

At Wakefield High School – Home Visits Through a Partnership Lens!

Often when we think of home visits, we think of social workers or other school staff going to a parents' home to ask lots of questions about their child. About ten years ago, however, two ESOL/HILT teachers at Wakefield became interested in the ***Parent Teacher Home Visit***, a high impact family engagement strategy that was pioneered in Sacramento, CA, after one of the teachers attended a conference where this strategy was presented. In this model, home visits were reframed and focused solely on developing a trusting relationship between the parents and their children's teacher.

The goal of the ***Parent Teacher Home Visit*** model is to join the family's expertise about their children with the classroom expertise of their children's teachers to build a strong, two-way partnership of teacher and parent. The ***Parent Teacher Home Visit*** model (PTHV) has five non-negotiable practices that are followed nation-wide and make the program effective:

1. "Visits are always voluntary for educators and families and arranged in advance.
2. Teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day.
3. Focus of the first visit is relationship-building; we discuss hopes and dreams.
4. No targeting – visit all or a cross-section of students so there is no stigma.
5. Educators conduct visits in pairs, and after the visit, reflect with their partner."

(<http://www.pthvp.org/what-we-do/pthv-model/>)

Research supporting the efficacy of the PTHV model says that participating schools report more trusting relationships between parents and teachers, improved student attendance, better behavior, improved academic achievement, and increased collaboration among teachers and families. For more information, check out the PTHV website <http://www.pthvp.org/>

In 2009, two Wakefield teachers did a small pilot with the ESOL/HILT students in their classes. In 2010, Wakefield began to fund training for the initial staff cadre to do home visits during August and early September and focused on their incoming ninth grade class. They immediately noticed a larger turnout than expected for Back-to-School Night.

Since then, thanks to the support of the Wakefield Principal, some school funds are allocated to conduct home visits during the summer. Incoming ninth grade student families receive an invitation; all those replying *yes* get a home visit. To date approximately 70 staff members have been trained and more than 800 home visits have been made. Trained staff include teachers, administrators, administrative assistants, and instructional assistants. The training lasts three hours and includes practice with the scripts for making the telephone call to set up the appointment and conducting meaningful conversations with students' families.

Home visits usually last between 20-45 minutes and can take place in the students' homes, restaurants, libraries, or other places convenient to both parties. While visiting, there is no taking of notes; the focus is on relationship building and discussing the parents' hopes and dreams for their children. Parents are asked about any questions they have as their children transition into high school and are personally invited to Back to School Night. When they return to school, the two home visit partners enter their

enduring observations into the Wakefield Home Visit data base and convey relevant information to the students' teachers.

Wakefield's trained visitors meet monthly and are very committed to the program. Currently they are in the process of creating a mission and vision statement for the Wakefield Home Visits program. They are also exploring methods of collecting quantitative data to complement the qualitative data they have. They would also like to see PTHV become a voluntary program county wide. In 2016, the FACE office facilitated a training by seasoned Wakefield home visit teachers for teachers in the Pre-School program. While VPI also conducts home visits at the start of the school year for every family in the program, they were not following the Parent Teacher Home Visits model. As a result, several VPI teams modified their visits placing a primary focus on relationship-building to establish a strong foundation for engaging their families during the school year. More recently, teachers in Gunston and Kenmore Middle Schools received training and conducted some home visits.

For additional information about homevisits, check out chapter 3 in ***Powerful Partnerships; A Teacher's Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success*** by Karen L. Mapp, Ilene Carver, and Jessica Lander, 2017. You can also contact Wakefield Assistant Principal Maggie Hsu (maggie.hsu@apsva.us) or Wakefield teacher Rebecca Kigin (rebecca.kigin@apsva.us) for more information.

"The hopes and dreams question is a powerful conversation starter. I never forget a family I visited a few years ago of one of our Hispanic students. The whole extended family was present. When I asked the parents about the dreams and hopes for their daughter, the Dad said what he wanted most was for her to be happy and successful, regardless of what she chose to do in her life. I noticed the daughter had tears in her eyes and then the father teared up too when he saw her. It was very emotional. I felt like they went on the same page and that the student realized her dad was going to be encouraging whatever she decided to do".

Wakefield teacher home-visitor

"Ms. Hill has become like a second mother to my daughter. I was so scared when she started high school since she has special needs. To this day Ms. Hill is the person we go to whenever we have questions or concerns. My daughter has had a much better high school experience thanks to her. I am very supportive of our school home visits as a result."

Parent of a 12th grader