



Parent Teacher Home Visits Implementation Study

Prepared for
Parent Teacher Home Visits

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Foreword

Despite the neat, pyramid-type structure often ascribed to schools through organizational charts, schools tend to operate much more like living systems. The parts of a system function more like dynamic and complex webs of interactive loops, rather than as compartmentalized units following clear chains of command, like cogs in a machine.

–From, *Systems Thinking for School System Leaders*,
ACSA Center for Systems Leadership, 2008

For many of the families it serves, the living ecosystem known as public education is too often characterized by an uneven power dynamic that stands between them and schools. Over twenty years ago, the parents, community activists, and educators who founded Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) set out to address this imbalance. They were not armed with a cache full of research-based strategies and practices. Instead, they drew on what they saw firsthand and what they knew in their hearts: relationships matter.

PTHV founders created and carefully honed a model that has helped redefine parent-teacher relationships by creating a two-way bridge of engagement that shifts student and family narratives from deficit- to asset-based. The academic, social, and emotional development of students depends upon meaningful relational connections among the students themselves, and the most important adults in their lives—their families and their teachers.

Historically, the primary engagement families had with educators was at back-to-school nights and parent/teacher conferences. Rarely did educators get to meet and listen to students and families in their homes in their community to learn their definitions of success. PTHV founders believed it was critical to have conversations in which parent and family voice genuinely mattered. These conversations needed to begin with one simple question: “What are your hopes and dreams for your child?”

The enclosed report looks deeply at how the PTHV model is practiced in four school districts across the country. In it, the authors reinforce the importance of the model’s five core practices as initially envisioned by the founders. They conclude that these practices should remain “non-negotiables” of the model and recognize that they are crucial to successful home visit implementation. They also highlight concrete methods that home visit practitioners have used to make their home visit efforts successful and to overcome challenges.

This report is the second of a three-study national evaluation of the PTHV program. Study 1 showed how the model builds understanding and trust, reduces anxiety and stress, and fosters positive cross-group interactions between educators and families. These relational capacities are critical for reducing implicit biases that often lead to disconnects, missed opportunities, and discriminatory behaviors in and beyond the classroom. The findings from Study 1 reflect the founders’ vision: when educators and families build mutually respectful and trusting relationships, they work toward eliminating stereotypes and biases. As a result, they are better equipped to support student achievement.

PTHV is committed to using the findings of both Study 1 and 2 to develop new supports and resources to ensure that parent-teacher relationships flourish. In the coming months, we will provide tools to strengthen ties between home and school that build trust, improve school climate, and put asset-based narratives into practice. In keeping with the founders' vision, our goal is that the PTHV model will continue to improve school climate and culture and student outcomes. To that end, we look forward to sharing our toolkit as we reflect on, refine, and adjust our national work to empower those closest to the students – families and educators. Their voices are crucial to the ongoing success of our work.

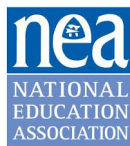
Sincerely,

Nick Faber, Teacher

PTHV Board President

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the four school districts, their staff, and their families who invested time and resources in making Studies 1 and 2 a reality. We also recognize their bold vision for meaningful family engagement, and their commitment to investing in, creating, and supporting the systems that realize it. Similarly, we appreciate the organizations that provided the financial resources to carry out the evaluation. Flamboyant Foundation, National Education Association, Stuart Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation all generously funded the work. Through their support for this study, these districts and funders contributed to advancing the knowledge base of both PTHV and the greater field of family engagement.



STUART FOUNDATION

Executive Summary

Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) is a strategy for engaging educators and families as a team to support student achievement. The PTHV model developed from an understanding that family engagement is critical to student success. However, complex barriers often prevent meaningful partnerships between educators and families. A group of teachers and families in a low-income neighborhood in south Sacramento, California, came together in 1998 to address a deep distrust between the school district and the community. From this gathering, parents and teachers created PTHV based upon community organizing principles of empowerment. The model focuses on building trust and communication and partnering on shared goals for student success.

The PTHV model is designed to promote a mutually supportive and accountable relationship between educators and families. Educators are trained in the model and then encouraged to visit the homes of their students in teams of two, conducting an initial visit in the summer or fall. The model emphasizes discussing “hopes and dreams” that educators and family members have for students. Other home visit models focus on student performance and academics, which can reinforce prevailing power structures between schools and families and hinder relationship-building. In the PTHV model, communication continues after the first home visit, enabling teachers to apply what they learned about their students to instruction and families to engage more fully with the school and their children’s coursework. A second visit in the winter or spring focuses on academics, with reference to the hopes, dreams, and goals shared in the first visit.

In the last 20 years, the PTHV national organization (PTHV National) has expanded to a network of over 700 communities in 25 states, each a collaboration between local partners such as school districts, unions for credentialed teachers and classified staff, and community organizations. While details of the model vary by location, participating sites agree to five core practices or “non-negotiables”:

1. Visits are always voluntary for educators and families and arranged in advance.
2. Teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day.
3. The focus of the first visit is relationship-building; educators and families discuss hopes and dreams.
4. No targeting – visit all or a cross-section of students so there is no stigma.
5. Educators conduct visits in pairs and, after the visit, reflect with their partners.

Study Overview

This report summarizes findings from a study conducted by RTI International examining implementation of the PTHV model. The research questions driving this implementation study are as follows:

1. How do stakeholders uphold the five core practices of PTHV?
2. Should schools continue to follow the five core practices as “non-negotiable”?
3. To what extent do stakeholders consider the two-visit-per-year component of the model critical to improved relationships between educators, students, and families?
4. What are effective strategies that schools and districts could use to successfully implement the five core practices?
5. What are effective practices to support and monitor implementation of visits?
6. What barriers should organizations seeking to replicate the model be mindful of?

The study relies on two main sources of data: (a) qualitative data collected from three or four schools in each of four large districts implementing PTHV and (b) video observations of a PTHV training from each district. All districts serve student populations that are majority people of color and from low-income families. RTI conducted interviews with a total of 187 people (105 teachers and staff members, 59 adult family members, 13 school administrators, 8 central office administrators, and 2 PTHV founders).

Key Findings and Recommendations

Finding: Most educators, administrators, and family members agreed that the five core practices ensured that home visits resulted in positive relationships between educators and families.

Recommendations

- RTI recommends that PTHV maintain all five core practices. Findings and recommendations for each core practice are summarized below.
- To effectively implement the core practices, RTI recommends that schools and districts consider various implementation tips detailed in this report and that PTHV National support this process by developing a toolkit summarizing the implementation tips.

Core Practice 1: Visits are always voluntary for educators and families and arranged in advance.

Findings

- Adherence to this core practice varied across the schools in the study. At three of the four districts, stakeholders reported that participation was voluntary. Most stakeholders from those three districts thought that for relationships to be authentic, participation should be optional for educators and families.
- At one district, educators at the four schools interpreted the principals' school-wide goals related to PTHV as mandatory. A few educators at one school expressed negative views about the expectation to participate in the home visit program or about the goals requiring a high participation rate from families.
- Educators, administrators, and families recalled many strategies to encourage hesitant educators and families to participate in home visits and tips to ease struggles with scheduling visits.

Recommendations

- RTI recommends that PTHV maintain the voluntary nature of home visits and that schools respect the right for an educator or family to refuse participation. Maintaining this core practice preserves the PTHV model's alignment with effective, research-based interventions that forge intergroup relationships.
- RTI recommends that schools and districts apply the various implementation tips, described in this report and to be summarized in a toolkit developed by PTHV National, to encourage hesitant educators and families to participate in home visits.

Core Practice 2: Teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day.

Findings

- All districts provided training for teachers and school staff interested in participating in the home visit program. Districts typically provided the new educator trainings throughout the year, with more trainings scheduled at the beginning of the year.
- According to educators, successful home visit trainings offered opportunities for educators to practice the home visit invitation phone call, included detailed explanations of what to expect on a home visit, provided time for educators to reflect on cultural assumptions, and motivated educators' participation by including families' voices and perspectives.
- Veteran home visit educators desired ongoing refresher trainings, but these were not common across the four districts.
- Compensation signified home visiting as a valued practice to educators and motivated their continued participation. One school administrator chose not to compensate certificated or classified staff, despite district-wide policies for compensation. Classified staff (e.g., family engagement liaisons or paraprofessionals) were critical supports for PTHV implementers, but one district's compensation policies limited their participation.

Recommendations

- RTI recommends that PTHV continue to include training and compensation as a core practice.
- RTI recommends that districts adapt the PTHV National training as they see fit but implement the promising training practices described in the full report to ensure educators feel prepared to conduct a successful home visit.
- RTI recommends that districts and/or schools implement ongoing refresher trainings for veteran home visit educators to strengthen their home visit practice. Refresher trainings can include reflection on effective implementation and educators' cultural awareness and bias.
- RTI recommends that district administrators revise compensation policies or practices that may prevent classified staff from participating in the home visit program because these staff members can be critical to successful implementation.

Core Practice 3: The focus of the first visit is relationship-building; educators and families discuss hopes and dreams. The recommended second home visit focuses on academics.

Findings

- All educators followed the focus of the first visit. Educators and families considered the focus and structure of the first visit critical to building positive relationships.
- Educators used various strategies to adapt the question "What are your hopes and dreams" to their own context.
- Educators who participated in the recommended second home visit believed that visit deepened connections between families and students to support student success.
- Families reported desiring more, not fewer, visits with educators.

Recommendations

- RTI recommends that PTHV maintain the focus of the first visit as a core practice because educators can adapt the discussion of "hopes and dreams" to their own contexts which allows them to make genuine connections with families.

- RTI recommends that educators consider various conversation strategies to maintain the focus on “hopes and dreams” while ensuring conversations are authentic and relational.
- RTI recommends that PTHV continue to include the second visit as a highly recommended component of the PTHV model.
- RTI recommends that PTHV National and schools and district continue to encourage the second visit, especially if educators do not have additional opportunities to meet families face-to-face.

Core Practice 4: No targeting – visit all or a cross-section of students so there is no stigma.

Findings

- Educators generally adhered to this core practice by offering and conducting visits with all or a cross-section of students in their classes.
- Some secondary schools made school-wide decisions to visit students in certain classes. Educators also used varying strategies to narrow down a cross-section of students when unable to visit all students.
- Some educators, especially secondary ones, reported targeting their home visits because they believed that the visits could effectively support students with various challenges and they lacked time to meet all students. Information learned during the home visits was used by educators to engage in subsequent actions to support students, and students’ challenges were not discussed during the visits.

Recommendations

- RTI recommends that PTHV keep “no targeting” as a core practice.
- RTI recommends that educators use a selection process that does not stigmatize students when they cannot visit all students and their families. In cases where educators need to be strategic, they can prioritize certain students keeping in mind that the focus of the visit is to build relationships and not to discuss academic or behavioral issues.

Core Practice 5: Educators conduct visits in pairs and, after the visit, reflect with their partners.

Findings

- Educators consistently reported conducting home visits in pairs, or sometimes in groups of three or four. A few reported conducting visits on their own due to last-minute scheduling issues. At one district, educators reported that the district no longer considered paired visits a “non-negotiable” practice but a recommended one.
- Pairing benefitted educators and families beyond feelings of safety. Educators reported that pairs allowed for stronger relationships between schools and families and elicited constructive reflections that positively influenced educator practice.
- Educators reported that planning a successful home visit often starts with creating an intentional pairing for the visit and recommended varying types of pairs.
- Educators reported that reflection occurred naturally but often did not include reflections on their biases or assumptions.
- Educators reported that structured protocols for reflection were neither used nor preferred but that guiding questions or expectations for reflection were appreciated.

Recommendations

- RTI recommends that PTHV maintain pairing and reflection as a core practice.
- RTI recommends districts and schools consider implementing reflective practices at the school level to deepen home visiting practice.

Effective support and monitoring of PTHV implementation

Finding: Successful implementation of PTHV at school requires coordination of multiple staff, including the principal, school PTHV coordinator, parent engagement liaisons, and the district PTHV coordinator

- Principal (or assistant principal): Plays a critical role in promoting PTHV, especially in communicating its value and demonstrating in words and actions that it is a priority.
- School PTHV coordinator: This is the school point person for PTHV. They develop and execute a plan for raising awareness of the program, notify educators of upcoming training dates and locations, help them register for trainings, continually remind them about PTHV, help them schedule visits, track home visit data, and support other logistics such as payment.
- Parent engagement liaisons: In some schools, they served as school PTHV coordinators. This was a successful practice because they were often bilingual and tended to be trusted and known to many families. Schools with part-time parent engagement liaisons could engage them to promote PTHV to families.
- District PTHV coordinator: This person is the main advocate and administrator of the program, making the program visible and viable, often by keeping other district leaders engaged and abreast of the work. They are the main hub of support for school PTHV coordinators.
- External support organization: One external support organization helps fund the program and provides coaches to support selected schools in family engagement efforts, including PTHV. PTHV National was an important resource, particularly as districts began their programs; a few school PTHV coordinators attended the national conference and found it valuable and inspiring.

Finding: Each of the four districts visited had ways of incentivizing and encouraging home visits

- Incentives ranged from highlighting in district communications the number of home visits conducted across the district and at top visiting schools to more elaborate campaigns and celebrations. Educators generally reported that these efforts helped to sustain their enthusiasm for home visits.

Finding: Five factors are critical to building a school culture in which parents and students come to expect and proactively ask educators when they are coming for a visit

- Critical factors for nurturing a school culture of family engagement in general, and of home visits in particular, are (a) strong support from the principal, (b) not introducing or enforcing home visits in a top-down manner, (c) having an effective school PTHV coordinator, (d) holding ongoing meetings at the school or opportunities to reflect on the home visit program to establish visibility, and (e) supporting family members so that they embrace the practice.

Finding: Home visit data are mainly collected and used to track how many visits are conducted

A few school administrators and school PTHV coordinators noted using home visit data to check whether a particular student had received a home visit.

Recommendations

- PTHV National should develop “role descriptions” documents that can be modified by schools and districts to support implementation of home visits.
- School principals should not serve as school PTHV coordinators because demands on their time prevent them from effectively coordinating PTHV.
- Involve parent engagement liaisons in PTHV implementation as much as possible.
- The district PTHV coordinator should organize at least one event during the year to raise the visibility of the program and create positive energy around it.
- Schools should organize at least one event to highlight and celebrate the home visit practice at their schools and make sure that the voices and experiences of families are elevated.
- PTHV National should develop a specific practice guide or section of a practice guide on nurturing a culture of home visits.
- Districts and/or schools should develop tracking systems that educators can use to track if certain students received home visits.
- District central offices should provide critical support to schools implementing PTHV and integrate it in a systemic approach to family and community engagement. By taking a systems approach, central offices can mitigate many of the challenges that individual schools face when implementing PTHV, such as building families’ awareness of PTHV. Ongoing, systemic and proactive support from central offices can be critical for schools that are continuing to build productive relationships with families through home visits.