

**WCSD Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project:
Evaluation Report SY 2012-2013**

**Washoe County School District Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project:
Evaluation Report for SY 2012-2013**

“Every child, by name and face, to graduation,” is the motto by which Washoe County School District (WCSD) is governed. Inherent in this motto is a commitment towards helping students achieve their educational goals, as well as providing opportunities for growth and connection between members of the educational team and family. This connection is one of the goals of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP). PTHVP is built on a partnership between the Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) and WCSD and based on a national model program that is intended to provide positive teacher home visits to families. Research has consistently highlighted the link between parent engagement in education and academic achievement and home visits have been identified as an effective tool for aiding parental involvement in their child’s education (Allen & Tracy, 2004).

The PTHVP model places parents as co-educators, instead of spectators, in their child’s education. This approach differs from other home-visit models in that the purpose of the home visit is not an assessment or to address problematic behaviors or deficits, but rather to encourage positive relationships between families and schools. This approach also links with the WCSD strategic plan, adopted in 2010, to actively engage families in education and, as one of its five strategic goals, “increase meaningful parent involvement and family engagement initiatives” as a key objective”. PTHVP corresponds also with the parental involvement provisions in Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which calls for accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded parental choice, and effective and successful programs that reflect scientifically based research (NCLB, 2004).

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Program Background

The PTHVP began in WCSD in September 2009 at three Title I secondary schools including Vaughn Middle School, Traner Middle School, and Hug High School. Since then, the program has grown and during the current year, included 28 schools and over 200 children (see Table 1). Teachers and other staff willing to participate in home visits from each school were trained in the PTHVP model and collaborated with Parent Involvement Facilitators (PIFs) to schedule home visits. Teachers generally worked in teams of two when visiting families. A third person joined the visits and served as a translator when necessary.

Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project Model

The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project was developed by Sacramento City Unified District in

1998 and has since become a nationally recognized model for home visits. The model is based on five tenets that shape the approach to home visits. Elements of the program include two visits throughout the year: the first visit is focused on relationship building between parents and school staff visitors; the second visit is centered on capacity building and information sharing. It is important for school visitors to provide parents with an informational packet, or toolkit, during

The feature of the PTHVP that defines it as unique from other home visit approaches is its focus on relationship building: *Visits are never made for punitive purposes and all students are equally likely to be asked to participate.*

A visit to the home is viewed as an opportunity for teachers to build a positive relationship with the student and parents where enduring connections can be formed.

the first visit to ensure parents have relevant information in case a second visit does not occur.

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PTHVP Core Tenets

1. Families and teachers are equally important co-educators given that the family is the expert on the individual child while the teacher is the expert on the curriculum that must be mastered for success.
2. Before important information about academic status can be effectively shared, positive communication must be established and barriers addressed.
3. All students and families should be visited because targeting challenging students will only perpetuate the cycles of mistrust.
4. All families have the ability to assist their child in their academic success and that effective family involvement can happen in every home—especially in light of the educational research about rethinking exactly what is effective family involvement.
5. This project should be voluntary for all involved and that teachers should be compensated for their time.

www.pthvp.org/history.html

Program Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project at WCSD is *to build positive relationships with families and strengthen their capacity to effectively engage in their child's education at home and within the school environment*. The primary objectives are:

- Cultivate a welcoming and trusting relationship between families of school-aged children and the WCSD.
- Provide a foundation for engaging parents in their child's education throughout their child's academic career by (a) raising awareness among parents and guardians regarding school policies that relate to their child's academic success and, (b) providing families with knowledge, tools, and strategies that will help them engage in their child's education at home.
- Improve the academic achievement of students and thereby improve their chances for college and career success.

Additional goals of the program include:

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- Provide a foundation for engaging parents in their child’s education throughout their child’s academic career.
- Improve the academic achievement of students receiving home visits and thereby improve their chances for college and career success.
- Adopt a train-the-trainer approach to ensure sustainability and extension of the program across all Title I schools.

Evaluation Approach

The research and evaluation team within the Department of Accountability conducted the evaluation of the PTHVP in partnership with Title I and the Department of Family-School Partnerships. The research and evaluation team together developed a formative and summative evaluation plan at the onset of the program. The first year evaluation focused heavily on process data and fidelity to implementation. The key findings of the evaluation of year one informed the direction of the evaluation of year two. The second year evaluation expanded to also incorporate evidence of outcome attainment. Following two years of successful implementation, the third year evaluation continues to expand data collection processes to include more testimonials from teachers about their experiences in the program and assess impact on student achievement and academic behaviors. This scaffold design serves to provide information about whether school sites continue to implement the program with fidelity and guide implementation for future expansion across WCSD. The primary goals of the evaluation were:

1. Gather and report evidence of short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes associated with the Title I Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project.

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2. Facilitate the use of information gleaned from the evaluation to inform the decision-making process regarding future implementation and expansion of the project within the WCSD.

Evaluation Questions

The guiding evaluation questions focused on four important variables: (a) implementation and perception of PTHVP, (b) teacher impact, (c) home-school relationships, and (4) student success.

Key Evaluation Questions for Implementation and Perception of PTHVP

- Was the program implemented with fidelity?
- What are the challenges of implementing PTHVP?
- Is the project valued as an effective educational strategy among project stakeholders?
- What are suggestions for improvement?

Key Evaluation Questions for Teacher Quality

- How has participation in home visits influenced teacher engagement, motivation, and effectiveness?

Key Evaluation Questions for Home-School Relationships

- How have home visits influenced communication between families and WCSD?
- How has the project affected the relationships between teachers, students, and families?
- Has the program shaped parent's perception of their child's education, schools, and teachers?

Key Evaluation Questions for Student Success

- What is the impact of home visits on indicators of student academic outcomes?
- How have behaviors related to academic achievement been influenced by the home visits?
- Are families more engaged in their child's education in the home and community environments as a result of home visits? If so, in what ways?

Data Sources

The evaluation employed an emergent design to allow for flexibility to accommodate unforeseen growth and change related to PTHVP. The evaluation employed two approaches including (1) broad survey and student achievement/behavior data collection from all program

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sites and (2) intensive data collection, including group interviews with school home visit teams and telephone interviews with parents. Data sources are described below:

Program Documentation and Time Logs. The collection and review of program documentation provided contextual information about the program. Process information was collected from home visit logs that were submitted to the Title I office for stipend awards.

Reflection Sheets: All teachers completed a brief one-page reflection sheet after every visit to help them reflect on what they learned about their students and the students' family, what additional follow-up was needed, and next steps for maintaining contact with the family throughout the school year. Information obtained in reflection sheets provide a brief snapshot of what occurs during home visits and what impact they have on teachers, students, and parents.

Focus groups with Teachers and Counselors. Three sets of one-hour focus groups were conducted with XX staff during spring 2013.

Achievement, Attendance. Several indicators are used to monitor impact on student achievement over time. These include: (1) The percent of students achieving proficiency in reading and math on Nevada State Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) for students in grades 3-8; (2) changes in GPA following the home visit; (3) changes in attendance from before to after the home visit.

Evaluation Findings

Participation Logs

In Fall 2012, 64 staff at twenty schools completed 263 home visits; in Spring 2013, 58 staff at twenty schools completed 256 home visits (see Table 1). Of the participating schools, eighteen were designated as elementary schools, four were designated as middle schools and one was designated as a high school. Students were selected from grades pre-kindergarten up to grade 11.

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Demographic data

Table 1. Number of homes visited by semester

School	Semester		TOTAL
	Fall 2012	Spring 2013	
Allen	4	2	6
Bennett	0	4	4
Booth	7	3	10
Cannan	4	10	14
Corbett	0	8	8
Desert Hts	35	18	53
Duncan	8	1	8
Elmcrest	5	0	5
Hug	9	12	21
Kate Smith	44	16	60
Lincoln Park	2	5	7
Loder	12	0	12
Mathews	17	5	22
Mitchell	12	13	25
Natchez	0	38	38
Palmer	5	13	18
Risley	3	15	18
Sierra Vista	2	6	8
Sparks MS	2	0	2
Stead	22	31	53
Sun Valley	7	8	15
Traner	19	19	38
Veterans	44	29	73
TOTAL	263	256	519

Over five hundred parent teacher home visits were conducted during SY 2012-2013. Some students received a single visit and others were visited during both Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters. Demographic data was gathered for all unique students identifiers, meaning all students were counted just once, regardless of how many visits received for a total of four hundred fifty-five records. Analysis of the frequencies shows that home visits were evenly split between males and females, 49% vs. 48.8% respectively, and that most students (70%) were considered Hispanic. Approximately 14% of students who received a home visit were considered Caucasian, followed by Native American/Indian (7%), African American/Black (2%), Asian (2%), Pacific Islander (2%), and Multiethnic (2%). Analysis of home visits by student grade level shows that most students were in the fifth (16%) and sixth grades (16%). Approximately 13% of students were in first grade,

12% were in third grade, 11% were in fourth grade, 10% were in second grade, 6% were in pre-kindergarten, 3% were in eleventh grade, 2% were in ninth grade, 1% were in tenth grade and less than 1% were in seventh and eighth grades.

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Over 90% of students who received a home visit were considered were categorized as Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). Fifty percent of students were considered Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and approximately 22% had Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

Reflection Sheets

Following every home visit, teachers and staff had the option of completing a brief one-page reflection sheet about their experiences. Teachers were asked to provide feedback about their experiences in five areas: (1) what they learned about the parent/family; (2) what they learned about the student; (3) what parents comments, questions, suggestions, and desires were discussed; (4) any additional information and/or follow up was needed; and (5) what contact information and invitation to participate in school activities were provided. These worksheets provide a glimpse into the discussions that occur between teachers and families during each visit and provide some valuable information about the education barriers faced and support provided by families to students in WCSD.

Learning about parents and families. Most teachers commented on the many ways parents and families were concerned about and supported their child’s learning. As one teacher noted, “This family is very concerned about their children. The parents want their children to have an education that will allow them a better life, better kinds of work than they do to provide for the kids. They know that the key is education.” Another teacher commented, “The children love spending time with their dad. The dad was very welcoming and was supportive of children’s’ education. He wanted to

Teacher Reflection Sheets

Family dynamic:

- Parents believe education will aid children in attaining a better life
- Family structure gives idea of students duties (e.g. aiding in childcare of younger siblings) outside of education
- Personal information otherwise not available about student helps teacher to have better at-home context of student

Barriers to education

- Many parents are concerned about available resources and their ability to receive them
- Parents want to advocate for their child but are unsure how to do so
- Some parents feel limited by their own experiences and need strategies to overcome barriers (e.g. language)

Outcomes

- Invitations extended for further home visits and for school events

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know how to assist them.” In addition, “Dad wishes for me to call him on his cell phone when it’s possible for updates, both good and bad, about his daughter’s progress.”

Nearly all teachers reported on what they learned about the interpersonal dynamics of student’s family and how it is structured. For instance one teacher described, “Mom is quiet when her husband, who is bilingual, is talking. The patriarch is the charge but encourages his daughter to be more assertive.” Another illustrated one students family as including a “...mom and dad who are separated and live together, but spend time with whole family at apartment. The oldest daughter graduated high school with honors, a 16 year old engaged and dropped out of Hug for alternative education. A middle schooler in SPED at Traner and feels like the program is not helping. Two babies, one is youngest child, other is grandchild. Dad had an accident, hit by a car a year ago, then they lost their house in Cold Springs. Mom works at Best Buy.”

Others documented more intimate information that they may not have received otherwise. For instance one teacher reported, “Single mom has six children. Older sister is a high school senior. Mom has only second grade education.” Another was informed that, “...the family lives in the housing Authority homes, close to our school. I learned the mother had eight children, two of which are dead. Both, she said, had committed suicide. I learned her fourteen-year-old daughter tried killing herself two weeks ago and had left earlier on the seventeenth to go to Colorado for clinical/psychological help. The mother said the daughter had tried to kill her also and that she was afraid to sleep at night because of it.” Reports such as these provide teachers with a greater understanding of the context in which the student is located when he or she leaves school.

Several teachers noted that they enjoyed learning about their students outside of the learning context, “He is quite in class but energetic and confident at home. He enjoys being

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outside riding his scooter.” Conversely, “At home she is very silent. Even though Dad says she’s always reading. In school, it’s a different story. She is very active.” Several teachers commented on being better informed of the additional resources the student needs, “Need to be able to log in for grades, needs password,” “Needs to practice reading more,” “Doesn’t read at night.” Others reported parental concerns regarding their children’s peer relations that the teachers were not aware of such as bullying problems on the bus.

Gaining greater insight into the life of their students proved to be eye-opening experiences for the teachers. As one nicely put it, “I learned that although families may be different culturally, they all have the same desires for their children.”

Family barriers to education. Much of the information teachers noted about parents and families in reflection sheets reflected parents’ need for additional resources regarding their child’s education. For instance, one teacher noted that one family informed her that they wished they could have assistance in supporting their child’s transition from Tier 2 to Tier 3. Another teacher reported that the parents were concerned about their daughter not receiving services at Traner. Others noted parents’ interest in gaining further supports. “Mother is interested in any opportunities that would allow her son to improve. They were impressed with teachers willing to visit homes of students.”

Teachers’ also noted possible barriers to students educational success with regard to parents’ own experiences with education and economic hardship. For instance, many parents, especially those who have recently immigrated to the United States, did not have much education, and were not fluent in English. “Young mom with five kids. She has her hands full but she’s doing her best to get her GED.” Other family circumstances that affect their students’

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education were apparent with phrases such as, “Mom has concerns about Winter clothes and food,” or “Dad had questions about Food Bank.”

Many teachers identified strategies and new ideas to help support students’ learning and to assist the families with some of their troubles. For example, “Mom and dad would like for their daughter to get some extra help with her math. We let them know that we will let her teacher know and will check into AM/PM academy and let them know.” Another teacher commented, “Community resources were provided in a packet. Special attention was drawn to Food Bank. Check with afterschool program and send home application.”

Outcome of visits and steps taken to further engage families. Many teachers commented on the gratitude parents, and families expressed about their teacher having taken the time to visit them in their home. Some even reported taking steps to continue the teacher-parent relationship with phrases such as, “We are getting together again soon,” and “The family invited us to come back and visit!”

Nearly all teachers attempted to further engage the family by inviting them to school events. One teacher reported, “Invited family to Hug for a Thanksgiving meal already cooked for them.” Others stated, “Invited the parents to our family evening events. They are new to our school and so far they are very impressed. We invited them to call or come to school if they have any questions or need help/information,” “Family was invited to Family STEM night,” and “Invited the family to Fall Festival...Also invited family to STEM science night on 10/23/12 and reminded them of track break in November.

Impact of Home Visits on Student Risk

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A series of analyses was utilized in order to examine any potential relationships between home visits and student risk. Risk Index Scores from 2012 were utilized in order to better understand if and how home visits affect student risk.

Results of PTHVP focus groups

In spring, 2013, three different focus groups were conducted in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers and counselors view and approach the home visit project. Three separate focus groups were conducted; each contained a mix of participating teachers and counselors from elementary, middle, and high school. The central questions focused on the selection process, first and second home visits, and the longer-term impact of home visits. Each focus group lasted approximately an hour.

Student selection process

Participants were prompted to discuss their selection procedures for determining which students would receive a home visit. The criteria varied across participants and across focus groups but several participants utilized both risk index data and behavior and academic data, either separately or together. “I looked at MAP scores um and, chose some kids who were in what I called the ‘bubble group’ and they were also a bunch that I did others things with at school, you know like small group and one-on-one and stuff like that. So I chose those bubble groups. This year, I chose my behavior kids.” Some participants had a select group in mind, either due to teaching that grade or group (e.g. 6th graders or those with an individualized education plan). For some participants, the selection was a random procedure in which the teacher or counselor would identify several students and attempt contact, if a visit was declined or no contact was available, then another student was chosen. There were instances in which participants would remark that one consideration they made was the number of siblings in the

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household, in order to maximize the visit they chose homes with a high number of siblings in the school. “I looked at children who had brothers and sisters in different grade levels so that I could get more than one...cover more grades.”

The selection of families for a home visit was also contingent on the teacher or counselors ability to connect with the family. Several participants remarked that they were unable to reach a certain family, either the phone number was no longer functioning or it was no longer utilized by the family. “You would have phone issues for one, it would ring one time and then be disconnected the other...I don’t think they answer phone numbers they don’t recognize.” In these cases, participants said they would sometimes send word home with their students and open up communication with the family that way. Participants remarked on the difficulties they had attempting to make initial contact with families in order to begin the home visit process.

Initial phone call

There were several points that arose during the focus groups when participants discussed the initial phone call to the home. The initial phone call was often described as awkward; parents often responded with fear or assumed that their child was in trouble until the teacher or counselor was able to explain the purpose of the home visit project. Several participants mentioned that they had a difficult time finding the correct phone number for the parents and went through several disconnected numbers before issuing the invitation to the parents through the child. A participant remarked that the language barrier often made it difficult for her to explain the program and that many of the families were fearful or suspicious of the reasons or motivations for the home visit. The language barrier was mentioned by several

“...When I made the phone calls it was even difficult over the phone to have a productive conversation with the parent because [there was] silence on their end. And that speaks volumes to the parent’s experiences with the school. We always call for negative reasons.”

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participants. When asked about the use of a translator, many participants agreed that having a translator helped with the initial phone call.

Other participants had little to no difficulty reaching the parents but did remark on the awkwardness or discomfort they initially felt due to, what one participant remarked, was “essentially us inviting ourselves over to their house”. Not having an invitation issued to them by the parents seemed to add to a level of discomfort felt by participants and many remarked that they began the phone call with an ice-breaker type of introduction about the parent-teacher home visit program, it’s goals and purposes, and the selection of the child as part of the program or

“reaching-out” by members of the Washoe County School District.

“I think the approach that worked for me...was being highly energetic and enthusiastic--and even a little over the top.”

Another participant remarked that they tried to approach parents in person, at school or other event, and felt that this approach was better because there was less of a feeling of pressure on the parents or the participant. “I’m much more comfortable if I see the parent

asking the parent in person than I am calling, that’s for sure...If I can catch them picking up their child, that’s when I’d prefer to do and that’s what I’ve done several times.”

Some participants had parents that declined the home visit or asked to have a meeting at the school instead. Some of the participants remarked that they believed the parents might fear judgment from the participant concerning the living circumstances of the child or, in another case, the parents might believe that the participants would bring an authority figure with them, such as the police or immigration authority. “I only had one that I can think of, that said absolutely no. It wasn’t like ‘no don’t come to my house’ it was like ‘I’d rather not’...I think...that she felt uncomfortable with us in the house.” Not all participants had this issue, some had no problems at all with contacting the parents and arranging for a home visit. In these

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instances, several participants pointed out that the parents had already heard of the home visit program, most likely through other parents who had already participated, and therefore knew its purpose and what to expect. In these instances, arranging a home visit through a phone call was considered by most participants to be much easier.

First home visit

According to the PTHVP model, the first home visit should be focused on relationship building between the teacher/counselor and the parents. There was a varied response to this, some participants brought data and others did not. There were several reasons given by those who brought data and many of the participants said they tried to focus more on relationship building between themselves and the families, but that having available data was a good way to initiate conversation or overcome any lulls during the visit. “I visited one home and...she wants to be on top of stuff so I did bring samples of the. She had a lot of questions too. So I bring the stuff just in case and she definitely wanted to know.” Another participant commented “I think it depends on the family. Some families right away want to know about the academics and how their child is doing in reading and math, so I’ll tell them but that’s not really why I’m there. If that’s what the families are interested in hearing, we’ll definitely have that in the conversation but I’m really interested in just getting to know them and their interests, what they do on the weekends, who their friends are, if they have family members in other states, just getting a feel for their life is what I’m really interested in.”

Almost all of the participants agreed that they needed an ice-breaker activity, especially if the participant had never done a home visit before. Several different ice-breaker activities were offered, including one participant who asked if she could take pictures of her home visit families and another who offered families hot chocolate she had made and brought. “I use laughter. I

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crack a joke and just getting them to laugh and that seems to work really well once they see that. I bring them hot chocolate, I show up with my thermos and I bring hot chocolate.”

In addition to the need for an ice-breaker several participants discussed the positive response they often felt from parents during the home visit, especially when the teacher or counselor would ask the parent about the parent’s hopes and dreams for their child. This question was mentioned by participants, as being particularly powerful

and useful in spurring the conversation. As one participant noted, “One of the things that we hear from parents that are asked that is often you’re the first person that’s ever asked them that and it really is very meaningful to them...” It was remarked by many participants that the first home visit was positive for both them and the parents, “It was interesting for me I remember one visit last year where [the] parents seemed

“I would stress doing homework before. Don’t just walk in without [any] idea [of] what you’re going to do. Have a list of questions that you’ve maybe looked into think about the student, have some idea about what they’ve done; their reading levels so you can address that right away since they [parents] want to hear about that and then go from there. Because having an awkward silence...it’s uncomfortable.”

really shy, withdrawn. Just seemed nervous and uncomfortable but it really was a real lesson for me. Soon as we asked her about her history and her education and what it was like for her then we, she just opened up and blossomed. It was amazing.” In addition to building a better relationship with the parent, many participants felt it helped them build a better relationship with the child outside of school because they are able to find out about issues that might be bothering the child, including bullying or home-life problems. According to one participant, whose student was not living at home, “...I really felt he needed me to come and meet his counselors, see where he lived and spend some time with him.”

Overall, participants felt that a goal of the first home visit was to be a positive experience between the parents and the teacher/counselor. Some participants left small gifts, such as flash

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cards or stickers, and other participants brought project materials, such as glue, paper, and markers and worked on that with the child during the visit. Many participants commented on resources for the parents as well; one participant discussed a family in which the father was not proficient in English and another participant suggested telling the family about free language resources. Support for the child, academically or otherwise, was also important and many participants said they tried to impart how the parents could help their child at home. As one participant described “I encourage[d] them to read every night...I tell them what kind of homework is expected at school so that they can be prepared with the supplies they need. So if they [do not have the books] we [tell them we] have a library at the school...and I also say how easy it is to get a library card”.

Second home visit

Those participants who conducted a second home visit with the same families were asked to describe the second visit and how it differed from the first home visit. Those participants said that the second home visit was different in that the parents were more relaxed with the teacher/counselor. Most participants who conducted a second home visit followed the model and

“...we had one family that had four kids and the mom was pregnant...in the spring when we went, she had a new baby so we were excited to see the new baby. We saw the activities the kids were involved in at their home...in the fall they were playing ball outside where in the spring they were running in the sprinkler so it was totally different.”

brought data with them but said they framed it in a positive manner, showing progress or growth, not deficit. As one participant said “I do show up with MAP data...So it is a little bit different in that sense. You come with more of a purpose of you’ve got this data that you want to share and [ask the family] what do you need? How can I help you help your child and whatever resources they need?”

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Other participants reported that they usually did an activity with the families during the second visit, such as attending a sporting event or a play. This activity allowed them to feel connected with both the family and the community in which the family resides. The second visit allowed participants a chance to form a stronger connection with the family, especially when they attended the child's events.

Longer-term impact of home visits

The longer-term impact of home visits was discussed and several different thematic groupings arose. The first focused on parental responses to invitations for school events. Almost all participants said that at the end of a home visit, they issued an invitation for the parents to come to school events like parent family nights or to just volunteer at school or chaperone field trips. One participant found out that a parent wanted to volunteer but did not feel comfortable in a classroom, so the participant offered the parent a chance to help in the school office, which the parent accepted. Other participants said that after a home visit, students were also more likely to approach them and invite them to more student events as well.

A second reoccurring topic was the

"I've noticed, they [the parents] just feel more comfortable telling me why something didn't happen...they just feel more comfortable coming and talking to me about things because they know I'll understand."

strengthened connection felt between the parent/student and the teacher/counselor. Some participants noted increased contact between them and the parents, through phone calls, visits, or email. Other participants said that parents appeared to be more at ease with them

and, although they might not have increased contact, the contact that they did have was more familiar, as one participant said, "I know that I feel more comfortable calling families, if there's any kind of situation, now that I know them. That's an open line of communication whether it's

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used or not.” In this regard, a follow-through was recommended by many participants. Some mentioned that they wrote thank-you cards, others made phone calls but most agreed that a follow-up act of some sort aided them in established a positive relationship and maximizing the impact of the home visit.

Besides the parents, participants also stated that the students felt more comfortable with them after a home visit. A few participants saw improved student grades and attendance after a home visit. Other participants said that the student did not show tangible improvement but that they noticed the students were more likely to seek them out for help, to simply say hi, or to ask when they were going to make another visit. A participant summed it up by saying “The other thing too is they’re more apt to come find me if they’re having an issue, you know they’re not shy about it anymore.” Increased student contact, or at least student recognition at school, seemed to be common for almost all participants.

A third area of follow-up discussed by participants was the ways in which they could maximize the impact of home visits. In this area, the responses varied; some participants were unaware of any activity they did which maximized the impact. Some participants sent follow-through or follow-up notes and postcards or Christmas cards to the family, others stated that they kept contact logs to see if the parents contacted the school more and other participants made more phone calls to the family to check in on things. According to a participant, “A follow through is great because then they can see that we really do care and that’s the true connection.”

When participants were asked about improvements to the home-visit program, they often mentioned more time and money. According to most participants, the commitment of making home visits tended to fall on a select group of people and that this group tended to shrink as time passed and more constraints were placed on teachers and counselors time. An idea for

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improvement was to increase stipends or place limits on who was involved with visits so that those who made a commitment to make home visits followed through with the visits. As there was a very small percentage of participants who were able to make a second home visit with the same family, requiring a commitment might improve this rate. In addition to this, several participants were open to the idea of training sessions in order to promote the home visit program and possibly even alleviate any potential problems new home visit participants might have, such as having a script to follow for phone calls or initial home visits until the visiting teacher/counselor felt more at-ease. To that end, the suggestion of beginning the PTHVP in the summer was suggested as a way to both provide training and time for participants to schedule a second visit. “We’d like to be able to stretch it out all school year. I know there needs to be an ending time but I think we’re supposed to start before a certain date, we have to end by a certain date in the spring, we’d like to be able to just do it through the school year when it’s needed. And, for us, we have a lot of people on our team and not all of them go, it’s pretty inconsistent, so either we’re scrambling at the very end to get those kids or something. So maybe just have a team.”

Another suggestion of improvement was renaming the purpose of the visit. As one participant pointed out, many of the parents felt the teachers/counselors were visiting on behalf of the school or a government agency. A suggestion was made to call the visit a “home connection” instead of just “home visit” to again bring forward the idea that these visits are done with the purpose of strengthening the connection between parents and teachers/counselors. All of the participants felt that PTHVP was a worthy and extremely positive experience. Although the implementation was not always consistent, the overall message of teachers and parents working together was one that participants felt was important.

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Conclusion

Although there are many factors which can contribute to a student's perception of connectedness, data shows that the PTHVP has aided in establishing these kinds of connections. The preliminary data analyses also show that students who have received a home visit from a teacher also tend to have lower Risk Index scores. This information suggests that home visits and student connectedness with school might be a factor in a student's overall risk and that by increasing connections between students and school support, we can help reduce risk.

Results from the current evaluation also suggest that parents are very open about receiving teachers into their home. The teacher reflections sheets showed that most teachers felt the experience was beneficial, both to them as well as to the parents. The teachers were able to get a better picture of their student's family dynamic, including the additional home duties (such as attending to younger siblings etc.) that many students had outside of the classroom. Teachers were also able to provide the families with resources so that parents could advocate for their child and overcome some of their own perceived deficits, such as a language barrier, in order to ensure their child received a quality education.