in New York City middle schools during the 2017-18 school year. APTT is a parent engagement model that replaces the traditional parent-teacher conference with three whole-class 'meetings' and a one-on-one individual meeting designed to help families support their children's academic progress. APTT in New York City middle schools is supported by the Department of Education's Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI). Through this evaluation, NYU Metro Center sought to answer the following questions:

1. How does the APTT program help families connect with their children's teachers and schools?
2. What are the experiences of families participating in the APTT program: how does the program help them work with their children, their children's teachers, and their schools to improve their children's academic capacities?
3. How do the APTT program's family engagement strategies align with other NYC DOE family engagement strategies?

In the 2017-18 school year, 14 middle schools implemented APTT1. Our evaluation team conducted an in-depth study of APTT implementation in three of these schools, including interviews, observations, and surveys. We also conducted interviews and surveys at a set of matched comparison schools, and carried out quantitative analyses of the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment administered to students at both study schools and comparison schools.

We found that APTT helped families connect with their children's teachers and schools by offering teachers and families the opportunity for positive engagement about children's academic capacities, rather than communicating about low academic performance or behavioral concerns. However, our observations of APTT meetings and reports from teachers suggest that participation in APTT meetings is relatively low overall, indicating that a large proportion of parents do not reap the benefits of these positive parent-teacher interactions.

Through our observations and conversations with educators, we found relatively low fidelity to the APTT model for the third of three APTT meetings, and found that schools did not facilitate APTT individual sessions meetings with families. Of the three in-depth study schools, none facilitated individual sessions as outlined in the APTT model. This does not mean that teachers did not meet individually with parents as needed, only that schools did not do this as part of APTT. In part, citywide guidelines on parent engagement time limited teachers' ability to hold extended one-on-one meetings with every family. We understand that training facilitators encouraged teachers to utilize weekly family engagement time to continue the work from whole-class APTT meetings. However, this brief weekly time often did not align with parent schedules. APTT implementation in middle school also proved challenging, because middle school faculty tend to teach more students than elementary faculty, meaning that there are more families with whom to develop relationships.

Finally, we found a gap in the model's cultural responsiveness as currently implemented in New York City middle schools. Parents are positioned as learners rather than assets, and they have limited voice, agency, or decision-making power in the context of APTT. Further, the content presented at APTT meetings is not rooted in the learning concerns of students or their families; rather, the content is selected by school staff without parent input and is not differentiated based on student need. The selected content presented at APTT meetings – including student data and learning games - was overly narrow and lacked emphasis on comprehension or becoming a better reader.

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations to the NYCDOE, individual schools, and WestEd about implementing the APTT model:

✚  Implement APTT in consonance with other parent engagement activities that establish and build trusting relationships between teachers and parents

✚  Increase the cultural responsiveness of the APTT model by building asset mindsets among teachers implementing APTT and offering parents meaningful opportunities to lead and share their perspectives

✚  Intentionally diversify and differentiate the instructional content the APTT model presents

✚  Adapt the APTT model for use in middle grades, acknowledging that parent engagement is likely to be different between sixth and eighth grades

# Introduction

Background. In early 2017, the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) and its Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI) contracted with the NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (Metro Center) to conduct an evaluation of the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) model in New York City middle schools.

The APTT model, developed by Maria Paredes in 2009 and later acquired and marketed by WestEd, "supplements and elevates the efforts of traditional parent conferences by expanding opportunities for families and teachers to collaborate" (Paredes, 2017). Paredes developed the model because she believed parents wanted more opportunities to be involved directly in their child's academics. In 2017-18, the Middle School Quality Initiative supported 14 New York City middle schools' use of the APTT model.

A 2017 Washington Post article highlighted the APTT program at a D.C.-area elementary school. In one kindergarten classroom, all students demonstrated literacy progress, and the school experienced a significant increase in the number of parents coming to the school on parent-teacher night (Matos, 2017). A 2015 article from Education Week noted the modeling of activities as a driver of increased parent involvement at one school, and a significant increase in parent attendance at another school (Sparks, 2015).

Despite this evidence, few formal studies of APTT have been published. Little existing research assesses the implementation of the APTT model, including the identification of successful strategies and the challenges associated with implementing the model with fidelity. One evaluation, conducted in the Houston Independent School District, found that students in APTT schools with parents who attended APTT meetings performed better academically than students in the same school whose parents did not attend APTT meetings (Foster, 2015). This evaluation only included students in third through fifth grades. A second study, conducted as a doctoral dissertation, studied teacher and parent perceptions of APTT in one school (Ferguson, 2017). The study found that parent engagement was most impacted by family perceptions of communication, usefulness, and convenience.

These studies, however, lack rigorous comparison against the known features of effective parent engagement cited in the studies above. Further, no published studies of APTT in the middle grades were found in the literature search. Additionally, the research on parent-school relationships in the middle school grades is fairly sparse (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill, Tyson, & Bromell, 2009; Tyson & Hill, 2009). Therefore, this evaluation contributes to the field a study of Academic Parent-Teacher Teams in middle schools in a large, urban school district.

We aim to make our findings useful and accessible for researchers and practitioners wanting to know more about parent engagement and APTT at the middle school grade levels. Among the published studies on APTT, researchers primarily focused on APTT's influence on academic outcomes.

APTT Model and Intended Impact. APTT is a parent engagement model that replaces traditional parent-teacher conferences (brief one-on-one meetings between a parent and teacher) with three whole-class 'meetings' and one individual session. Teachers facilitate whole-class meetings, which last 75 minutes each. All classroom parents attend as a group rather than meeting individually with the teacher. APTT whole-class meetings are highly structured, and teachers are expected to adhere to a facilitation guide that specifies activities for each stage of the meeting. Each meeting consists of a welcome activity, team building activity, presentation of foundational grade-level skills, data sharing, modeling practice activities, facilitating family practice of activities, and facilitating the setting of SMART goals. According to WestEd (n.d.), APTT meetings should occur in early fall, winter, and spring.

The purpose of the meetings, in the words of Dr. Paredes (2013, in Dunlop, 2013), is to "[empower] families with the necessary information, tools, and strategies to support student learning at home" (35). APTT functions on a principle of accountability - that parents who are better informed can also be brought into discussions with the school about academic work in ways that facilitate their participation and reinforcement of instructional strategies and academic activities in the home.
In addition to three whole-class meetings, the APTT model calls for one 30-minute individual meeting in October or November. In this meeting, families meet one-on-one with the teacher to build relationships, review students' academic progress, and collaboratively, with the teacher, develop a plan of action to improve student academic capacity. According to the model, WestEd trainers provide extensive year-round support to districts and schools implementing APTT. This support consists of an initial training session for teachers and administrators, and regular in-person facilitation and guidance throughout the school year.

According to the APTT logic model (Appendix A), APTT implementation should result in improved student learning and performance. Teachers should develop increased self-efficacy to engage families and develop an expanded understanding and awareness of family engagement. Parents should experience increased self-efficacy to be engaged, and both teachers and parents should maintain regular communication about academics. Students should engage in skill practice at home, demonstrate improved academic performance, improved behavior, and improved attendance. The overall climate of an APTT school should be improved through integrated systems of family support, and academic achievement should be improved through increased parent-teacher collaboration.

Evaluation Purpose and Design. We aimed to study APTT program implementation in New York City middle schools, and to learn more about parents' experiences participating in APTT. Specifically, the evaluation questions we aimed to answer included:

+ How does the APTT program help families connect with their children's teachers and schools?

+ What are the experiences of families participating in the APTT program: how does the program help them work with their children, their children's teachers, and their schools to improve their children's academic capacities?

+ How do the APTT program's family engagement strategies align with other NYC DOE family engagement strategies?

To answer these questions, our evaluation utilized qualitative, quantitative, and comparative methodologies. We collected qualitative data by facilitating semi-structured interviews and focus groups with parents, teachers and school administrators. We collected quantitative data through parent and teacher surveys developed for this evaluation. Finally, we utilized students' DRP scores to conduct a comparative analysis of reading progress.

# Literature Review

Volumes of research point to the numerous academic and behavioral benefits of effective home-school collaboration to students (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Jensen & Minke, 2017; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011), teachers (Lareau, 2003), families (Hong, 2011), and schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Parent-teacher conferences are considered the primary method of parent-teacher interaction under traditional approaches to school-home communication (Epstein, 1997). The model is typically Eurocentric, focusing on the concerns and interests of teachers, with parents as participants but largely as audience to the school professionals' expertise (Lemmer, 2012). Parents can often feel apprehensive of schools and teachers (Pillet-Shore, 2016; Walker & Legg, 2018).

Significantly, the challenges students and their parents face in interacting with school are culturally mediated. Urban schools and poorer communities in particular struggle to establish meaningful and effective parent engagement practices (Geller, 2013.; Hargreaves, 2002; Hong, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2012; Lareau, 1989, 2003; Mapp, 2012). According to the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006), "parents of ELL children can be a valuable resource in their children's education, but schools often fail to involve or engage ELL parents in an effective partnership...Specifically, high-ELL schools are more likely than low-ELL schools to provide interpreters, translated documents, parent outreach activities, and other services (e.g., transportation or child care) to support involvement" (p. 813; cf. Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

# Theoretical Framework

This evaluation draws upon two major theoretical frameworks that inform knowledge about parent engagement and home-school relationships and how they affect teaching and learning in the classroom: ecological systems theory and culturally responsive education/culturally responsive parent engagement (CRE/CRPE). Together, these frameworks consider the elements of the logic model of APTT specifically within the context of middle schools with high concentrations of historically underserved groups at various intersectional identities of race and class. This fusion of theories provides an understanding of how school-based professionals perceive, address, and incorporate cultural contexts in their policies and practices, which is so critical to parent engagement and student success.

Ecological systems theory informs much of the work around parent engagement. environmental subsystems, or contexts, that students experience in their everyday lives is essential to understanding their growth and development (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). An asset pedagogy like CRE/CRPE enables the home context to be seen not only as orthogonal to school context but interdependent, to the extent that welcoming elements of students' home lives into the arenas typically deemed the sole domain(s) of school becomes essential for parent and student engagement.

One primary mechanism for this asset pedagogy is the recognition of the "funds of knowledge" that students and their parents bring into the school from their homes (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001; Moll et al., 1992; Murray, 2009). The extension of CRE/CRPE into ecological systems theory requires that schools not only recognize student and parent funds of knowledge but welcome them into schools in "deep and authentic" ways (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001; Moll et al., 1992; Murray, 2009). This framing is especially helpful in thinking about how teachers and administrators can make quick and problematic assumptions about students and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds based on how they perform relative to white-normed expectations of participation and achievement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

The CRE/CRPE framework also acknowledges that Joyce Epstein, one of the preeminent scholars on parent engagement and cited throughout the initial literature on APTT, (Epstein 1991, 1992, 1995; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) reframed her conception of parent-school relationships as dialogic partnerships (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This framework also places increased emphasis on recognizing that meaningful improvements in student outcomes is broader than singular standardized academic measures and should be looked at both from an individualized and a transformative systems perspective (Baird, 2015; Hong, 2011; Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

The CRE/CRPE framework aligns with the DOE's current prioritization of culturally responsive education at the school and system level. It also allows this evaluation to view both the assets and the challenges of the APTT program not only in terms of its stated outcomes, but in the alignment of its logic model to a broader vision of student outcomes rooted in best practices, as well as in recognition of how the theoretical literature has evolved since the APTT model was first designed. Bronfenbrenner (1994, 2005) states that understanding the interactive and often overlapping

# Methods

NYU Metro Center conducted a primarily qualitative evaluation of APTT implementation. NYU evaluators facilitated semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, and school administrators at schools implementing APTT, and administered surveys to parents and teachers at APTT schools and a selection of matched comparison schools.

The second component of the study involved a quantitative analysis of literacy outcomes conducted by analysts at the NYC DOE who compared the DRP scores of students at the three indepth APTT study schools to those of students at the three comparison schools. The results of this analysis were shared with the NYU evaluators.

## School Selection

The evaluation included three distinct groups of schools, each with a different level of participation in the study:

+ In-depth study schools: These three schools, all implementing APTT, participated in parent interviews, teacher interviews, principal interviews, and APTT Champion interviews. These schools also participated in a parent survey and teacher survey. Evaluators observed each of the three APTT meetings at these schools. The three in-depth study schools were selected based on their high fidelity to the APTT model and other factors.

+ Survey schools: These four schools, all implementing APTT, participated in a parent survey and teacher survey.

+ Comparison schools: These three schools were part of MSQI but did not implement APTT. These schools participated in teacher interviews, parent interviews, a teacher survey, and a parent survey. These comparison schools were selected as matches to each of the three in-depth study schools. We did not conduct any primary data collection at one of the three comparison schools due to a lack of response from the school. At a second comparison school, we only conducted semi-structured interviews.

All MSQI schools were eligible for participation in the study, as "in depth" schools, "survey" schools, or comparison schools. Evaluators used four criteria to select schools for the "in depth" sample of APTT schools. First, evaluators selected schools with high levels of fidelity to the model; evaluators reviewed existing APTT fidelity indicators provided by the Department of Education and MSQI. Schools received fidelity ratings in five focal areas: engagement of school leadership, family outreach and attendance, student data and analysis between APTT cycles, teacher-team engagement, and APTT meeting implementation. Second, schools could not be part of the DOE's Community Schools program. Third, schools must administer the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment three times per year. Finally, schools must be at least in their second year of APTT implementation. Four schools met these criteria; we selected three for in-depth study.

Analysts at the NYC Department of Education conducted a propensity score matching (PSM) analysis to select comparison schools. The three in-depth study schools were matched to other MSQI schools not implementing APTT based on the following criteria:

+ % poverty
+ % temporary housing
+ % English language learners
+ % Black
+ % Hispanic
+ % Students with disabilities
+ ELA proficiency from previous three years

Propensity score matching analysis resulted in three matched schools for each in-depth study school - one primary match and two secondary matches. Evaluators initially coordinated data collection activities with the primary match, but moved on to secondary matches when the primar school declined participation or other factors made the school ineligible for participation.

Schools selected for comparative analysis did not necessarily conduct traditional parent-teacher conferences. Rather, the only criteria to be eligible for comparison school selection was that they not be implementing APTT. This is important to note because at least one comparison school implemented student-led parent-teacher conferences. The implementation of other alternative parent engagement models can help contextualize the results of this evaluation.

## Parent and Teacher Surveys

We developed a parent survey based on WestEd's existing APTT parent survey, and administered the survey in April, May, and June 2018. The survey was administered primarily on paper, with one school opting to distribute the online version of the survey to parents. We offered the survey in both English and Spanish. Evaluators worked with each school to determine the best survey administration plan for each school. A total of 312 parent surveys were collected from schools using the APTT model (including in-depth schools and survey schools combined), and 8 parent surveys from comparison schools.

The teacher survey was distributed to teachers implementing APTT at planning meetings in Spring 2018. A total of 34 teacher surveys were collected from APTT schools. Surveys were distributed to teachers at comparison schools via email; 5 surveys were collected. Due to the low response rate among teachers at comparison schools, we are opting to exclude the data from this evaluation.

## Observations

The evaluation team conducted observations of all APTT meetings at the three in-depth schools. At each meeting, an evaluator selected one classroom to observe for the entirety of the APTT meeting. Evaluators aimed to observe how APTT works in practice and gain more insight into how different teachers implement APTT in their classrooms. Evaluators compiled field notes to record each observation.

# Parent, Teacher, and School Administrator Interviews

Evaluators conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with parents at all three in-depth schools and two of three comparison schools. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents, depending on participants' preferences. Parents were recruited to participate in interviews or focus groups either directly by a researcher or through the assistance of a school staff member (e.g., parent coordinator). In total, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with:

+ 5 parents at the two comparison schools
+ 10 parents at the three in-depth study schools

Researchers conducted interviews with school administrators and teachers at all three in-depth schools and two of three comparison schools. School administrators and teachers were recruited to participate in interviews or focus groups either directly by a researcher or through the assistance of a school staff member (e.g., APTT Champion) who organized interview and/or focus group sessions in alignment with teachers' schedules. In total, we conducted interviews and focus groups with:

+ 4 school administrators at in-depth study schools
+ 15 teachers at in-depth study schools
+ 10 school administrators and teachers at two of the three matched comparison schools

## Coding and Analysis

Qualitative data collected from interviews, focus groups, and observations was transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative coding software. Evaluators used thematic analysis to code the data based on both deductive and emergent themes. Evaluators cleaned and analyzed survey data using SPSS software. Findings selected for inclusion in this report were those most pertinent to answering the evaluation questions guiding this study.

## Methodological Limitations

Only parents who actively participated in APTT participated in this study, either as a survey or interview participant. This selection bias likely influenced our findings. Parents included in this study tended to be moderately or even highly engaged, with some being active PTA members. These parents were more likely to report high levels of engagement with their children's school and teachers, regardless of program, and there was no evidence to suggest that they became more active or engage as a result of APTT.

In addition, parents who did not attend any APTT meetings, or parents who decided not to attend APTT meetings after attending the initial meeting, are severely under-represented in our evaluation. During our school visits, we observed relatively low turnout at two of the three study schools, meaning that non-attending parents made up a significant portion of the unsampled population. Not knowing why they were unable or chose not to attend is a significant missing piece of the puzzle to explain how parents feel about their children's schools, parent conferences, and/or about APTT specifically.

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2. We received a total of 102 parent surveys from schools implementing APTT. However, identical or very similar response patterns from one school led us to question the validity of responses from parents at that school. We opted to exclude these surveys from our analysis.

# Context of APTT Implementation in Study Schools

WestEd, the developer of the APTT program, would have typically provided an initial training and year-round support for all schools implementing APTT. However, due to contractual issues, WestEd discontinued its work with the DOE halfway through the 2018 school year. As a result, DOE staff stepped in to provide support to schools implementing APTT.

The three schools selected for in-depth study and the three matched comparison schools served a large number of low-income families and students of color. The economic need index of the three in-depth study schools ranged from 81 percent to 95 percent; the average across all city schools in 2017-18 was 74 percent.

Study School 1 implemented APTT meetings in sixth and seventh grade, and planned to expand to eighth grade in 2018-19. At the time of the evaluation, the school was in its second year of APTT implementation. The school held APTT meetings in late November, early March, and early May. The school used APTT to improve skills in both reading and math; in our observations, the first APTT meeting focused on context clues, the second on fractions, and the third on context clues.

Study School 2 implemented APTT meetings in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, and was in its third year of APTT implementation. The school held APTT meetings in late November, early March, and mid-June. The three APTT meetings focused on reading concepts and data. The first two meetings focused on context clues, which the school identified as its lowest reading test score component across all grades. These two meetings followed closely the APTT model and there was a separate meeting for each grade. All of the grade level teachers were present at their respective grade-level meetings. The third meeting did not focus on skills, it didn't follow the APTT model, and families weren't separated by grade level. Instead, the third APTT meeting was intended as a celebration of score increases in the three grades and was held in the school's auditorium.

Study School 3 implemented APTT meetings in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The school was it its second year of APTT implementation, and held two APTT meetings in late November and early March. The school opted not to facilitate a third APTT meeting later in the school year. The focus of both APTT meetings was Tier 2 vocabulary: words that are considered more descriptive than everyday (Tier 1) words but are useful across content domains, such as "obvious," "complex," "examine," "evidence," or "verify." Meetings consisted of teams of between two and six teachers in a room with a range of between four and thirty parents, and each of the first two meeting days offered morning and evening time slots for parent convenience. The meetings were very similar and the second meeting focused on the same academic skill as the first meeting, but introduced a new game for parents to take home. No math, science, or social studies concepts were addressed because of an administrative directive to focus on the Tier 2 vocabulary exclusively. This was intended to align with a schoolwide focus on boosting testing performance through cross-disciplinary academic vocabulary.

# Findings

Based on analyses of interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations, and DRP data, we present seven findings most relevant to the evaluation questions guiding this study. Our first two findings directly answer the first and second evaluation questions relating to APTT's influence on school-family connections and parents' experiences with APTT. Our third finding presents results from an analysis of students' DRP scores, and our fourth finding answers how APTT aligns with citywide parent engagement strategies. The last three findings do not directly answer the evaluation questions, but emerged from our analysis of interview data. These findings deepen the contextual understanding of APTT implementation in MSQI schools and may help identify potential areas of programmatic adjustment, including adaptations to increase the cultural responsiveness of the APTT model.

## Finding 1: APTT helped families connect with teachers and schools by providing an opportunity for positive parent-teacher interactions

APTT offered an opportunity for parents and teachers to communicate about positive aspects of their child's education rather than limiting communication to concerns about academic performance or student behaviors. Some teachers framed APTT as a way to build community, celebrate learning, and partner with parents to promote learning; they stressed the value of celebrating what students are able to do. In addition, schools added to the celebratory nature by serving dinner to all families.

*"I feel again that [APTT] allows parents to come in and not come in for behavior issues, it's coming in to learn and help improve their kid's learning. So, that will definitely always be a positive in terms of promoting this program."-Teacher*

*"[W]e wanted parents to leave here on a positive note, so we added the food at the end. We wanted to make it celebratory. And so, if parents were leaving the building on a high note, that then they'll be willing to come on the Tuesdays [to family engagement time]. Oftentimes, parents don't come to school just because who wants to come to the schools to get bad news, right? So, I think that was basically we wanted to be able to make it festive, make it celebratory, so that way parents would feel good about being in the building. [...] And I think that we had a slight increase in it where the communication is not just negative communication." -School administrator*

*"So, now with APTT, we are looking at a more positive way in a more positive thing, instead of focusing on what the child is not doing. Now we are talking about a game or an activity that they are doing at home. And, I think when it's a positive thing the parents are more open to talk to the teacher, but also the kids – if the children know that we are not talking about how bad they are behaving all the time, or they are not doing homework – it's about this activity and how it can help them, it helps to build a more positive relationship with the parents and the children." -Teacher*

This cultivation of a positive, celebratory atmosphere was apparent at one of the in-depth study schools that turned the third and final APTT meeting into a celebration of reading progress for eighth grade students. The school's principal transformed the meeting into an awards ceremony for students who had improved their reading since sixth grade, aligning with Epstein's (1997) principles of effective parent involvement.

Some teachers found that APTT meetings facilitated a better relationship with parents outside of APTT. One teacher commented that she has better communication with parents who attended APTT meetings:

*"Having the APTT meeting allowed that icebreaker that allowed parents to come visit the teacher under not a behavior issue. And I think that also the parents can go home with tools or resources to say, 'I sat down with your teacher. me and your teacher work together, and I'm going to sit down with you.' … So I've seen that change, and students whose parents attended, I can reach them and they respond quicker now, and also the communication between us is a little bit better. -Teacher*

*"Just for myself, when I see parents during our Tuesday afternoon parent engagement time, if they came to APTT, it's like we have – it's like, 'Oh hi! It's nice to see you again." -Teacher*

While APTT offered parents an opportunity to connect with teachers in a positive way, we did not observe the active solicitation of parent voices, partnerships with trusted organizations, or the use of parents - or even students - as promoters of engagement. Further, only certain parents who are able to attend APTT meetings reap the benefits of interacting with teachers in this manner. From both our observations and surveys of teachers, relatively few parents participated in APTT meetings (though participation varied widely across schools). Among teachers, 42 percent reported that only "a few" of their parents attended at least one APTT meeting during the year, and another 24 percent reported that "about half" of parents attended. This suggests that a significant proportion of parents are not being reached by APTT.

These findings point to potential improvements to both the APTT model and to APTT implementation. The team meeting facilitation guide specifies that parents should practice leadership roles, though only during the 'Welcome and Team Building' activity. APTT meetings could be made more culturally responsive by expanding parent leadership opportunities and the solicitation of parent voices throughout the meeting. Parents could also play active and meaningful roles outside of APTT meetings by engaging in collaborative planning or making decisions about APTT content and design.

Implementation of the existing model could also be improved. Though parent leadership is included in the 'Welcome and Team Building' activity, we saw limited evidence that teachers actively encouraged parents to take on leadership roles or asked parents to share personal experiences; teachers may need increased support from facilitators to improve in this area. Expanding the potential leadership opportunities for parents and ensuring that these opportunities are prioritized within APTT may promote attendance, engagement within meetings, and empowerment because parents will become active participants in the group and not solely receivers of information.

## Finding 2: APTT offered parents the opportunity to learn skills, interact with teachers, and be informed about their child's academic progress, but the model as implemented in New York City middle schools did not offer parents a one-on-one relationship with teachers, which was a priority for both parents and teachers.

Regarding parents' experience in the APTT program, we found that parents that participated in APTT generally felt satisfied with the APTT program in their respective schools. Parents appreciated meeting and engaging with other parents, getting an opportunity to interact with the classroom teacher, and seeing how their child is doing in school. One parent found the community aspect of the meetings particularly useful, as it helped her see that other families shared similar student experiences:

*"[At APTT meetings] I was able to see what my child actually does, what kinda games she does, how she interacts, how she talks with the teacher. [...] And not only that, I learned that she's not the only kid that has issues in school. [...] They're very helpful because I – sometimes, I felt like it was just my child going through issues with school, and with the teachers, and stuff. Then, I see, "No, it's really not." It makes you feel a little reassured that they're all kids and they're taking their time getting to know what they need to do." -Parent*

Nearly three-quarters of parents we surveyed said they communicate about school on a daily basis with their children. For some parents, APTT enhanced this interaction by providing games and other learning strategies to practice at home to support their child's learning. All parents agreed that the practice materials they received at APTT meetings were helpful.

*"What I learned [at APTT meetings] is that you have to always be with them and you have to make them read every day or look for what they like to do. Because you can't get them to do something they don't like to do, like sports." -Parent*

*"Yes, what they always suggest is that whenever they – for example, whenever they read a book they give us a form with questions about what she can do. The student already knows. We already know how to ask about it. [...] It's a form that says, "What is this book about? How much did she read? What do you think?" And other questions like this." -Parent*

*"Well, I've been doing the [activities] at home. I won't actually know until I get her next report card. [...] But, I've been doing the activities with her, you know, getting her also to go on the computer. On the computer they have a lot of learning stuff. So, I do that with her." -Parent*

Some parents talked about playing the games provided at APTT meetings with other children or extended family members, suggesting that APTT may help influence the learning of siblings and other family members at home who engage in games demonstrated at APTT meetings.

*"I would say like, during the weekend we take a day to play those kinds of games  [from APTT] with the girls, because she has a sister that's seven. She doesn't know a lot, but she does participate, and she's good at some of the things. So, we tend to do that with the girls on the weekends, because you know since they're in school until either 4:30 p.m. or 5:15 p.m. They come home, they're tired, they have to do their homework, take a shower, eat, and then heaven forbid they want to watch a little TV, you know?" -Parent*

*"We did all of that at home, we did the games, I think. I actually did the game. [...] I did the game with her, her uncle, her mother that came to visit, and me. We all did it. They all had fun. They laughed, you know, it was kind of cool. And she does you know, the reading logs [...] It helps out, because especially on the days when there's no school, like the week that they have off? She has something to do to keep her mind going." -Parent*

*"Well, it's kinda hard [to play the games] because she's away on a certain day of the week and she goes to church with my mom. So, when she's home, we try to squeeze it all in. Not only that, she has younger siblings so she can encourage them to learn as well. It helps." -Parent*

While parents spoke positively about APTT and its influence, the schools included in this study did not implement the APTT individual parent-teacher session, resulting in the loss of a critical opportunity for one-on-one engagement between parents and teachers. Based on our interviews, we found that both parents and teachers valued one-on-one interactions regarding students' academics or behavior.

*"I do feel – like, we had a parent teacher conference last night; I wish it was for the report card. We'd get more parents in if it's connected with a report card. One thing you do lose [with APTT] is the individual [meeting] for the kids who are really, really, really struggling behavior wise, or [with] academics, is to really talk to them in depth. Because a lot of times on [the weekly parent engagement time] they're not coming in." -Teacher*

*"[APTT is] an interesting idea but I don't know if I would prefer this. If I had a choice I might go with the traditional one because it gives us a lot of chances to talk to parents one-on-one. And sometimes we need that to address the problems." -Teacher*

In order to develop better relationships with teachers, some parents we spoke to took a proactive approach to individual parent-teacher communication by reaching out to teachers to monitor student progress and homework assignments. For example, one parent described her personal approach to communicating with teachers:

*"Well, I am in touch with two teachers, basically. And I visit them. The rest, like I told you, I have had to go there and ask how she is doing. I have to call her like, "Is she doing okay? How was she today? How was school going? Is she picking up on anything?" -Parent*

However, though other parents wanted teachers to initiate communication with them, it often didn't happen:

*"I've come twice for report card, and I've met all of her teachers, and they all say they love her, she's a good kid. But, beyond that, I have no relationship with them. They have my number, I've always told them if there are any issues, or any problems with[my child] they're more than welcome to call me. I gave them my cell phone and my house phone." -Parent*

*Interviewer: Do you feel that they communicate enough with you?*
*Parent: No. they don't communicate at all.*
*Interviewer: What would you want?*
*Parent: Honestly, I would want that if [child] wasn't doing that good in her classes, I would appreciate it if the teachers called me and not waited until report card day to tell me. Because if they tell me ahead of time, maybe I can get her motivated to do better.*

*"I never communicate with the teachers. ...I figure the teachers would communicate with me if there's a problem. If there's not a problem, I guess they figured they don't need to communicate with me. That's the way I see it." -Parent*

These parents who take the initiative to close gaps in parent outreach at the school level can mask underlying factors creating those gaps, such as a lack of recognition of parent "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001) and general apprehension about schools (Pillet-Shore, 2016; Walker & Leg, 2018).

## Finding 3: On average, students at the three APTT study schools experienced less reading growth than students at comparison schools.

Analysts at the NYC Department of Education conducted a comparative analysis of DRP scores of students in the three in-depth study schools, their matched comparison schools, and all MSQI schools. Analysts calculated the average score among all students who took the DRP assessment in both the fall and spring.

Sixth graders in in-depth study schools scored, on average, 49.2 in the fall and 53.1 in the spring, for a growth of 3.9 points. Sixth-graders in matched comparison schools scored, on average, 50.4 in the fall and 56.3 in the spring, for a total growth of 5.8 points. Students in the comparison schools began the year at a slightly more advanced reading level and experienced more growth in reading skills than did students in the in-depth study schools.

Seventh graders in in-depth study schools averaged a 52.5 in the fall and 56.3 in the spring, for an average growth of 3.8 points. Seventh graders in comparison schools averaged a 54.1 in the fall and 58.7 in the spring, for an average growth of 4.6 points.

Eighth grade students in in-depth study schools averaged 58.0 points in the fall and 61.7 points in the spring, for an average growth of 3.7 points. In matched comparison schools, eighth graders earned an average score of 57.7 in the fall and 62.4 in the spring, for an average growth of 4.7 points.

**Table 1: Degrees of Reading Power Score Analysis**

| Grade | Study Schools | | | | Comparison Schools | | | | DRP Score Standards[3] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Fall 2017 | Spring 2018 | Average Growth | N | Fall 2017 | Spring 2018 | Average Growth | |
| 6 | 265 | 49.2 | 53.1 | 3.9 | 378 | 50.4 | 56.3 | 5.8 | 57-62 |
| 7 | 303 | 52.5 | 56.3 | 3.8 | 341 | 54.1 | 58.7 | 4.6 | 60-64 |
| 8 | 248 | 58.0 | 61.7 | 3.7 | 344 | 57.7 | 62.4 | 4.7 | 62-67 |

The patterns observed between APTT and comparison schools overall also emerged when comparing each APTT in-depth study school to its matched school (Table 2). At Study School 1 and 3, the average students growth in all grades was less than the growth at the comparison schools. In Study School 2, students in seventh and eighth grade progressed more, on average, than students at the matched comparison school.

**Table 1: Degrees of Reading Power Score Analysis**

| | Average DRP Point Growth - 6th Grade | Average DRP Point Growth - 7th Grade | Average DRP Point Growth - 8th Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| Study School 1 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 2.9[4] |
| Comparison School 1 | 6.3 | 5.2 | 6.1 |
| Point Growth Difference | -2.8 | -1.7 | -3.2 |
| Study School 1 | 4.0 | 5.3 | 6.1 |
| Comparison School 1 | 5.5 | 4.5 | 5.1 |
| Point Growth Difference | -1.5 | +0.8 | +1.0 |
| Study School 1 | 5.3 | 2.8 | 3.4 |
| Comparison School 1 | 5.8 | 4.3 | 3.5 |
| Point Growth Difference | -0.5 | -1.5 | -0.1 |

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3. https://www.questarai.com/drp-docs/Degrees-of-Reading-Power-Report-Interpretation-Guide.pdf
4. 8th grade did not participate in APTT at Study School 1.

The DRP analysis conforms to similar recent findings in Bench (2018), who found that in a convenience sample of roughly 900 third grade students' reading scores, no statistically significant effects were detected of APTT on academic achievement. Significant percentages of the sample were English Learners (77%) and eligible for free or reduced price lunch (88%), and a fairly representative portion (16%) were special education students. While not directly comparable to New York City students, the sample's diversity represented populations that our literature survey and theoretical framework suggest are least likely to be served by this model of parent engagement.

APTT teachers' survey responses suggested that at least some felt that APTT did not improve students' academic performance; 47 percent disagreed that students' reading skills improved because of APTT, and 39 percent disagreed that data related to the selected foundational skills demonstrated improved academic achievement.

Results from the analysis of DRP scores should be interpreted with some caution. Analysis included data for all students in each grade, regardless of parental involvement in APTT. In addition, these analyses studied scores for the entire DRP assessment, though APTT meetings (including the data presented and the learning games shared with families) tended to be narrowly focused on only one specific reading skill measured by the DRP.

## Finding 4: Implementing APTT's one-on-one meetings and the third group meeting with full fidelity presented a challenge to schools.

Through our observations and conversations with educators, we found that schools experienced challenges to implementing the APTT model with full fidelity, which manifested in two distinct ways. First, in-depth study schools did not facilitate the APTT individual parent-teacher sessions prescribed by the model. Second, the three in-depth study schools struggled to facilitate the third APTT meeting with fidelity, with one school opting to abandon the third meeting altogether.

None of the three in-depth study schools implemented the APTT individual sessions as prescribed by the model. The DOE mandates 40 minutes per week of parent engagement time. At the guidance of APTT facilitators, schools adhered to this school-day block for one-on-one meetings with parents, though these meetings were not part of APTT. Because schools tended to schedule the weekly parent engagement time in early or mid-afternoon, many working parents could not participate in one-on-one meetings.

*"The one-to-one is usually what a lot of the teachers in the school … they don't know when [to have it]. You know, you have Tuesdays from 2:30 to 3:00. They only have a short window that only fits maybe 10 percent or even less percent of the population because people are engaged in work." -School administrator*

*"…the problem is … we don't have as many times a week to talk with the parents. Because I know they probably got work to come into the school. And I really like the way that APTT's working, I do. But taking the time to speak directly with the parents, this is just something that I would like to happen, and here we have one day, which is Tuesday … the parents are not coming. Even if we have the extra time to give to the parents, the parents are not coming." -Teacher*

Second, the use of the city's designated parent engagement time to hold one-on-one meetings was not effective, because teachers needed that time for other parent engagement activities aside from one-on-one meetings, such as making phone calls or preparing report cards.

We found that the three in-depth study schools experienced difficulty with or barriers to facilitating the third and final APTT group meeting with fidelity. One problem encountered by all three in-depth study schools related to the timing of DRP testing. Schools implementing APTT used DRP results to track reading students' reading progress, and presented these data to parents at APTT meetings. However, most schools scheduled their third APTT meeting in early to mid-May, when results from the third DRP assessment were not yet available. One in-depth study school held a third APTT meeting, but due to the timing of DRP testing, was not able to share DRP data with parents. Instead, the school shared students' Lexile scores and cross-referenced Lexile levels to DRP scores.

A second APTT school delayed its third APTT meeting until mid-June, about three weeks before the end of the school year. They wanted to avoid the state testing window (April and May) and to have the DRP scores available to present. Finally, the school worried that parent attendance would be lower due to its scheduling so close to the end of the school year. The school ultimately decided to have an awards ceremony to celebrate the reading achievement of 8th grade students rather than facilitate a third APTT meeting so late in the year.

The third in-depth study school opted not to hold a final APTT meeting at all. School staff cited multiple reasons for this decision, including the unavailability of data, teacher workload, and the difficulty of getting parents to come to parent-teacher conferences at the end of the school year:

*"I wanted to do the reading data again, but we don't have the third set of reading data. … but timing-wise it just didn't make sense for us this time [to have a third APTT meeting], especially without the support from WestEd. It just became something that I wasn't prepared to have the teachers work through what's already been a very busy month for us." -School administrator*

*"…last year the third meeting was in June. [It was] very difficult to bring any parents in June. It ended up making the most sense for us to talk about things that weren't very academic…or, you know, related to data and performance. We talked about high school application process, we talked about high school readiness, we talked about a summer reading program with the sixth grade parents." -School administrator*

*"…maybe if we had a building where everything was running smoothly, then teachers would have been okay with trying to push for it, but we are really busy here, where I think I appreciate not having the third meeting because it probably would have been rushed and I probably wouldn't have invested as much, my mind would have not been in the meeting. So having an opportunity to not do it I think was also beneficial." -Teacher*

These deviations from the APTT model were not made to improve the model's efficacy, but rather for the convenience or logistical needs of the study schools.

# Finding 5: APTT offered middle school teachers the opportunity to engage with more parents around topics pre-selected by the school, though teachers felt the model needed adaptation for the middle grades

In the initial development and research of APTT, Paredes (2009) observed that future research on the APTT model might include studying what variations of the model could better serve the needs of middle and high school students and their families. Due to the departmentalized nature of middle school courses, middle school faculty typically teach more students than do elementary teachers, posing a challenge to family engagement because of teachers' limited capacity to engage with such a large number of parents. One teacher noted that a traditional parent-teacher conference model is not an efficient method for successful family engagement:

*"[Traditional parent-teacher conferences] were exhausting because you had this whole train of parents waiting and when you have a small population … it's not a problem but when you have 54 parents…, the way it moved just took too long." - Teacher*

APTT presents an opportunity for middle school teachers to engage with an entire classroom of parents at one time, which can be an efficient way to reach more families. However, while the actual APTT meeting format might be an efficient way to reach more parents, the APTT model as a whole still requires a significant time commitment of teachers; 71 percent of teachers rated time as their biggest challenge to implementing the APTT model.

Teachers observed that the APTT model was initially developed and studied in an elementary school setting and did not provide adaptations for the middle grades. Teachers felt that the model could be effective in elementary schools and wanted to learn more adaptation strategies to make the model more appropriate for families of middle school students.

*"And I feel like the people who did go to the trainings had some games or activities, but they were more focused for elementary school. I remember that happening last year when we were discussing these issues for the math team. So maybe seeing how APTT could be better modified and better adjusted to a middle school setting could be cool too." -Teacher*

*"APTT, as far as I understand, it was born in elementary schools, or at least created to service elementary schools. [...] You could see it working really well in elementary schools, but the models they provided left a lot of questions about what it would look like in middle school." -Teacher*

In addition to requesting support in adapting the APTT model for middle grades, school staff acknowledged the challenge of engaging middle school parents, noting that parent engagement differs even between grades in middle school.

*"Middle school is weird. Eighth graders' communication with their parents is a worldaway from the sixth graders. So sixth grade is coming home with an invite is like anelementary school kid coming in and you're gonna do it, right? Our largest turnout isin the sixth grade. We know that." -School administrator*

One school staff member felt that middle school students and their families would benefit from the inclusion of non-academic components that are more relevant to older students:

*"...particularly as you get older, in middle school, seventh and eighth grade, and then in high school, I know a few high schools that are attempting the model, you really have to pack the meeting with things that are very applicable really beyond the classroom. You know, how to get that first job or how to get a summer job, something like this." -School administrator*

These observations point to the necessity of altering the model to be more appropriate and in alignment with a middle school classroom and middle school parent-child relationships.

## Finding 6: Schools utilized a limited set of traditional parent outreach methods to promote APTT participation.

One possible explanation for the finding that parent participation in the APTT group sessions was low was that in promoting parent participation in APTT, educators used a combination of phone calls, newsletters, robocalls, and school calendars to publicize APTT meetings. These modes of communication are all fairly typical and traditional methods of parent outreach.

Among the parents we interviewed, each preferred a certain mode of communication with their child's teacher, though often these parents were not receiving communication via their preferred method. Some parents preferred phone calls, while others we spoke to preferred the convenience of email, apps, or online platforms. This observation is consistent with gaps in engagement programs common to traditional approaches to parent engagement (Lemmer, 2012; Niehaus & Adelson, 2014) and with minoritized populations (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

The differences in parents' preferred method of communication underscored the need for schools to engage in multimodal communication about both APTT and other opportunities for parent engagement. There was a shared interest among both teachers and parents to use apps to communicate and to share academic progress. Several parents and teachers praised the use of apps or other electronic tools to foster communication and transparency between teachers and parents. One teacher used WhatsApp to create a classroom group where parents could communicate with each other and with the teacher. While the use of electronic tools appealed to some teachers and parents, schools should not rely exclusively on technology to communicate with parents, as some parents expressed discomfort with using computers or phones to communicate with teachers.

In addition to traditional outreach methods and the use of technology to reach families, teachers spoke about students as an asset in inviting parents to APTT meetings and building parent-teacher relationships. One teacher created buy-in among their students by having them design formal invitations to the APTT meetings. This approach alleviated anxiety about a teacher 'telling' on students at the parent-teacher conference:

*"I believe [designing formal invitations] may have worked only because the kids brought into the concept of, "Oh, it's not an opportunity for [the teacher] to tell." And one of the things I told them was, "It is not a conversation about what you did in school. The conversation [is about] where you can go as you are still in school." Somehow they bought that, because you're not telling my parents about me, you're trying to work together with me." -Teacher*

*"For example, the sixth grade team last time had students write letters to their parents, so they turned into a teachable moment, how to write a letter, and they addressed the envelope, and they used the kid's writing on the outside of the envelope because they figured the parents would open something with their child's handwriting probably before they would open something official from the school. The kids doing poster contests. In the past when we had an art teacher, he did a series of invites that the kids would make and bring home." -School administrator*

These school staff members provide examples of the deeper and more authentic ways to engage students and families, and open the door to the dialogic relationships (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) characteristic of more transformative and effective learning partnerships with students' families consistent with CRE/CRPE.

## Finding 7: Schools and teachers made some logistical changes to encourage parent engagement, though some challenges remain unaddressed.

We found that school staff made logistical modifications to encourage and support parent engagement, particularly around linguistic need and accommodating working parents. Educators experimented with different responses to feedback from parents and teachers, though some key challenges remained unaddressed.

Two of the three in-depth study schools served a large number of Spanish-speaking parents. The APTT meeting facilitation guide does not offer suggestions for accommodating speakers of other languages. At the first APTT meeting, one of these schools opted to facilitate the meeting with all parents in one classroom, regardless of their primary language. One teacher facilitated the meeting, while another translated the material into Spanish. Though this format ensured that all parents remained in the same classroom for the APTT meeting, the meeting ran well beyond the 75-minute meeting time due to the time required for translation.

*"I think what came out of it is I have to be very careful about basically just putting Spanish speaking in one room, but what happened with this process was that everybody was able to finish beforehand because in the past, it was … taking too long. It was taking too long because we [didn't] anticipate the fact that you had to basically translate." -School administrator*

At the second APTT meeting, the school that used translators at the first meeting experimented with separating English-speaking and Spanish-speaking families into different classrooms. Though the meeting finished on-time, the school acknowledged that this solution segregated families based on their preferred language and could inhibit community-building among parents.

*"[The interpreter came] and extended our time and the parents were not happy about sitting there for that long of a time. When we did it the second time around where we separated it based on language, we sacrificed the commodity that you want to build as far as community is concerned, but we … cut out at least 20 minutes from not having to translate. And so it's just like those little things … we need to tweak … to make APTT work for us, for our population, for our school community" -Teacher*

Serving parents who speak languages other than English is a clear challenge to APTT implementation. In addition to our direct observations of schools' challenges in this area, only about half (53 percent) of teachers felt they had adequate training on how to engage families that did not speak English.

Though we observed educators adapting APTT meetings to accommodate linguistic need, these adaptations were not universal. At another in-depth study school, educators made no direct modifications for linguistic diversity, because the school's administration claimed there were "no significant language needs" at the school. However, at the school's APTT meetings, parents brought their own translators, mobilizing their own social capital to respond to a deficit structure in school practice.

However, we saw no evidence that the school understood or even noticed the problem. The experiences of students whose parents spoke a language other than English is indicative of a gap in the APTT model. The APTT model as designed, from logic model to implementation, does not specifically provide for linguistic needs for non-English speaking students. The variance in how APTT schools managed linguistic needs indicates that the model has no provisions for servicing speakers of other languages. The APTT model does not instruct teachers in how to plan for or work around language barriers, and as a result, each school devised a variety of practices.

All three study schools provided meals to accommodate families. Schools understood the challenges presented when families - sometimes including younger siblings - are asked to come to the school for a 75-minute parent-teacher meeting often lasting until 6:30 pm or later. Providing a meal demonstrates an understanding of the effort required for families to attend an APTT meeting. Further, parents used the mealtimes as an opportunity to engage in one-on-one conversations with teachers.

Though we found that schools made accommodations to meet parents' needs, some challenges remain unaddressed. Child-care, for example, posed problems. In one study school, no child-care was provided for families, which meant that parents, middle school students, and younger siblings attended the APTT meeting together, creating a crowded and distracting classroom environment for everyone. It is also likely that the lack of child care prevented some families from attending APTT meetings altogether.

Schools faced challenges in facilitating APTT meetings at family-friendly times of day. Two of the three study schools opted to hold two APTT meetings on the same day in an effort to maximize the number of families able to attend. One of the schools hosted one morning meeting (9:00am) and another in the early evening (5:00pm). The other school hosted one meeting in the early afternoon (1:00pm) and one in the early evening (5:30pm). The third in-depth study school chose to facilitate only one APTT meeting per cycle, held at 5:30pm.

# Discussion

From an ecological systems theory and CRE/CRPE theory perspective, the APTT model as deployed in NYC middle schools demonstrates some challenges and tensions that suggest some disconnects across program theory, practice, and outcomes. While APTT is intended as a tool to build parent-teacher relationships, parents are not positioned as assets or as equal partners – a critical component of culturally responsive parent engagement. Based on the instructional focus of APTT and the focus on literacy skills in APTT's middle school program implementation, the APTT model could be more accurately framed as a literacy intervention than a parent engagement program. While parents who attended APTT meetings reported satisfaction with the model, participation in APTT meetings was relatively low, meaning that APTT's influence on parent-teacher relationships is limited. Further, the emphasis on only one foundational skill per meeting does not serve students at the extremes of academic achievement or those who need extra support on other foundational literacy skills. An expanded focus on middle school literacy skills such as comprehension would allow for a greater variety of learning games to be taught and practiced.

How does the APTT program help families connect with their children's teachers and schools? We found that the APTT model provided an opportunity for teachers and parents to share positive interactions, rather than interactions that are initiated because of poor academic performance or behavioral concerns. Teachers and school leaders aimed to make APTT meetings celebratory by emphasizing progress and working together. In addition, schools served dinner and held raffle drawings to enhance the celebratory nature of APTT meetings; these activities were designed to make APTT meetings more attractive and foster a greater sense of community and positive home-school interaction.

There are elements of APTT conducive to increased parent engagement and student success. However, there is a gap in cultural responsiveness in the model as currently implemented. Our evaluation found that APTT does not position parents as assets and that parents have little voice or agency in the context of APTT; parents had limited opportunity to ask questions or address concerns with individual teachers at APTT meetings. Interviews with teachers confirmed that other avenues for such contact, such as weekly family engagement time or one-on-one meetings, were not regularly used for this purpose. Furthermore, there is no intrinsic component within the APTT model designed to draw more parents into APTT-focused parent-teacher meetings than traditional parent-teacher conferences; this work is left to individual schools to design such supplements to the program.

The model's assignment of responsibility for educators to creatively engage parents and create school communities of celebration is a research-based positive practice, but it is not rooted in the learning concerns of students or families. APTT projects the learning priorities of the school onto parents in what can be, as confirmed in interviews, easily converted into a blame-based accountability paradigm that faults students and their parents for learning struggles and failures rather than co-creating conditions for academic success in through effective partnerships between home and school.

In addition, the APTT model assumes that trust has already been established between parents and schools. Multiple interviewees described trust-building as an essential component of parent engagement. In some of the APTT study schools, the time that teachers would normally dedicate to regular parental contact became time that was allocated to rehearsing and planning APTT meetings; this further directed scarce time way from direct and individualized parent contact.

The assumption of firmly established trust is an especially problematic one when a CRE/CRPE lens is applied to practitioner beliefs and practices. Teachers held deficit views of the culture, attitudes, and commitment to education of parents of struggling students. These views tended to align with positive views about APTT, because in educators' perceptions described in interviews, APTT allowed parents to be held more accountable for the success or failure of their children. One unanticipated consequence of APTT is that teachers used the accountability model of APTT to assign blame for student failure to students' parents, particularly to parents who did not attend school-initiated APTT meetings. APTT teachers showed little awareness or regard for the difficulties parents face in attending any parent conference, let alone a full 75-minute meeting. Thus, the APTT framework can enable teachers who are culturally distanced from their students' parents and homes to use that distance to support their erroneous assumptions about parental commitment to education, establishing a self-fulfilling prophecy of limited parental contact and reinforcing a cycle of failure for struggling students from marginalized backgrounds. While this is not a phenomenon

unique to APTT, elements of APTT can exacerbate this negative pattern. One example is the lead APTT graphic in Meeting 1, which depicts to parents (and teachers) how much waking (and potential learning) time students spend outside of school. This transfer of responsibility to educate and reinforce school activities onto the parent implies that only parental lack of skill, background, or motivation could explain why their students might continue to struggle after the APTT program has been introduced in their schools.

In response to these findings and observations, we recommend the following:

**+** Increase the cultural responsiveness of the APTT model by building asset mindsets among teachers implementing APTT and offering parents meaningful opportunities to lead and share their perspectives. We found evidence that teachers maintained deficit perspectives of students and their parents, and especially of students who were not doing well academically. These deficit perspectives were reinforced when teachers attempted unsuccessfully to contact parents of struggling students. APTT meetings did not address and attempt to counter these deficit perspectives, and in several documented instances actually reinforced them.

Students and their parents should be viewed as assets in the development of meaningful school-parent and teacher-parent relationships. Shifting to a mindset that values and nurtures families' strengths and assets can encourage the growth of school climates that promote student achievement, parent engagement, and student learning potential. Storytelling is one example of a culturally responsive pedagogical strategy that could be employed to teach literacy skills while simultaneously centering the strengths, cultures, and lived experiences of students and their families. Storytelling can also increase understanding and build community between the storyteller and the listener.

As currently implemented, APTT creates few opportunities for parents to lead or to engage in meaningful decision-making. Parents should be asked what academic skills would be most important to focus on in APTT meetings so that meetings can be tailored to the learning priorities of children and their parents, rather than narrowly focused on content identified through item analysis. Further, APTT meetings should be modified to include more opportunities for parents and students to lead and contribute in meaningful ways.

+ Implement APTT in consonance with other parent engagement activities that establish and build trusting relationships between teachers and parents. Educators should consider implementing the APTT model within other parent engagement strategies that work intentionally to build trust between parents, teachers, and schools, such as giving parents a meaningful role in school and classroom decision-making or by partnering with a well-known local community-based organization with an established trust in the community. Ensuring a pre-established level of trust between parents and teachers may contribute to increased attendance and engagement in APTT meetings.

APTT focuses on remediating need in one or more academic skill areas, and utilizes parents as instructional supports by repurposing parent-teacher communication around those objectives. Accordingly, other programs must be put in place to perform the primary functions of more engagement-focused parent programs: recruitment and maintenance of an active and engaged family population; establishment of a school climate that welcomes families throughout the year for various functions and purposes beyond reading; cultivation of vibrant, differentiated, and frequent parent-teacher communication strategies; more outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse parent populations; and greater efforts to welcome and include students and parents in decision-making at the school level.

**What are the experiences of families participating in the APTT program: how does the program help them work with their children, their children's teachers, and their schools to improve their children's academic capacities?**

Parents we spoke to described positive experiences participating in APTT. Some parents expressed appreciation for the learning games and activities they received at APTT meetings, which they played with their children. However, analysis of Degrees of Reading Power scores between APTT schools and matched comparison schools indicated that on average, students at APTT schools experienced less reading growth than their peers.

The APTT design leaves little to no room for differentiation of literacy instruction. In the schools we studied, APTT meetings focused on developing one specific foundational skill pre-selected by the school, such as context clues, regardless of how individual students were progressing on that skill. This approach does not account for students at either end of the academic achievement spectrum or those who would benefit from a focus on other literacy skills; importantly, this approach does not actively encourage students to become better readers overall nor does it account for the complexities of middle school literacy development. This design limitation suggests a broader question about the value added by APTT for parents of students whose DRP scores, or the scores of any other standardized measure, are at or above proficient. To ask parents to attend a 75-minute meeting to focus on skills that are not relevant for their children represents a misallocation of parent time and a misalignment of resources and needs. The heavy scripting of the program leaves little time for teachers to diverge based on any recognition of differentiated need (including translation in multilingual presentations). An expanded focus on reading comprehension and fluency more generally would allow for a greater number of learning games to be taught and practiced within APTT meetings, and may help teachers of subjects besides English to buy-in to the APTT model and work within the APTT context.

Further, the APTT model does not make explicit how students with IEPs, 504, or academic or behavioral intervention plans benefit. The meeting structure and activities, as observed, appear to align with Freire's (2000/1993/1970) "banking model" of education, designed to "teach" to the middle at the expense of those at the extreme high and low ends of academic achievement, by delivering pre-formatted information largely decontextualized from students' lives and experiences.

We found it problematic that the APTT model does not explicitly focus on or include students. Students are not required to attend either APTT whole-class meetings or individual sessions, even though the APTT whole-class meetings required families to set S.M.A.R.T. goals for student achievement. The student-led conferences provided in one comparison school provided a meaningful contrast to APTT. By placing the student at the center of home-parent engagement on academic improvement, this instructional focus can connect students' lives to pride in achievement, responsibility, and position parents and schools in a supportive capacity to assist students in setting, reaching, and analyzing progress toward more meaningful goals.

Finally, APTT, in both its foundational literature and in the research studies conducted thus far, cites literacy skills and scores almost exclusively as indicators of its success in boosting "academic achievement." In interviews with teachers at study schools, however, middle school teachers noted several difficulties in extending APTT to other content areas, including mathematics, science, and social studies. The process of disseminating packaged skill-builders at grade level is easier with vocabulary acquisition and word play than it is with conceptual foundational activities in math and science, which often require manipulatives or other materials-based hands-on activities to foster acquisition of skills and knowledge.

In response to these finding and observations, we recommend the following:

+ Intentionally diversify and differentiate APTT's instructional content. Schools should use APTT meetings to deliver a diversity of instructional skills beyond narrow ELA-specific academic areas. As noted by teachers in interviews, the APTT model at the middle school level is quite limited, particularly when meetings focus on a very limited reading skill rather (e.g., context clues) than on improving comprehension, becoming a better reader, or on other content areas besides ELA. It becomes difficult, for example, to consider how to teach practical algebra skills to parents in a single APTT meeting, especially if they are less comfortable with algebra. In addition, the APTT model should also be revised to consider students on both ends of the achievement distribution -- those who most excel and most struggle with targeted skills do not benefit from any differentiation within the current model.

**How do the APTT program's family engagement strategies align with other NYC DOE family engagement strategies?**

APTT aligned with NYC DOE family engagement strategies in that it calls for the facilitation of three parent-teacher meetings, which schools generally aligned with citywide parent-teacher conference nights in November, March, and May. On the other hand, the APTT model conflicted with citywide parent engagement strategies.

None of the three in-depth schools in the study facilitated APTT individual sessions with families. The primary reason for this gap in model fidelity was the city's mandated family engagement time, a 40 minute weekly time block in which teachers work on family engagement activities such as calling parents, preparing report cards, or meeting individually with parents. Schools typically scheduled the parent engagement time in the early afternoon, at a time when many parents are at work. Further, a single APTT individual session is scheduled for 30 minutes, which would occupy nearly all of one teacher's weekly parent engagement time. Finally, given the number of families a middle school teacher needs to engage, scheduling individual APTT sessions with every family is unrealistic. These challenges established an environment in which parents often became the initiators of one-on-one relationships, either through regular phone calls or in-person visits.

In light of this and the preceding observations, we recommend the following:

+  Adapt the APTT model for use in middle grades, acknowledging that parent engagement is likely to be different between sixth and eighth grades. School staff recognized that the APTT model was initially developed primarily for elementary settings, and requested support in adapting the model for use in middle school classrooms. WestEd, the NYCDOE and individual schools should consider how to best adapt APTT for effective use in middle school, given the limitations identified through this evaluation. These limitations include the differences between how sixth grader and eighth graders communicate with their parents, how sixth grade parents and eighth grade parents communicate with their teachers, and how many students a typical middle school teacher teaches.

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# Appendix A: APTT Logic Model

## Academic Parent Teacher Teams Logic Model | aptt Academic Parent-Teacher Teams with WestEd

**Goal:** To develop, implement, evaluate, refine, and sustain a high-impact school family engagement model that improves student learning and performance.

| Challenge | Resources | Activities | Outputs | Short and Long-Term Outcomes | Impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of a research-based, data-driven system for parent-teacher collaboration for increasing student achievement. | • WestEd coach<br>• APTT Framework<br>• District policy and support<br>• School administrative support<br>• PLC's<br>• Data system support<br>• Funding Sources<br>• Community partners' support<br>• Translators<br>• Child care | • Review District policies for (FE) and facilitate upgrades<br>• Provide PD on research and best practices to district leadership team<br>• Provide school APTT training to administrators, teachers and staff<br>• Facilitate development of school training and implementation plan<br>• Use data system to access student formative and summative data<br>• Develop foundational grade-level learning skills<br>• Develop activities and materials by grade level for APTT implementation | • APTT implementation<br>• Students meet their academic goals<br>• Distributed leadership (Peer mentoring and demonstration classrooms)<br>• Data to demonstrate level model effectiveness<br>• APTT champions | • Expanded awareness and understanding of FE<br>• Improved teacher self-efficacy to engage families<br>• Improved parents' self-efficacy to be engaged<br>• Regular parent-teacher communication about academics<br>• Increased skill practice at home<br>• Improved student engagement<br>• Improved student attendance<br>• Improved student behavior<br>• Improved school climate | Improved student learning and performance |

# Appendix B: APTT Parent Survey

N=27

We'd like to know how important it is for you to be invited to APTT meetings. Please check the box that indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| To be invited by the teachers to APTT meetings was important to me | 3.4% | 0% | 55.2% | 41.4% |
| To be invited to an individual one-on-one APTT meeting was important to me | 0 | 0 | 53.8 | 42.3 |
| To receive a phone call invitation was important to me | 0 | 3.8 | 53.8 | 42.3 |
| To be invited by my child to APTT meetings was important to me | 3.6 | 3.6 | 46.4 | 46.4 |
| Attending APTT meetings was important to me as a parent | 3.3 | 0 | 46.7 | 50 |

We'd like to know how important it is for you to be invited to APTT meetings. Please check the box that indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would participate in the APTT program again next year | 0% | 0% | 46.7% | 53.3% |
| Having team meetings with other classroom parents was a positive experience | 0 | 0 | 46.4 | 53.6 |
| The practice materials I received were helpful | 0 | 0 | 44.8 | 55.2 |
| The activities demonstrated by the teacher helped me understand how to help my child at home | 0 | 0 | 41.4 | 58.6 |
| The academic reports (data graphs) were clearly explained by the teacher | 0 | 0 | 37.9 | 62.1 |
| The APTT meetings helped me feel more confident about helping my child at home | 0 | 7.1 | 28.6 | 64.3 |
| The APTT program meets my expectations | 0 | 0 | 33.3 | 66.7 |

| | 0 | 0 | 25 | 75 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The APTT program is well-organized | 0 | 0 | 25 | 75 |

Please check the box that indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| APTT Meetings were held at times convenient for me | 0% | 0% | 65.5% | 34.5% |
| Receiving learning strategies from the teacher to use with my child at home made a difference to me | 0 | 0 | 51.7 | 48.3 |
| APTT meetings were accessible to me in a language I am comfortable using | 0 | 0 | 51.9 | 48.1 |

Please check the box that indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My child's reading has improved because of the APTT program | 0% | 0% | 65.4% | 34.6% |
| The APTT program helped build a sense of community in my child's classroom | 0 | 0 | 60 | 40 |
| My child's teacher answer all the questions I had about my child's progress | 0 | 0 | 44.8 | 55.2 |
| My child's teacher helped me use my child's achievement data to better understand their academic progress | 0 | 0 | 42.9 | 57.1 |

Please check the box that indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My child's teacher has been helpful in providing support for my child's learning and development | 4.2% | 0% | 75% | 20.8% |
| I trust my child's teacher | 4 | 0 | 76 | 20 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am satisfied with how often my child's teacher contacts me | 3.8 | 3.8 | 69.2 | 23.1 |
| Schools are important for helping my child advance in the world | 3.8 | 0 | 50 | 46.2 |

How many times have you gone to your child's school in the past 12 months for something besides APTT?

| | Percent of parents |
|---|---|
| I have not gone to my child's school | 4% |
| 1-2 times | 32 |
| 3-5 times | 40 |
| 5-10 times | 20 |
| More than 10 times | 4 |

What were your reasons for going to the school?

| | Percent of parents |
|---|---|
| School event | 12.9% |
| Parent-teacher conference (not APTT) | 54.8 |
| Volunteering | 3.2 |
| Discipline issue | 16.1 |
| Personal concern about my child | 16.1 |
| Something else | 9.7 |

About how often have you done each of the following activities?

| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | A little | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Helped out at your child's school? | 0% | 4.3% | 13% | 47.8% | 34.8% |
| Discussed your child's school with other parents from the school? | 0 | 20.8 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 29.2 |
| Participated in meetings, events, or other activities with parent groups at your child's school? | 4 | 0 | 28 | 52 | 16 |
| Meet in person with teachers at your child's school? | 4.2 | 12.5 | 16.7 | 62.5 | 4.2 |

How often do you and your child speak about their experience in school?

| Daily | 73.7% |
|---|---|
| Two or three times a week | 5.3 |
| Once a week | 10.5 |
| Two or three times a month | 10.5 |

Please indicate your level of self-confidence in the following areas. Select one response for each item.

| How confident are you... | Not confident at all | Slightly confident | Somewhat confident | Quite confident | Extremely confident |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ...in your ability to connect with other parents? | 7.1% | 7.1% | 17.9% | 46.4% | 21.4% |
| ...that you can help your child develop good friendships? | 3.6 | 3.6 | 21.4 | 46.4 | 25.0 |
| ...in your ability to make choices about what your child learns at school? | 0 | 13.8 | 10.3 | 51.7 | 24.1 |
| ...in your ability to make sure your child's school meets their learning needs? | 0 | 3.4 | 17.2 | 44.8 | 34.5 |
| ...in reaching out to contact your child's teacher with questions or concerns about their learning? | 0 | 6.9 | 13.8 | 48.3 | 31 |
| ...in your ability to make choices about the school your child will attend? | 0 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 51.7 | 27.6 |
| ...that you can motivate your child to try hard in school? | 3.4 | | 13.8 | 51.7 | 31 |
| ...in your ability to support your child's learning at school? | 0 | 0 | 14.3 | 50 | 35.7 |

# Appendix C: APTT Teacher Survey

N=34

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements related to the APTT program? Select one answer for each question:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I received appropriate training on how to engage parents in APTT who speak a language other than English | 8.8% | 38.2% | 44.1% | 8.8% |
| I received appropriate technical assistance to support my implementation of the APTT program | 11.8 | 17.6 | 52.9 | 17.6 |
| I received appropriate initial professional development to support my implementation of the APTT program. | 11.8 | 14.7 | 58.8 | 14.7 |
| My principal provided appropriate support for my implementation of the APTT program | 2.9 | 20.6 | 52.9 | 23.5 |
| My school's leadership team provided helpful feedback about my implementation of the APTT program | 14.7 | 8.8 | 52.9 | 23.5 |
| My school's APTT Champion provided appropriate planning support for my implementation of the APTT program | 6.1 | 15.2 | 60.6 | 18.2 |
| My principal provided appropriate planning time so I could prepare for APTT meetings | 8.8 | 8.8 | 55.9 | 26.5 |

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following questions related to family engagement? Select one answer for each question:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I individually invited all my students' families to individual (one-on-one) APTT meetings | 9.4% | 31.3% | 40.6% | 18.8% |
| The APTT program has helped me become a more effective partner with my students' families | 11.8 | 26.5 | 26.5 | 35.3 |
| The APTT program has helped me build a sense of community with my students' families | 15.2 | 18.2 | 33.3 | 33.3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Holding APTT meetings has helped me build relationships with my students' families | 14.7 | 17.6 | 38.2 | 29.4 |
| APTT is an effective method for engaging parents | 12.5 | 18.8 | 40.6 | 28.1 |
| I individually invited all my students' families to my classroom APTT meetings | 8.8 | 17.6 | 44.1 | 29.4 |
| I felt comfortable inviting all my students' families to APTT meetings | 5.9 | 17.6 | 41.2 | 35.3 |
| The APTT program has helped me help my students' families understand their children's academic performance | 8.8 | 14.7 | 41.2 | 35.3 |

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about implementing APTT meetings? Select one answer for each question:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| APTT meetings helped me strengthen the capacity of my students' families to support their children's learning | 9.1% | 18.2% | 45.5% | 27.3% |
| APTT meetings helped me help families understand important classroom learning goals | 6.1 | 18.2 | 51.5 | 24.2 |
| I felt confident facilitating APTT meetings with my students' families | 12.1 | 9.1 | 45.5 | 33.3 |
| APTT meetings are well-organized | 6.1 | 12.1 | 54.5 | 27.3 |
| I carefully delivered each element of the APTT program during APTT meetings | 6.3 | 0 | 53.1 | 40.6 |

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the impacts of the APTT program? Select one answer for each question:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My students' reading skills and capacities are improving because of APTT | 21.9% | 25.0% | 40.6% | 12.5% |
| APTT has improved how my students' families support classroom learning goals | 15.2 | 24.2 | 39.4 | 21.2 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student growth data from APTT foundational skills demonstrates that APTT implementation has improved achievement results for my students | 15.2 | 24.2 | 39.4 | 21.2 |
| My students' parents are more engaged in their children's learning because of APTT | 24.2 | 12.1 | 54.5 | 9.1 |
| APTT is an effective program for improving student achievement | 21.2 | 15.2 | 45.5 | 18.2 |
| The APTT program builds parent-teacher collaboration more effectively than traditional parent-teacher conferences | 24.2 | 9.1 | 39.4 | 27.3 |
| I will continue implementing the APTT model in my classroom | 16.7 | 13.3 | 60 | 10 |

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your teaching efficacy? Select one answer for each question:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have enough training to deal with almost any learning problem | 3% | 12.1% | 33.3% | 51.5% |
| My teacher training program gave me the necessary skills to be an effective teacher | 0 | 12.1 | 33.3 | 54.5 |
| I feel prepared to work with all parents | 3 | 9.1 | 42.4 | 45.5 |
| I am aware of parent and family resources available at my school | 0 | 12.1 | 51.5 | 36.4 |
| My school is supportive of parents | 0 | 6.1 | 39.4 | 54.5 |
| I am confident in my ability to work with diverse families | 0 | 3 | 51.5 | 45.5 |
| I am confident in my ability to hold effective parent-teacher conferences | 0 | 0 | 45.5 | 54.5 |
| I am confident in my ability to cultivate a family-friendly environment in my classroom | 0 | 0 | 48.5 | 51.5 |
| My teaching experience has given me the necessary skills to be an effective teacher | 0 | 0 | 36.4 | 63.6 |

|  | All of them | Most of them | About half | A few | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How many of your students' parents attended at least one APTT meeting this year? | 3.0% | 30.3% | 24.2% | 42.4% | 0% |
| How many of your students' parents attended at least one individual APTT meeting this year? | 0 | 18.2 | 36.4 | 39.4 | 6.1 |

What have been your biggest challenges in engaging with your students' parents? (Select up to three)

| | |
|---|---|
| Time commitment | 70.4% |
| I can't get in touch with parents | 32.4 |
| Getting parents to attend APTT meetings | 44.1 |
| I don't speak the same language(s) as my students' parents | 20.6 |
| I don't feel supported by my school | 2.9 |
| Working with parents to understand their child's reading data and academic progress | 0.0 |
| I don't feel prepared to implement the APTT program | 5.9 |
| Something else | 2.9 |

What grade(s) do you teach? (Select all that apply)

| | |
|---|---|
| 6th grade | 61.8% |
| 7th grade | 23.5 |
| 8th grade | 20.6 |

For how long have you been teaching?

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-3 years | 12.5% |
| 4-5 years | 8.3 |
| 6-10 years | 20.8 |
| 10-20 years | 54.2 |
| More than 20 years | 4.2 |

For how long have you been teaching at this school?

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-3 years | 32.0% |
| 4-5 years | 12.0 |
| 6-10 years | 20.0 |
| 10-20 years | 36.0 |
| More than 20 years | 0.0 |

# Appendix D: APTT Fidelity Ratings of In-Depth Study Schools

DOE staff assigned fidelity ratings to each school and shared these ratings with NYU evaluators. We selected study schools in part because of their relatively high levels of fidelity to the APTT model.

*Table D1: Fidelity Ratings of In-Depth Study Schools*

|  | Engagement of School Leadership | Family Outreach and Attendance | Student Data and Analysis Between APTT Cycles | Teacher-Team Engagement | APTT Meeting Implementation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Study School 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Study School 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Study School 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

A rating of 3 indicates high fidelity, 2 indicates medium fidelity, and 1 indicates low fidelity

# Appendix E: Study Limitations

**Selection bias of parent participants.** The most significant limitation to this study is the selection bias of parents. We only interviewed and surveyed parents who participated in APTT meetings, who were often some of the most engaged parents in the school; several parents we interviewed discussed their involvement with the school's Parent Teacher Association. The study did not attempt to contact parents with no involvement in APTT meetings.

**Comparison group parent engagement strategies.** We found that comparison schools were not conducting traditional parent-teacher conferences. One comparison school implemented student-led conferences, at which students share their own learning progress with parents. Another potential comparison school actually implemented APTT, unbeknownst to MSQI leadership; we opted to exclude this school from the comparison group. Though it is exciting that schools are exploring innovating parent-teacher conference models, it creates difficulty when research efforts such as ours attempt to assess the impacts of one model compared to another.

**Recruitment and participation of comparison schools.** We recruited comparison schools for participation with support from DOE staff. However, even with this support we found it difficult to recruit comparison schools for the study. We also struggled to maintain comparison schools' engagement once they agreed to participate in the study. Ultimately, we received the requisite principal approval from three comparison schools but only collected data in two schools.

**Challenges administering parent surveys.** We experienced significant challenges in administering a parent survey, primarily in recruiting parents to participate. We intended to survey parents who attended APTT meetings as well as those who did not, but and recruiting parents who did not attend APTT meetings proved difficult. Further, we found that in some schools, parents had low levels of literacy in any language. Our survey also proved too long, compounding the literacy challenge. Ultimately, we collected 31 valid parent surveys. Due to the low response rate, parent survey results should be interpreted with caution.

**Quantitative analysis focused only on literacy.** One in-depth study school used APTT meetings to teach families math skill-building activities to do at home with their children. However, our evaluation design and analysis only considered literacy scores as an academic outcome.

**Degrees of Reading Power analysis.** The analysis indicates that students at APTT study schools experienced less reading growth on average than their peers in comparison schools. However, the results of this analysis should interpreted with caution. We know from our observations that only a fraction of parents participated in APTT meetings, limiting the value of a school-level analysis of reading data. We also know that at least one comparison school used an alternative parent-teacher conference model (student-led conferences) which may have influenced reading growth at that school. We cannot determine from this analysis how participation in APTT influenced an individual child's performance on the DRP, and how this performance compares to a student whose parents did not participate in APTT.