

Attendance and Parent Teacher Home Visits

A few absences may not seem like a big deal to parents, but research shows that even missing two days every month, or 10 percent of school days, has a negative effect on learning and graduation rates. Unfortunately, our annual nationwide absence rate in K-12 schools is around 13 percent, according to the US Department of Education.

Absences may disproportionately hurt children in socioeconomic, linguistic or ethnic groups who are already at a disadvantage. American Indian and Pacific Islander students are each over 65 percent more likely, African American students are 36 percent more likely, and Latino students are 11 percent more likely than white students to miss three weeks of school or more per year (DOE report, 2014).

Historically, home visits have been used as an intervention after the fact, as a consequence for truancy (also called a 3rd Tier or downstream intervention). This approach, usually an unscheduled knock at the door, often heightens mistrust and disengagement.



Educators can more effectively fight absenteeism with a preventative approach, but there are misunderstandings and barriers they must help families overcome, according to Attendance Works, a nonprofit initiative. Parents often don't know that a few absences can hurt a student's academic achievement, and they may have negative attitudes towards school that unconsciously get passed to their children. The family may also have trouble getting their child to school, due to lack of transportation, illness or other barriers. Too often, schools have no idea what the misunderstandings and barriers are that are preventing students from coming to class and getting the education they need.



Parent Teacher Home Visits are voluntary meetings between educators and families as equal partners, arranged in advance and hosted by the families on their own turf.

Unlike reactive home visits, PTHV relationship-building home visits follow a three-step model

(See graphic). Note that the first visit, which focuses on connecting with the family, is done either before school starts or at the beginning of the school year. The teachers and the family establish communication before any issues arise.

During the visit and in the months following, the teacher can share expectations and positively reinforce good attendance. If the teacher notices that a student's absences are adding up, the teacher and the family have already established open communication and can work together to address issues and barriers.



Independent evaluations have shown a positive impact on attendance when school communities use PTHV to get families and teachers on the same page for the success of their children. For example, in a 2016 study by Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. public schools, students whose families received a relational home visit had 24 percent fewer absences than similar students whose families did not receive a visit.

This is why Parent Teacher Home Visits are a recommended 1st Tier prevention practice by Attendance Works and other experts on chronic school absence.

For more information on home visits, please see www.pthvp.org.

For more information on chronic absence, please see www.attendanceworks.org