

# On the Road to Systemic Family Engagement

## *Reflections From a Six-Year Regional Effort to Implement Academic Parent-Teacher Teams*

Families are valuable partners and resources for improving educational outcomes, but many schools and districts do not yet have sustainable systems for family engagement. Families need clear opportunities, capacity, and trust to engage in school. At the same time, educators need the training, systems, and support to confidently and effectively engage families as partners.

Despite its potential, family engagement remains underfunded, understudied, and siloed in many schools and districts. There is a critical need for more information on how to promote systemic family engagement—where practices are used every day, districtwide.

In King County, Washington, a team of diverse partners wanted to explore how to systematize family engagement to improve student outcomes, with an eye on addressing disparities. Over three-quarters of students in the region are youth of color, two-thirds live in low-income households, and 45 percent live in households that speak a language other than English.<sup>1</sup> Historically, these groups of students have faced greater systemic barriers to academic success. Although families know effective ways to engage and support their children, education systems have not been set up to invite families to share their expertise.

A core team of partners in South Seattle and King County developed a multi-level approach to promote family engagement at the school, district, and regional level. Their journey shows what is possible when districts have long-term support to invest in the learning, infrastructure, and relationships that make family engagement systemic and sustainable.

### CORE TEAM

**Community Center for Education Results (CCER)** Convener and regional collective impact backbone

**WestEd** Developed the APTT model and led professional development and coaching for schools and districts

**Education Northwest** Evaluation and data capacity building

**The Stolte Family Foundation and Ballmer Group** Funders and thought partners

**District leaders** Champions of family engagement and APTT

**District family engagement teams** Implementation coordinator and resource for schools

**District partners** Auburn School District, Highline Public Schools, Seattle Public Schools

### KEY PARTNERS

**School leaders, educators, and staff**  
**Families and students**

# The Collective Journey



**FOUNDATIONAL EFFORTS**

2010–2018

**Starting From Collective Impact and Exploring Family Engagement as a Region**

CCER formed in 2010 as the backbone for the Road Map Project, a collective impact initiative.<sup>2</sup> Through this work, CCER had strong relationships with diverse partners across the region.

Starting in 2012, CCER convened educators, families, and community organizations to learn about family engagement from each other and from national experts. Learning communities, regional conferences, and technical assistance were grounded in the dual capacity framework of family engagement.<sup>3</sup>

2019

**Choosing a Program Model**

Through this work, CCER identified Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) program to operationalize the principles of authentic family engagement in schools across the region.

**APTT INITIATIVES**

2019–2022

**Piloting APTT and Persisting Through the Pandemic**

In 2019, CCER launched a three-year pilot of APTT with Highline Public Schools (HPS) and Seattle Public Schools (SPS). Educators received training and coaching from WestEd to facilitate meetings where families review data and discuss strategies to reinforce academic skills at home.

Despite the pandemic, six of eight schools completed all three years of the pilot. Both educators and families reported increases in their confidence and capacity for partnership.

2022–2025

**Building Readiness for Implementation and Scaling**

The APTT Readiness Initiative launched in 2022, with an increased focus on families who have been historically underrepresented. This Initiative intended to scale APTT to more schools and districts. HPS expanded APTT to nine schools, and Auburn School District (ASD) joined the partnership. The core team coached school and district leaders to cultivate the systems conditions that support family engagement.

**Implement systemic family engagement to promote positive school climate and eliminate disparities in student experiences and outcomes.**

## Engaging in Collective Learning

The core team held quarterly meetings to review progress, reflect on lessons learned, and adjust strategies. Ongoing communication fostered transparency and maintained alignment to shared goals. After reflecting over time on how goals and responsibilities were distributed, the team shifted financial management to better align with organizational capacity and priorities.





## Navigating Challenges

The core team navigated budget cuts, organizational changes, and varying levels of commitment across districts and schools. Responding to these challenges required the core team to adapt and pivot strategies.

Some districts ended participation early due to challenges at the district or school level. Districts that could not stay involved still benefited from the capacity-building work, such as articulating a family engagement vision and goals or developing family surveys.

# Progress and Pivots for Systems Change

*The core team focused on four essential systems conditions for successful family engagement at the district level. These conditions are grounded in implementation science.*

SYSTEMS CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS	SIGNS OF PROGRESS IN PARTNER DISTRICTS <sup>4</sup>	COLLECTIVE LEARNING BY THE CORE TEAM
 <p><b>Shared vision and priorities for family engagement and APTT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District and school staff view family engagement as a core priority.</li> <li>• Educators see the core principles and practices of APTT aligned with school and district goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation stalled when priorities were misaligned at the district or school level. To address school-level issues that arose during the pilot, WestEd offered additional information sessions and coaching for school leadership teams to ensure that schools understood APTT’s connection to district priorities and were ready for adoption before training teachers. The partners reallocated resources to other schools or districts when district or school staff members were not ready to adopt APTT.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Aligned organizational structure to support implementation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over time, teachers reported stronger structures, clearer roles, and support from school and district leadership.</li> <li>• District staff members beyond the family engagement team support APTT and family engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two districts expanded the role of district family engagement experts to include coaching educators. This included helping schools integrate the core principles and practices of APTT into other family engagement activities.</li> <li>• One district integrated APTT into existing systems and supports (for example, using professional development hours for training, replacing Open House with APTT meetings, engaging instructional coaches).</li> <li>• Districts promoted cross-departmental collaboration in different ways. One district convened cross-departmental meetings, while another district brought more family engagement staff and family action committee members into strategic initiatives.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Capacity to implement family engagement and APTT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District and school staff increased their capacity to implement APTT and build strong, asset-based partnerships with families.</li> <li>• Families reported stronger connections with teachers and increased capability to support learning at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff members need more support to build connections among families, and some district staff members need training to understand core components of APTT.</li> <li>• One district created an online library of family meeting resources to promote cross-school learning.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Data for continuous learning and improvement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners used data to improve family engagement and support for school staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two districts participated in development and administration of family surveys to improve implementation at APTT schools and track progress on strategic plan goals.</li> <li>• One district took over administration of the exit survey and annual survey. They now use the annual survey districtwide and report results on their website. The district is still developing systems and norms to ensure schools receive data back so that they can act on it.</li> </ul>



# Key Takeaways from South King County

The road to sustainable, systemic family engagement is not smooth or linear. However, through **partnership, shared learning, and adaptation**, communities can build trust and create the systems to transform education for young people and their families.

## Engage diverse partners at the school, district, and community level.

- Everyone—families, school and district staff members, community-based organizations—plays a role in developing and stewarding a shared vision for family engagement in learning.
- Systems transformation takes time and resources. Consider engaging backbone organizations, technical assistance providers, evaluators, and funders for support.
- Establish champions and coaches at all levels to communicate that family engagement is a strategic priority and prepare educators and families to work together in new ways.

## Learn and grow together.

- Take the time to cultivate strong relationships and trust across partners.
- Convene shared learning spaces at the school, district, and regional levels to reflect on progress and exchange strategies, challenges, and successes.
- Build in feedback loops. Regularly use data from families and educators to refine policies and practices for stronger engagement and impact.
- Invest in ongoing professional development and coaching to build educators' capacity to engage all families and connect families with each other.
- Allocate staff time and resources to engage in continuous learning and improvement.

## Build on supportive systems and adapt as needed.

- Integrate new programs like APTT into existing systems and structures. Assist schools in adapting implementation to their community's unique context.
- Advocate for policies and practices that build educator and family capacity to partner, remove barriers to partnership, and promote continuous learning and improvement.
- Cultivate champions and coaches at all levels to build resilience amid staff turnover and organizational shifts.

For more information about this partnership, view the [case brief on the Education Northwest website](#) or contact [Julie Petrokubi](mailto:julie.petrokubi@ednw.org) at [julie.petrokubi@ednw.org](mailto:julie.petrokubi@ednw.org)



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Community Center for Education Results, (n.d.) Road Map Project Data Dashboard

<sup>2</sup> Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–41.

<sup>3</sup> Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships. In *ERIC*. SEDL.

<sup>4</sup> Petrokubi, J., Maller, R., & Uriostegui, M. (2022). *Families and schools thriving together: Road Map Project Academic Parent Teacher Teams Initiative year 3 evaluation report*. Education Northwest.

Petrokubi, J., Maller, R., Uriostegui, M., Merrill, R., & Fantz, T. (2026). *Road Map Project Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) Readiness Initiative: Final report for Highline Public Schools*. Education Northwest.