

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project

District:

Sacramento City Unified School District

Location:

Sacramento, Calif.

Grades: K-12

Enrollment: 48,200 students

Free/reduced-price lunch:
66%

ELL: 25%

Boosting student success through home visits

Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project Sacramento City Unified School District *Sacramento, California*

Founded in 1998, the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) is collaboration among three partners: the school district, the Sacramento City Teachers Association, and the faith-based community organizing group Sacramento ACT. Designed to address the chronic low performance of local schools and a pervasive cycle of blame between school staff and community members, PTHVP trains teachers to make home visits to families, which build relationships and foster parent-teacher collaboration to improve student achievement.

Participation is voluntary, and teachers are paid for their time. Evaluations have found that the visits lead to increased student attendance, improved test scores, and reduced suspension and expulsion rates. More than 80 percent of students in the district are of color, and 25 percent are English Language Learners. The program is being adopted in several other states, including Colorado, Massachusetts, Montana, and Ohio.

Sarah Gebre, a parent who emigrated from Ethiopia, says, "After the home visit, I felt very respected and comfortable. I started to participate in my child's school. I felt more comfortable to talk to the teachers and ask them questions about my son."

How the program works

PTHVP is a nonprofit organization with four staff members and a cadre of about 30 parent and teacher trainers. Participating schools have a site coordinator; teachers make visits in teams of two and receive one hour of compensation for each visit. Before making visits, the teachers receive instruction and support from PTHVP trainers.

At the elementary school level, home visits take place in the fall and spring. At the end of the first visit, teachers invite the family to come to the school and they develop a plan to communicate throughout the school year. The second visit occurs just before spring testing. In middle and high school, teachers visit the homes of seventh, ninth, and tenth graders and focus on key school transitions. The visits that take place in eleventh and twelfth grades focus on timely graduation and career or college planning.

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Middle school teacher Tarik McFall recounts a home visit in which the mother told McFall that she hoped her son would do well in school and go to college someday. The son was present and heard what his mother said. "I think hearing her say those words to his teacher really influenced him to do well in school," McFall says. "For the rest of the year, DeJanerio really evolved into an excellent leader and even scored 'proficient' in math on the CST!"

PTHVP receives its funding from foundations and corporations and from fees for its training and materials offered in other districts. PTHVP covers the cost of training teachers. The district is responsible only for coordinating the program and compensating teachers for the visits, which is largely covered by the federal Title I program.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ A 1998-2001 study of 14 pilot home visit schools, by Dr. Geni Cowan of California State University at Sacramento, found the program to be associated with improved student performance, increased parent involvement, and enhanced communication between home and school. The schools credited PTHVP with making "a critical difference" in improving student STAR scores.
- ▶ A 2003 evaluation of PTHVP training and materials by EMT Associates found successful implementation of the program. Teachers identified several benefits, including increased parent involvement, improved parent-teacher relationships, and improved student achievement.
- ▶ In 2007, the Center for Student Assessment and Program Accountability, Sacramento County Office of Education, found that the home visit pilot project "has been associated with positive attitudinal shifts among students and parents toward school and the

future, as well as with positive behavioral changes associated with improved academic outcomes."

- ▶ Recognition and awards include a citation from former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley; numerous stories in local, state, and national media; and recognition in the September 2005 issue of *Edutopia* magazine as "one of ten big ideas for better schools."

Exemplary practices

Building collaborative relationships: Working from a community organizing model, PTHVP places a premium on relationships. Teachers visit K-12 families with two main goals:

1. To build connection and trust by listening to families and understanding their expertise and strengths
2. To share information about the child's academic status and offer tools for parents to work with students at home.

Agreeing on core values: The PTHVP partners took time at the outset to reach agreement on their attitudes and beliefs. They identified the following core values:

- ▶ Families and teachers are equally important co-educators. The family is the expert on the child, and the teacher is the expert on the curriculum the child needs to master to be successful.
- ▶ Before teachers can effectively share important information about academic status, teachers and parents must establish positive communication and address any communication barriers.
- ▶ Teachers must visit all students and families because only targeting challenging students will perpetuate the cycle of mistrust.

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- ▶ All parents can assist in their children's academic success; effective family involvement can happen in every home.
- ▶ Participation in the project should be voluntary, and teachers receive compensation for their time.

Getting buy-in from the district and teachers' union:

Through a series of conversations with local families and community members, Sacramento ACT learned that families felt unwelcome and disconnected from their children's schools. ACT approached the school district and the Sacramento City Teachers Association and convinced them to become partners in planning and implementing the program. This collaboration allowed the home visit initiative to be developed with teacher and parent input within the framework of the existing collective bargaining contract.

Outlook

PTHVP has formed a national collaborative that holds monthly teleconferences and meets annually to share best practices. School communities around the country are participating, and several districts in California and other states now offer the program. These include schools and districts in Alaska, Montana, California, Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, Washington, Massachusetts, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. In support of this expansion, PTHVP is developing regional training teams to increase training capacity for existing sites and availability for new communities.

Association perspective

The Sacramento City Teachers Association was one of the original core partners in establishing this project. In addition, the California Teachers Association (CTA) Institute for Teaching actively supports PTHVP. The NEA Foundation has supported the expansion of the project to other sites, and it has hosted annual meetings of site teams in Washington, D.C.

Says Scott Smith, president of the Sacramento City Teachers Association: "The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project is an evidence-based model of collaboration. It underscores the importance of school-family collaboration in improving student outcomes. We are proud to have been at the table in co-designing PTHVP with community partners, and we encourage our fellow Association members around the country to work toward building effective strategies that boost parent and community involvement."

Local contact

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Related information

Report card: <http://bit.ly/p5Dlmh>

Project website: www.pthvp.org

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