



Annual NNPS Report: 2017 School Data

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February 2018

Cover photo: Frederick Douglass High School
Baltimore City Public School System, Maryland
November 2017 Team Training with NNPS Program Facilitator Brenda G. Thomas

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consistent with previous reports, the *2017 School UPDATE* data indicate that most schools in NNPS are working to implement core components and essential elements that research shows improve the quality of partnership programs over time. Descriptive analyses of these data found important patterns of results. This year, some analyses focused on the relationship between ATP characteristics (e.g., size, organization, meeting frequency) and program implementation, as well as family engagement outcomes. The special topic for 2017 explored different aspects of homework in schools.

Characteristics of Excelling Programs

- More effectively addressed the challenges to engagement often faced by families.
- Reported higher percentages of teachers reaching out to engage families, as well as greater family participation in their children's schooling.
- Rated themselves better communicating with families, PTAs or PTOs, and the district about partnership program activities and progress.
- Reported higher percentages of parents who were engaged and good partners in their children's education.

Elementary schools were more likely to rate themselves as excelling than were secondary schools.

The level of district support did not differ by program quality.

Homework

- Students' failure to complete homework was perceived to be more of a problem in secondary schools than in elementary schools.
- Most ATPs reported that teachers' communication with families about homework was not a problem at their school.
- Many schools indicated they did not know what families think about the homework quality and quantity, especially in middle and high schools.

Team Structure

- Schools with at least 6 people on the ATP were more likely to report higher-quality programs than those with zero to five people on the ATP.
- Schools that organized committees to implement their partnership program were more likely to report greater teacher participation in several family engagement practices.

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Studies indicate that schools that work on partnerships over time will improve the quality of their programs and results of family and community involvement (Epstein, et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2007a, 2008a, b; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). Studies also show that district leaders for partnerships who guide school teams to plan and implement goal-linked partnership practices will have schools with higher quality partnership programs (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). NNPS guides all schools to plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their programs of school, family, and community partnerships. By doing so, schools' ATPs should be able to report progress and identify new challenges on the *2018 School UPDATE* survey in the spring.

In response to requests for information on partnership program development, NNPS provides this summary of schools' *2017 School Data* to all active members of the network. Districts, states, and organizations also will receive a summary of the *2017 District Data*.¹ Schools should compare the data in this report with their own responses on the *2017 School UPDATE* survey. ATPs can take pride in practices that are strong, compared to other schools across the country. ATPs should work this year to improve aspects of their programs that fall below NNPS averages or that do not reflect NNPS's expectations for excellent programs. In the spring, ATPs will be invited to share their best practices with the entire National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) in the 2018 collection of *Promising Partnership Practices*.

Benchmarking Strong Programs. This report contrasts schools describing their partnership program as *very good* or *excellent* (collectively referred to as "*excelling*") with those that described their program at lower stages of development. These analyses, we believe, provide benchmark levels of implementation that all schools can achieve. The result is a roadmap for all NNPS member schools toward partnership program excellence.

SCHOOLS IN THE 2017 UPDATE SAMPLE

In 2017, 404 Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) reported *UPDATE* data. Surveys came from schools in 15 states. A majority of schools (57.4%) served students in the elementary grades (PK-6); 4.2% served students in PK-8; 14.8% of schools included the middle grades only (4-8); and 12.3% included high school grades only (9-12). Three schools (0.7%) served students from PK through high school and five (1.2%) combined middle and high school grades. For the purposes of reporting in the graphs below, elementary schools are combined with PK-8 schools (labeled Elementary Schools) and middle schools are combined with high schools (labeled Secondary Schools). Early childhood centers and PreK-12 schools (9.2%) were omitted from analyses.

The largest percentage of schools was located in small cities (33.9%), with the remaining schools in large central cities (23.9%), suburbs (19.5%), and rural areas (18.7%). A few schools did not report location. A large majority of schools (74.5%) received school-wide or targeted Title I funds.

On average, schools served students from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. Across schools, about 38.5% were African American; 36.1% of students were White (non-Hispanic); 20.8% were

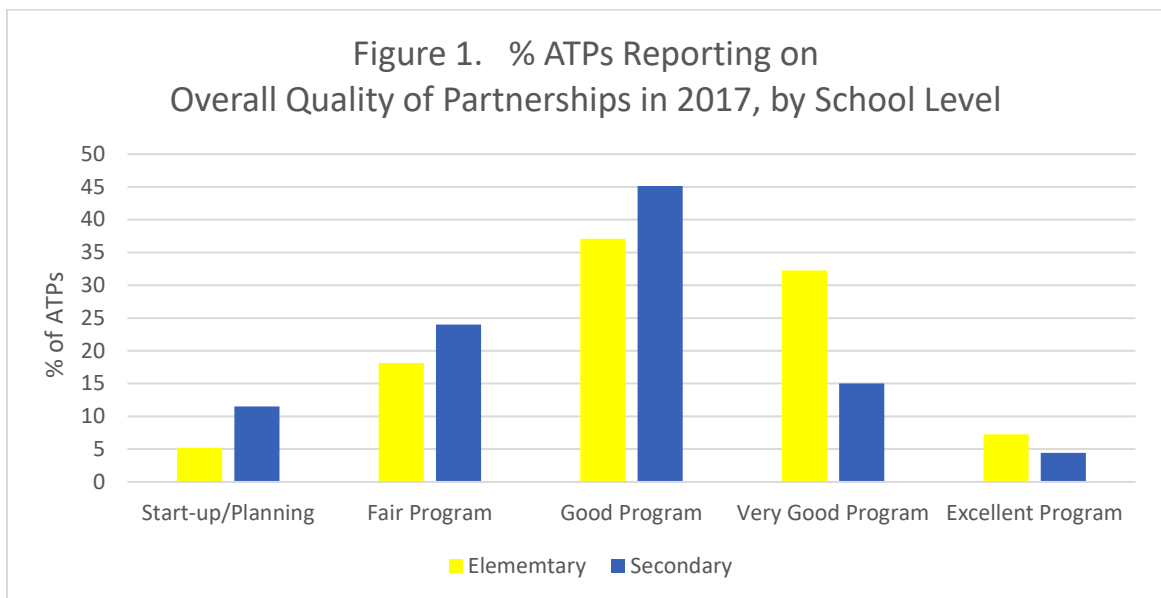
Latino/Hispanic American; 1.9% were Asian American; 0.3% were Native American; and 2.5% were from other racial/ethnic groups. Individual schools included a range of minority students, from 1% to 100%. The schools served students in families in which an average of 4.9 different languages are spoken at home. In some schools, families spoke only English, whereas other schools served diverse families speaking up to 70 different languages and dialects.

FINDINGS

OVERALL PROGRAM QUALITY

The annual NNPS *School UPDATE* survey provides each school’s ATP an opportunity to reflect on the overall quality of its partnership program by identifying one of six program portraits. Each portrait represents a different level of program quality, beginning with a *planning* stage and continuing up to an *excellent* program.

Elementary schools tended to rate their overall program quality higher than secondary schools and were more likely to rate their program as *very good*.



- The largest percentage of schools (approximately 37%) reported that their programs were *good*, indicating that several activities were implemented for the six types of involvement, teams were working to meet challenges to reach all families, and most teachers and families at the school knew about the program for partnerships and the school’s work with NNPS.
- This distribution and pattern of program quality ratings matches those found in previous NNPS summary reports. During any given year, within NNPS, some schools are implementing their partnership programs at higher quality levels than others, with **elementary schools tending to report stronger programs than secondary schools, overall** (Figure 1).

EXCELLING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

In an effort to help NNPS members see the steps needed to develop a strong and sustainable program of school, family, and community partnerships, the schools that rated their programs as *very good* or *excellent* (labeled “excelling”) were contrasted with schools that reported weaker programs. The excelling schools were more likely to report that they formed an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP);

wrote an annual action plan linked to student outcomes; met many challenges to reach more families; and mobilized teachers and parents to create an engaged school community.

- 119 schools (33.1%) in this sample are excelling (97 elementary schools and 22 secondary schools), based on their program quality ratings.
- Elementary schools were more likely than secondary schools to rate their partnership program as *excellent* or *very good* (39.3% vs. 19.5%).

PROGRAM ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

UPDATE measured whether school ATPs were implementing core components of NNPS’s research-based partnership program and how well they were implementing a broad range of programmatic activities.¹

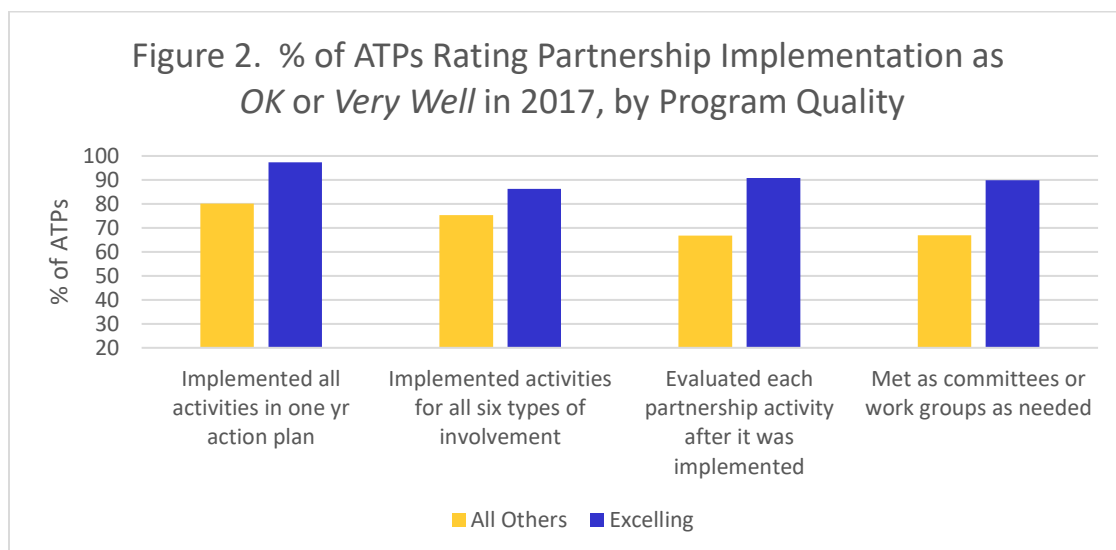
CORE COMPONENTS

Core NNPS program components were measured using six items. Regardless of grade level or if they were “excelling,” most schools were implementing the basic components of the NNPS program model. ATPs were most likely to report that they had an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) of six or more people (89.7%); wrote (or planned to write) a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships for the *next* (17-18) school year (89.9%); and had written an action plan for the 16-17 school year (90.2%). Fewer schools (68.5%) had participated in an end-of-year celebration to share activities and ideas on partnerships with other schools in the district.

- Excelling programs were far more likely than weaker programs to allocate funds for their family and community engagement efforts (91.9% vs. 74.0%).
- Elementary and secondary schools implemented the core components of NNPS at similar rates.

QUALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

A 12-item scale ($\alpha = .92$)² measured how well ATPs organized and implemented a partnership program at their school. The program implementation actions included involving families in activities for all six types of involvement in the NNPS framework; evaluating the activities conducted; and reporting information to all families, PTA or PTO, faculty, and staff. The ATPs gave one of four responses to, characterize implementation on each item as *did not do the practice*, *need to improve*, *OK*, or implemented the practice *very well*.



Across all 12 measures of program implementation, excelling schools rated their practices higher in quality than did the other schools (Figure 2).

- Nearly every school in NNPS (97.2%) implemented activities to support school improvement goals.

ACTION TEAM FOR PARTNERSHIPS (ATP)

In NNPS, each school must have an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) or an equivalent committee of teachers, parents, and administrators working on family and community involvement. The ATP is responsible for planning, implementing, overseeing, and evaluating partnership activities that are linked to school improvement goals. As an official committee, the ATP should report its plans and progress to the School Improvement Team or School Council on a regular schedule, just as other school committees report their work. Questions on the *2017 School UPDATE* asked about the structure of schools' ATPs, members of the team, subcommittee structure, frequency of meetings, funding for the partnership program, and the ATP's effort to share plans and progress with the school community.

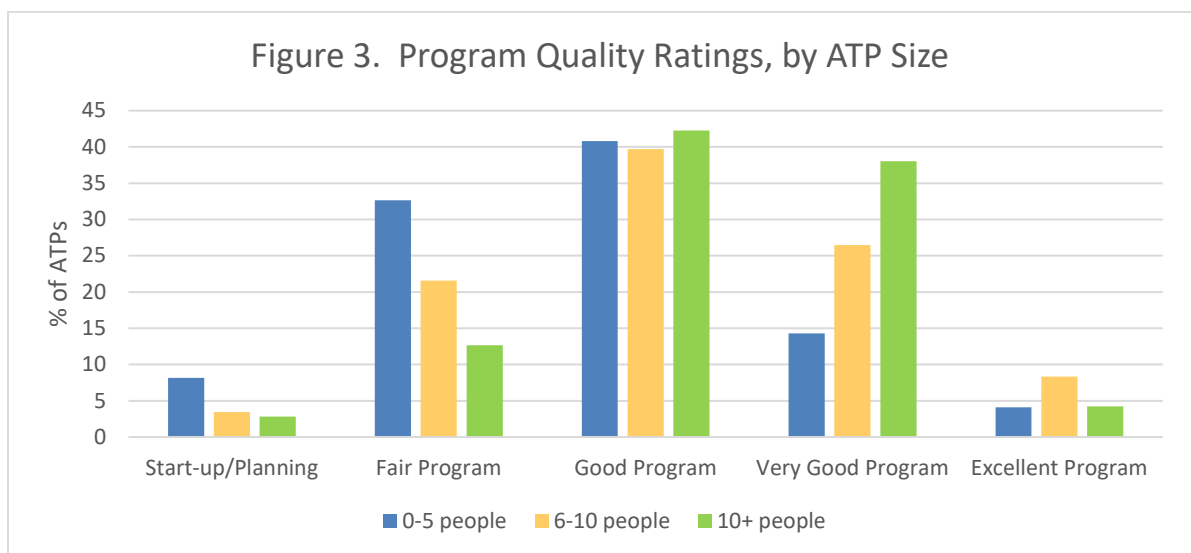
MEMBERSHIP

NNPS suggests that each school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) include at least two or three teachers, two or three parents, and one administrator, with one or two students at the high school level, and options for community partners and other educators and representatives at any level.

- Excelling and non-Excelling programs both had an average of 9.5 people on the ATP.
- Elementary schools had about 9.7 people on the ATP, compared to secondary schools that averaged 8.2 people on the ATP.

STRUCTURE

Prior NNPS studies and the *Handbook for Action, Third Edition* (see Chapter 3 in Epstein, et al., 2009) suggest that the ATP should have committees to use time more efficiently and conduct more practices of family and community involvement. With committees, ATP members and others not on the team can share leadership for more and different activities.

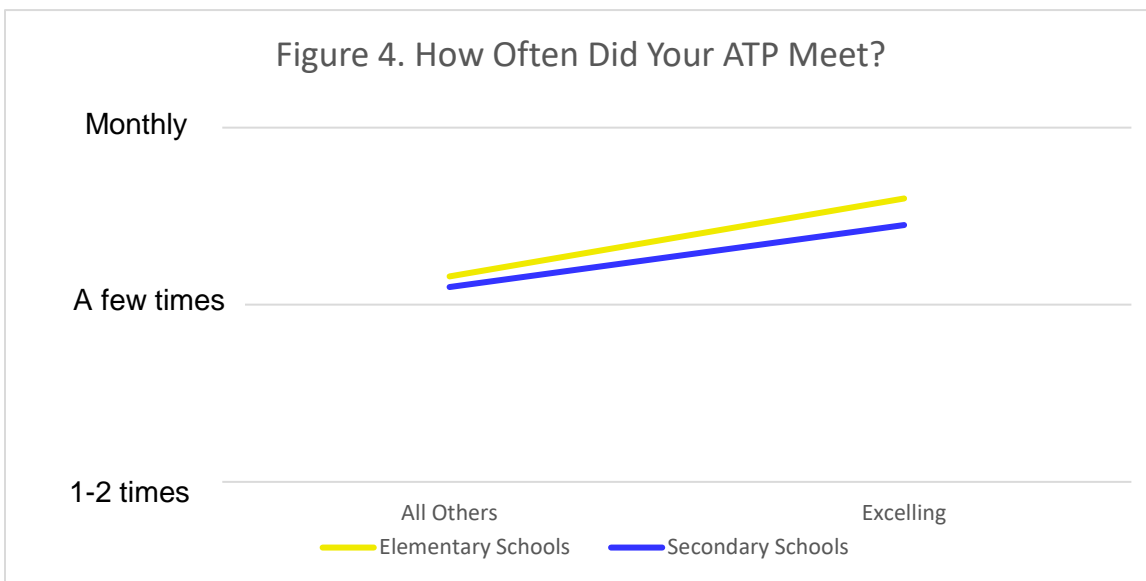


About one-third (35.4%) of all schools' ATPs worked together as a single team, whereas almost half (47.6%) formed committees.

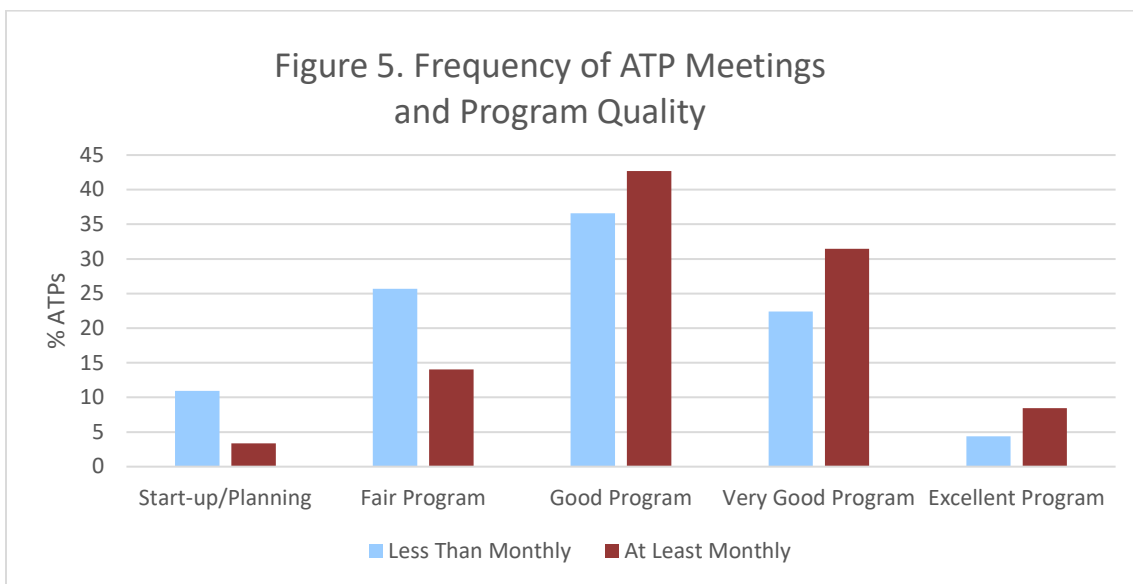
- Schools with at least 6 people on the ATP more often reported that their partnership programs were *very good* or *excellent*, whereas those with zero to five people more often rated their program as *starting/planning* or *fair* (Figure 3).

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

NNPS encourages schools to hold monthly ATP meetings in order to effectively plan and implement a comprehensive partnership program. In 2017, schools reported on the frequency with which their ATP met (Figure 4).



- Elementary and secondary schools did not differ significantly in how frequently their ATPs met.
- ATPs in excelling schools met more frequently than those in other schools ($F= 10.9, p < .001$).

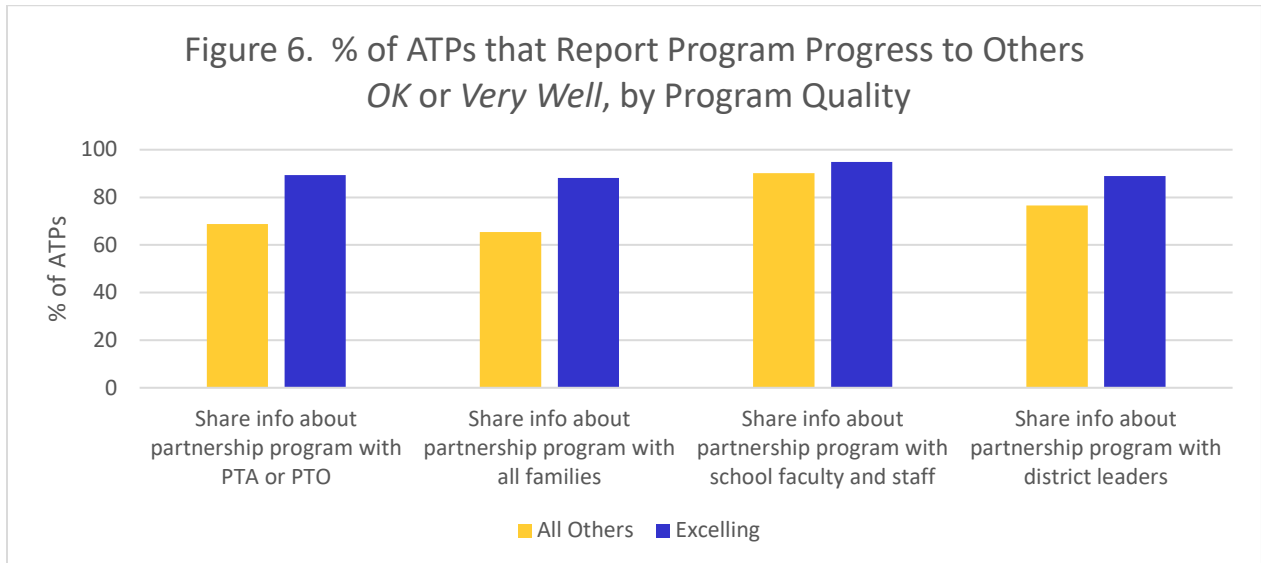


- Figure 5 indicates that ATPs that met at least once a month were more likely to rate their program as higher in quality than did teams that met less frequently.

REPORTING PROGRESS

NNPS recommends that ATPs report progress to various stakeholders, including the School Improvement Team, faculty, district facilitators, and other parent groups (PTO or PTA). As a school committee, the ATP should communicate with the overarching School Improvement Team so that partnerships remain a priority at the school.

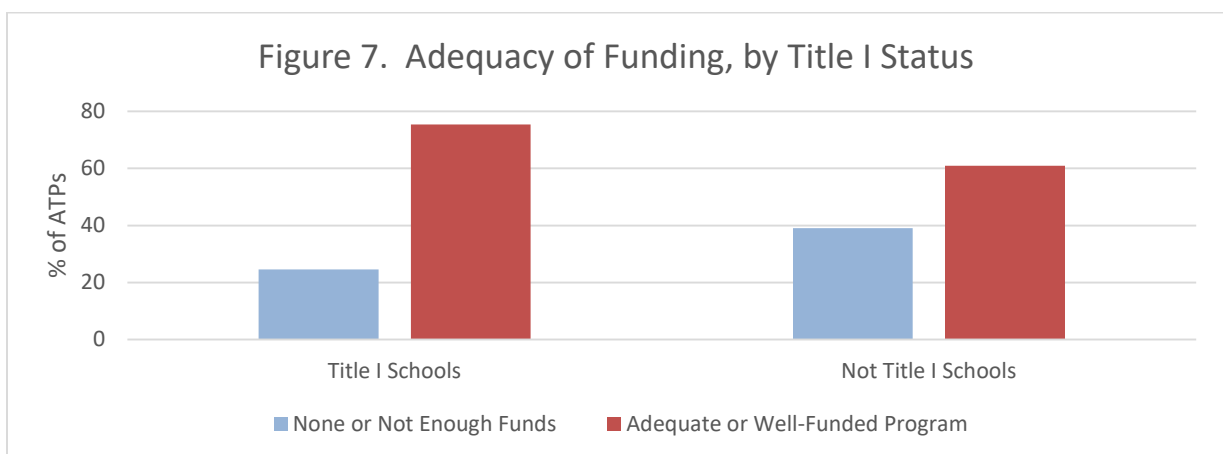
- In general, elementary schools implemented more key components of a partnership program than did secondary schools. Elementary schools were especially strong in sharing information with their PTA or PTO.
- Schools excelling in program implementation tended to share information about their work and progress better than the other NNPS schools (Figure 6).



The differences between excelling schools and other schools in NNPS were statistically significant and especially noteworthy in terms of ATPs' communications with families and parent organizations (e.g., PTA and/or PTO).

FUNDING

A single item asked ATPs to rate the level of funding for their schools' partnership programs. The largest percentage of teams reported that they had *adequate funds* for their partnership program (56.8%). However, a sizeable portion of schools noted *not enough funds* (23.1%) or no funds (5.0%) for their programs. A few (15.2%) felt their family and community involvement programs were *well funded*.



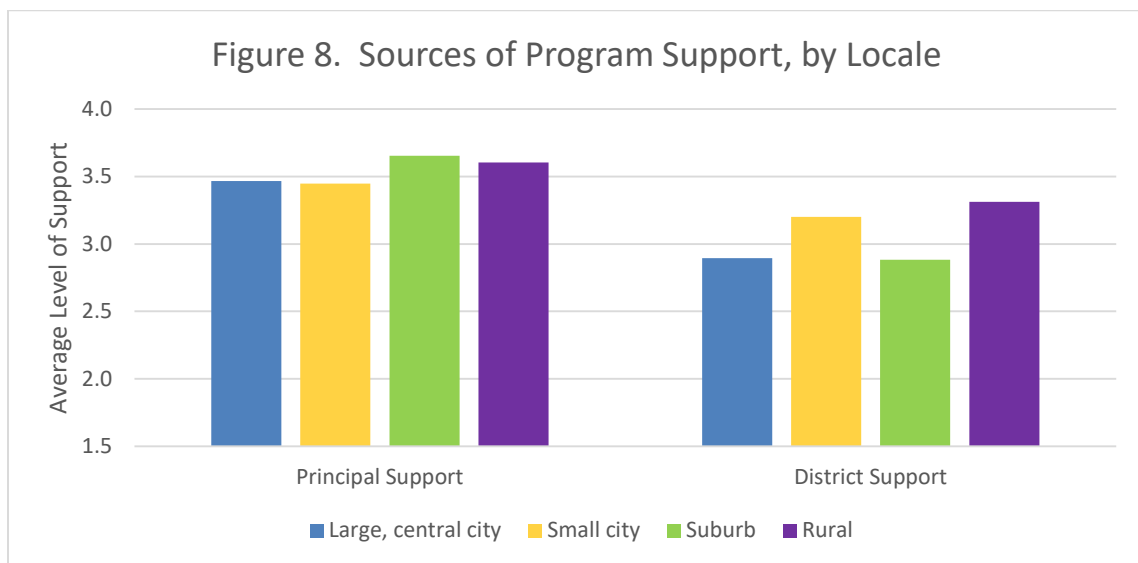
ACTION TEAM SUPPORT

PRINCIPALS' SUPPORT

School-based partnership programs need the support of the principal in order to be successful and sustained (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). ATPs reported responses from 1-4 for whether or not the school principal *never*, *sometimes*, *often*, or *always* provided support for ten actions of the partnership program ($\alpha = .91$).

Overall, NNPS schools reported high levels of principal support. However, those with excellent programs reported statistically stronger levels of principal support than did other schools.

- Overall, principals were rated as highly supportive of partnerships at their school.
- Elementary schools tended to rate their principals as more supportive than did secondary schools.
- Schools in suburbs reported greater principal support than did those in small or large cities (Figure 8).



DISTRICT LEADERS' SUPPORT

Schools' partnership programs also benefit from the support of district leaders. In 2017, ATPs rated the quality of 7 types of district assistance ($\alpha = .90$), as *not provided*, to *not very helpful*, *helpful*, or *very helpful*. On average, school ATPs reported more than six supportive actions from their districts—an increase over reported support last year.

ATPs with excellent programs reported more helpful district support than other schools.

- Title 1 schools reported more helpful district support for their family engagement program than non-Title 1 schools.
- Schools in small cities and rural areas reported more helpful district support than those in suburban areas or large cities (Figure 8).

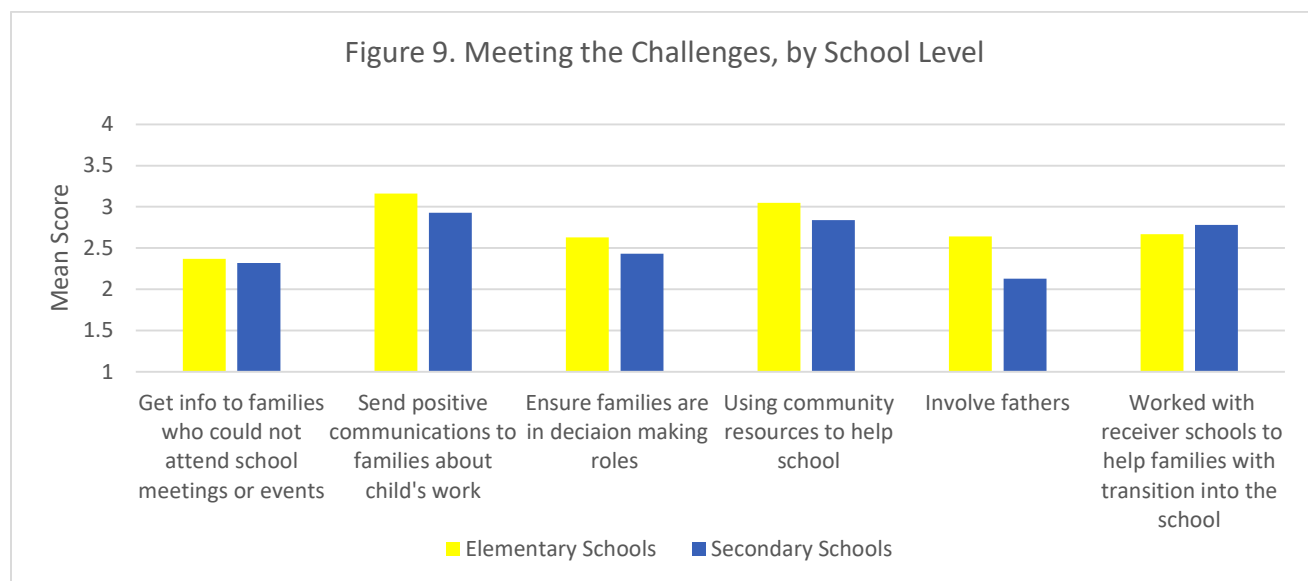
MEETING CHALLENGES TO REACH ALL FAMILIES

In addition to organizing their partnership programs, ATPs are expected to conduct activities that solve challenges to involve all families and community partners in ways that support student success. Previous research found that schools' efforts to meet these challenges in outreach to families were associated with higher achievement and attendance rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Sheldon, 2003, 2007b).

On the 2017 *UPDATE*, schools' efforts to solve challenges of outreach and the involvement of all families were measured with a 9-item scale ($\alpha = .83$). ATPs rated their attention to solving challenges from *not working on the challenge*, to making *fair progress*, *good progress*, or having *solved the challenge*.

Excelling schools were making between *fair* and *good* progress addressing the nine challenges listed in the *UPDATE* Survey.

- Excelling programs were more likely than others to be addressing each of the challenges.
- Elementary schools tended to report meeting challenges to family engagement more than did secondary schools (Figure 9).
 - In contrast, secondary schools tended to report more progress than elementary schools on working with families to help with the transition into their school.

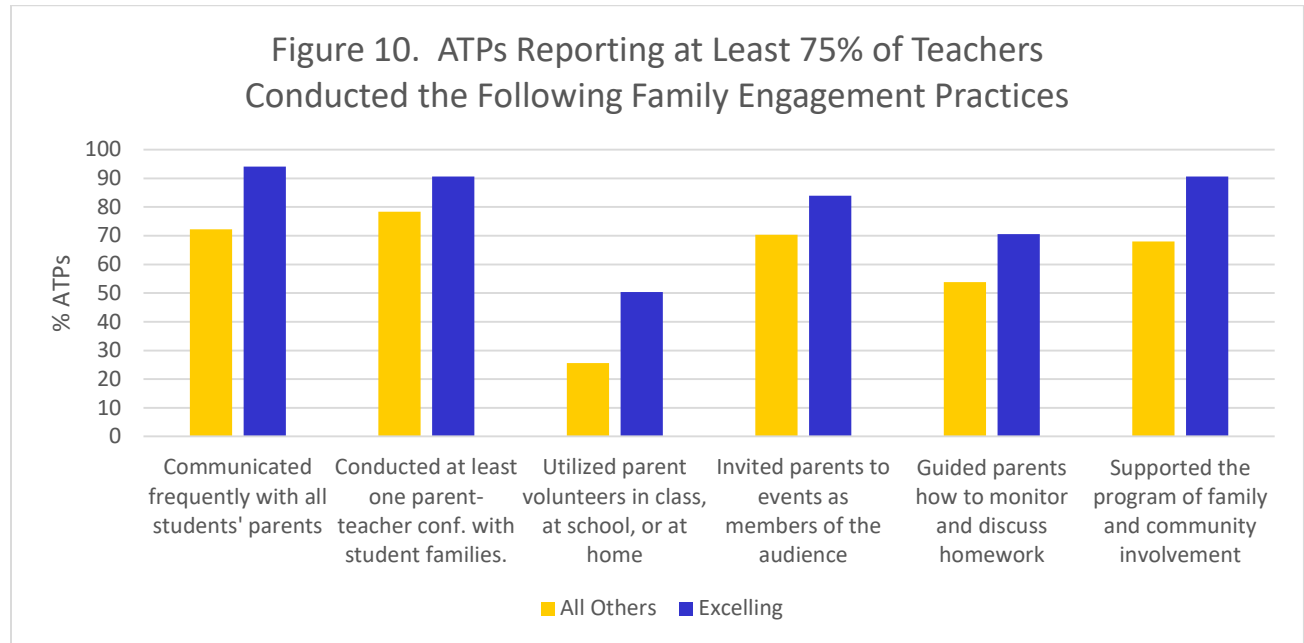


- Schools located in small cities reported less progress in engaging all families in decision-making activities.
- Title I status was associated only with ATP reports of sending positive communications to families about their child's work.
 - Schoolwide Title I status was associated with more attention to sending positive communications to families, translating communications to families into other languages, and assigning interactive homework where students discuss the lesson with family members.

TEACHERS' PRACTICES OF INVOLVEMENT

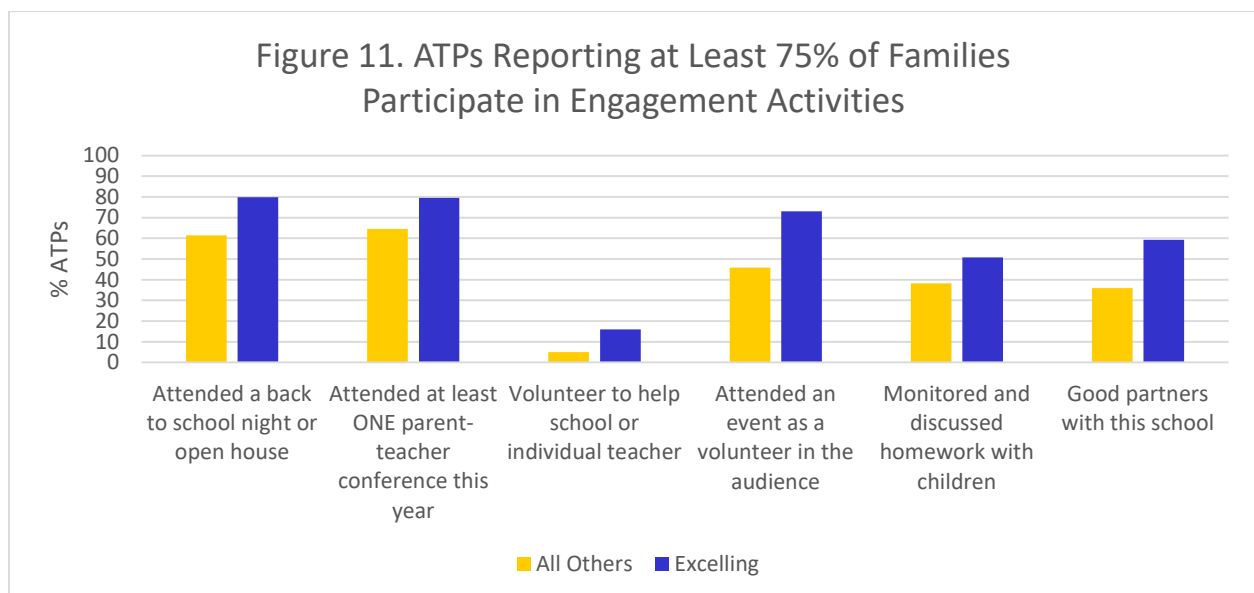
Six items identified the percent of teachers who conducted various family involvement activities, such as holding parent-teacher conferences with each student's family, communicating with all students' families, utilizing volunteers in the classroom, guiding parents in discussing homework with their children, and supporting the partnership program. Figure 10 shows the percentage of schools' ATPs reporting that 75% or more teachers participated in activities to involve all families.

- Excelling programs were more likely to report that at least 75% of teachers implemented each of the family engagement practices.



FAMILIES' INVOLVEMENT IN PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

ATPs estimated the percent of families involved in various partnership activities, including Back-to-School Nights, parent-teacher conferences, volunteering to help the school or teachers, monitoring their child's homework, and being good partners in their child's education. Figure 11 shows the percentage of schools in which 75% or more of families participated in partnership activities.



Extensive family engagement was more common in elementary and PK-8 schools than in secondary schools (Figure 11).

- Excelling programs were more likely to have at least 75% of parents involved in all engagement activities.
- Fewer schools reported 75% or more of parents volunteering at the school than any other parent participation activity.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT, BY PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Schools that conducted outreach to help families solve challenges that limit involvement reported higher levels of family engagement.

Analyses explored the extent to which the quality of schools’ partnership program was associated with reports of pervasive family support and participation. Several measures of program implementation were associated with significantly higher levels of family involvement. The following measures of schools’ partnership program implementation predicted greater estimates of all forms of family involvement (Table 1):

- Quality of Basic Program Implementation
- Principal Support for Partnerships
- Meeting the Challenges to Family Engagement

Table 1: Correlation Coefficients for Quality of Program Implementation and Levels of Family Engagement

<i>% of Families Who...</i>	Basic Program Implementation	Principal Support	Meeting the Challenges
Attended a Back to School Night or Open House	.261**	.195**	.247**
Attended at least ONE parent-teacher conference this year	.219**	.166**	.164**
Volunteered to help school or individual teacher	.235**	.252**	.407**
Attended an event as a volunteer in the audience	.248**	.245**	.259**
Monitored and discussed homework w/ children	.214**	.238**	.316**
Are good partners with this school	.350**	.245**	.329**

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 1 identifies a constellation of variables that significantly increase parents’ participation at school and at home. More parents participate in the six engagement activities listed in schools that implement core components of research-based partnership programs, have strong support from the principal, and are working to meet key challenges to engage all families in their children’s education.

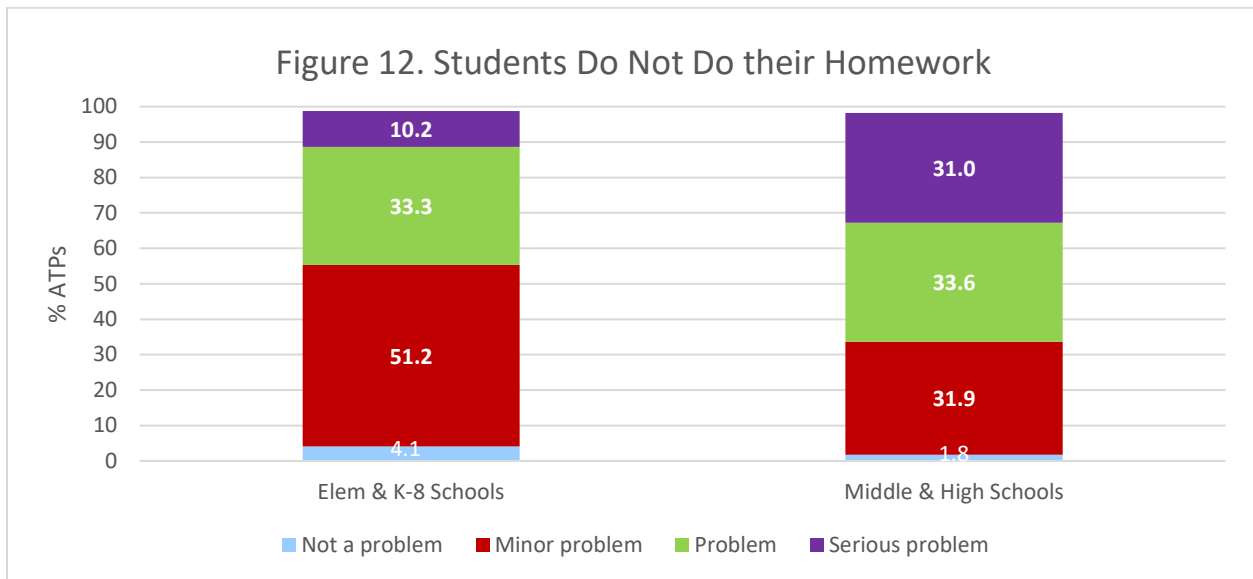
SPECIAL TOPIC: HOMEWORK

Homework is an on-going topic of controversy among educators and families. Some people want to eliminate homework, while others argue that it is an important educational tool that helps improve student learning and achievement. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2012) suggested ten reasons or

purposes for assigning homework. Among these, homework is a natural “connector” between school and home for teachers to communicate with parents about children’s classwork. The 2017 *UPDATE* asked ATPs whether teachers in their schools viewed homework as part of their efforts to educate students.

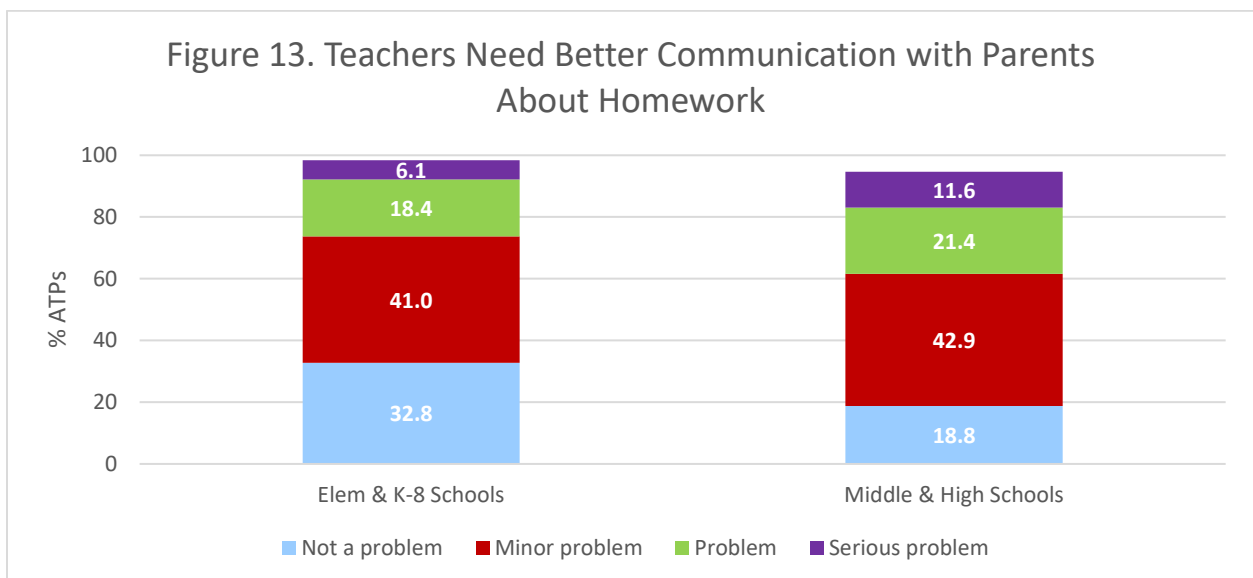
THE STATE OF HOMEWORK IN NNPS SCHOOLS

In light of the differing opinions about homework, our analyses began by examining the extent to which students’ failure to complete homework was *not a problem, a minor problem, a problem, or a serious problem* at their school (Figure 12).



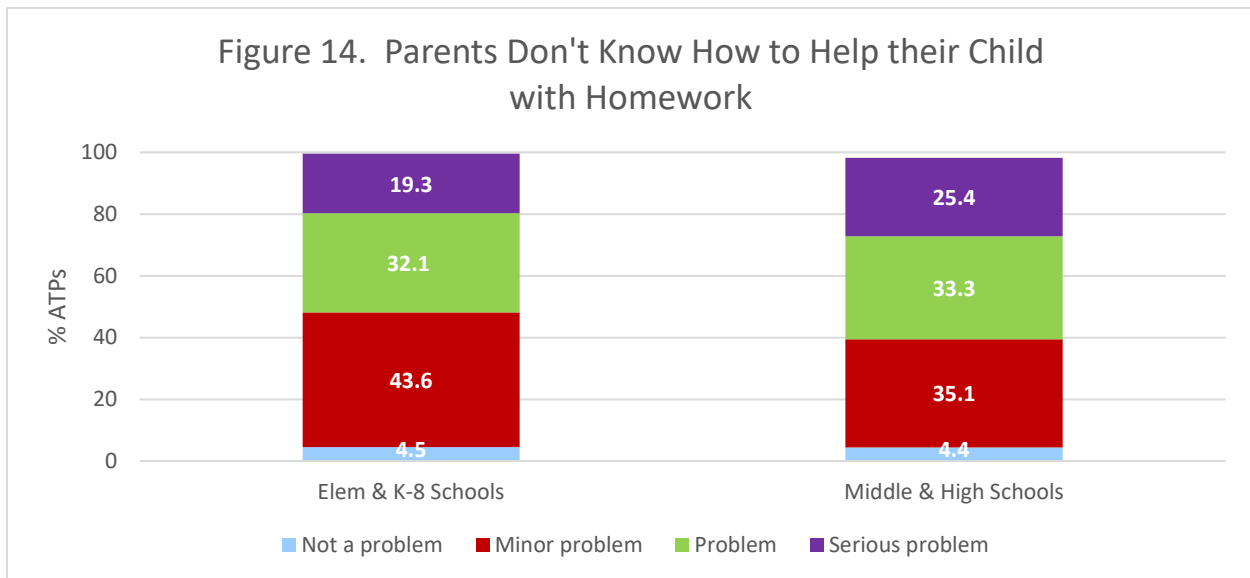
- Overall, students’ failure to do their homework was perceived to be more of a problem in secondary schools than in elementary schools.
- Three times the percentage of ATPs in secondary schools (31.0%), than in elementary schools (10.2%) reported that students not doing homework was a *serious problem*

Additional items asked ATPs to rate the extent to which teachers and parents have problems with homework. Figure 13 shows the extent to which ATPs rated teachers’ communications with families about homework is a problem.



- Elementary schools rated teacher communication with families about homework as less of a problem than secondary schools. They reported seeing this issue as “*Not a Problem*” twice as often as secondary schools.
- Over 10% of secondary school ATPs rated teacher communication to families as a serious problem at their school.

ATPs reported the extent to which they think the families at their school do not know how to help their children with homework. There were no dramatic differences between elementary and secondary schools. About half of the ATPs in both types of schools estimated that parents’ not knowing how to support their child’s homework completion was a *problem* or *serious problem*. (Also see district leaders’ reports about homework problems and needs in Epstein & Hine, 2018.)



The 2017 *UPDATE* asked ATPs to estimate how families at their school feel about the amount and quality of homework assigned to students. A large percentage of ATPs believed that parents thought the quality and amount of homework was *just right*. However, many ATPs indicated a *lack of awareness* about what families think about the homework assigned at the school.

Among middle and high schools, over one-third (35.7%) did not know how families feel about the amount of homework assigned and more (43.5%) were unaware of how families felt about the quality of the homework assigned. Elementary schools indicated greater awareness, although more than one in five (22.9%) did not know what families thought about the amount of homework assigned and almost 30% could not say what families thought about the quality of homework assigned to students. The data suggests a need for schools to better communicate with families about the work student are doing in and outside of the classroom, and to provide mechanisms whereby families’ can communicate back with the educators of their children.

NOTES

- 1) NNPS *UPDATE* data are analyzed each year in research studies to learn how the various scales and measures combine to affect the quality of district and school programs. For summaries of past years' results of *UPDATE* data, visit www.partnershipschools.org and click on Research and Evaluation. Also see annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices* (Thomas, et al. 2017) in the section Success Stories.
- 2) The (α or alpha) reports the *internal reliability* of a scale, indicating whether the selected items are correlated and represent a common construct. Reliability coefficients of .6 or higher indicate that a set of items is consistent and the scale is useful.

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