

Parent Teacher Home Visits Advances as Semifinalist in Harvard's 2017 Innovations in American Government Awards Competition

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Sacramento, CA— The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, recognized today Parent Teacher Home Visits as one of the 100 programs named as Semifinalists in this year's Innovations in American Government Awards competition. Parent Teacher Home Visits has completed two phases of evaluation, and will advance in the competition for the \$100,000 grand prize in Cambridge this spring.

Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV), was evaluated from a pool of more than 500 applications from all 50 states, and was selected by the Innovations Award evaluators as an example of novel and effective action whose work has had significant impact, and who they believe can be replicated across the country and around the world.

Founded by a unique collaboration of parents with the support of community organizers, teachers and the school district in a low-income neighborhood of south Sacramento, Parent Teacher Home Visits trains teachers to establish meaningful relationships with their students' families, starting with a voluntary home visit. Evaluations show multi-directional impacts, such as higher test scores, improved school climate, increased family participation at school, and increased skills, empathy and job satisfaction for teachers. The model has been successfully adopted across the US, and has been lifted up by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the US Department of Education as a "high-impact" strategy that enriches educators and families as well as the children they team up to support.

A significant reason that Parent Teacher Home Visits are so effective at bringing teachers and families together is the model's directive to question and let go of any previously-held assumptions. Educators say that any unconscious bias or stereotypes they may have had about the family is replaced naturally by first-hand knowledge learned from 1-1 interactions. Similarly, parents or guardians who have negative attitudes about school, possibly from their own experience, are often impressed by teachers who care enough to sit down for a chat.

This relatively fast and inexpensive way to build relationship and break down assumptions is significant, considering the increased diversity in public schools: the majority of students in US public schools come from families of color and/or low-income neighborhoods, yet the majority of teachers and administrators are white and middle class, and do not live in the neighborhoods where they teach. Educators have little or no practical training in cultural competence and also may not understand historic reasons for mistrust and low parent involvement. As students of color attempt to close the “achievement gap” of lower reading and math scores, they face disproportionate remedial tracking, failures, suspensions, as well as disparities in infrastructure, teacher quality and per-student spending. Home visits are a real-time, real-world antidote to the barriers that keep well-intentioned adults from working together for the success of their children.

Parent Teacher Home Visits have been successfully adapted in widely diverse settings, from rural Montana to New York City. Each location is unique, but all follow five “non-negotiable” core practices, such as the program is voluntary, and teachers are trained and compensated. Efforts to start new locations are strengthened by a collaborative approach that gets the school district, the teachers’ unions and local community groups involved. The national network, based in Sacramento, CA, provides training and technical support.

“These programs demonstrate that there are no prerequisites for doing the good work of governing” said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Program at the Ash Center, “small towns and massive cities, huge federal agencies and local school districts, large budgets or no budgets at all — what makes government work best is the drive to do better, and this group proves that drive can be found anywhere.”

The Semifinalist programs represent a cross-section of jurisdictions and policy areas, and embody one of the most diverse and sophisticated groups that have advanced to this stage in the competition’s 30-year history. They were invited to complete a supplementary application last fall, answering in-depth questions about their work, the process of creating and sustaining their programs, and how they believe they can teach others to do what they do. The Ash Center expects to announce 10 programs that will be named Finalists and be invited to Cambridge to present to the Innovation Awards Program’s National Selection Committee in March, with the grand prize winners to be named in June.

Please visit the Government Innovators Network at <http://innovations.harvard.edu> for the full list of Semifinalists, and for more information regarding the Innovations in American Government Awards.

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About Parent Teacher Home Visits

Parent Teacher Home Visits trains public school teachers and staff to make meaningful relationships with the families of their students, starting with a voluntary home visit. This national nonprofit is a unique collaboration between school districts, teachers' unions and community groups, and has grown from a local effort in Sacramento, CA to a national network of over 500 school communities throughout the US that use this model. In addition to outcomes of increased attendance and academic achievement, PTHV is recognized as an effective strategy for building cultural connection and addressing implicit bias. For more about the model and evidence of its impact, please see www.pthvp.org.

About the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Center fosters creative and effective government problem solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. For more information, visit www.ash.harvard.edu.