For Immediate Release
December 7, 2017

National study shows Parent Teacher Home Visits can interrupt implicit bias

SACRAMENTO – Building communication between families and their student’s teachers via a voluntary home visit program has been shown to improve metrics like reading test scores and attendance. To learn more about the effectiveness of their unique process, Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) commissioned a multi-city evaluation, conducted by RTI International and Johns Hopkins University in three parts. Just released Study I focused on whether PTHV relational home visits build trust, foster positive cross-group interaction and heighten awareness of stereotypes and unconscious assumptions, or implicit bias. **RTI found that PTHV is a promising strategy for interrupting implicit bias that contributes to achievement and opportunity gaps among students of color and in low-income neighborhoods.** By connecting the most important adults in a child’s life, the PTHV process deepens the support that both educators and families can collectively contribute to their students’ success.

The independent researchers at RTI International conducted a landscape study that cited evidence that unconscious assumptions about race, socioeconomic status and culture, also known as implicit bias, are
causative factors for documented achievement and opportunity gaps among students of color and students in poverty. Implicit bias is natural and unconscious, the study showed, but it also detailed research indicating that mindsets can change. Relational approaches in particular, the study cites, are a powerful intervention for changing bias, especially ongoing practices that deepen understanding between groups, both individually and in the school culture. Additionally, the study found that following the Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) process, both educators and families reported a change their assumptions and attitudes about one another.

Researchers discovered that in general, across all four major metropolitan school districts, families who participated in PTHV reported being more comfortable around school staff and teachers. As their perceptions of educators shifted from “distant authority figures” to “relatable” people with common goals, “families reported increased confidence in reaching out to educators and communicating about student’s needs.”

Some of the teachers who previously held “deficit” assumptions about the families of their students found their perceptions shifting after home visits, moving to “recognizing students’ capabilities” and realizing that families’ care for their children takes shape in diverse ways. Educators reported increased understanding and empathy towards their students and families, and described changes in their behavior and their teaching practices, such as including students’ interests and home cultures in lessons to improve student engagement and motivation, and handling discipline with more empathy than in prior practice.
Attention to bias, and the study of intervention effectiveness, is more important than ever in US public schools, which serve a majority of students of color, over 80% Latino, Asian and African American. And the majority, 70%, of public school students live in low-income households. At the same time, the majority of teachers are white, middle-class and female. Even when a staff is diverse, a single teacher is likely to work with students (and their families) who are ethnically, racially, linguistically or culturally different than their own.

The three phases of the PTHV National Evaluation, including Study 1: Mindset Shifts, are funded by Flamboyan Foundation, WK Kellogg Foundation, National Education Association and the Stuart Foundation.

See [http://www.pthvp.org/what-we-do/results/i-research/] for the full report of Study 1: Mindset Shifts.

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