Home Visits and Community Schools

Relational home visits help Community Schools leverage the power of families

Community Schools go beyond the traditional concept of school (classroom, student and teacher), providing afterschool activities, health and social services to students, their families, and the community. By integrating services with school, students are better supported to succeed on many levels, and their families are more likely to be engaged on the school grounds. The benefits to the community also help to create a better environment for the children, their families and their neighbors.

Research confirms that family engagement, school climate, and health care significantly improve school success. And the data is clear as to the kinds of engagement that have the most impact. According to Harvard University Graduate School of Education researchers in the DOE report “A Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships,” effective engagement requires relationships, collaboration, increase in capacity for all involved, and a link to academic achievement.

In the data and in practice, it’s clear to Community Schools that providing services is only part of the solution. To really change academic and social-emotional outcomes for children and their families, and thus support students for college and career success, educators and families must be in a two-way relationship, learning from each other and working together toward their mutual goal: the success of their children.

It seems simple that a strong relationship between the most important adults in the child’s life – in the family and the school – increases a child’s

In 1998, an interfaith community organizing effort among parents in a low-income, racially diverse neighborhood in south Sacramento, CA resulted in a new approach to an old strategy: use voluntary teacher home visits to end the longstanding cycle of blame and distrust between the community and the school district, and build relationships between families and teachers in order to support student learning. Today, over 600 school communities are using the PTHV model.

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academic and developmental success. But the barriers that prevent these adults from working together productively are numerous. Specifically, barriers related to racism and poverty, such as fear, segregation, stereotypes, unconscious assumptions and historic mistrust, are a profound impediment to partnership, despite our best intentions. Overcoming these barriers is not simple, and requires data-driven interruption in addition to supportive services. The need for proven methods to interrupt these barriers is only increasing, as US public school student demographics are increasingly diverse, with students of color in the majority, and the majority of students in Title 1-eligible schools in low-income neighborhoods.

In their efforts to transcend the service model, Community Schools in districts such as Portland, OR, Hartford, CT and St Paul, MN bring Parent Teacher Home Visits training to their educators and use visits and debriefs to increase student, family, teacher and community engagement and capacity.

PTHV uses community organizing tactics and principles of family empowerment, is endorsed by local stakeholders, and has a solid foundation in research on family engagement and school success.

The Parent Teacher Home Visits protocol empowers participants to 1) connect on a meaningful level, 2) reflect on any assumptions or unconscious bias and 3) direct new knowledge toward the success of the individual student, the classroom and the school community as a whole.

When Community Schools use Parent Teacher Home Visits to build a two-way relationship between educators and families, we transcend both school and service models to become a more effective and relevant institution for our children, families, educators and community.