

Ways to Visit

Emily Chiswick-Patterson

Research Analyst, CityBridge Foundation

1. The Why

- Anecdotal evidence about parental involvement:
 - Since starting home visits McCoy Elementary School has seen:
 - 100% attendance during parent-teacher days,
 - Very few “big” attendance or discipline problems,
 - Parents eager to respond to the school’s calls for help.
(Maria Celis, Secretary, McCoy Elementary School, interview, December 5, 2006.)
 - Emily Glasgow from Teach for America noted:
 - An increase from a 10-15% turnout at Back-to-School night to an 80-90% turnout,
 - Meeting every family at report-card time, as opposed to rarely getting to talk families through the reports.
(Teach for America, “Investing Students and Their Influences,” 70.)

1. The Why

- Anecdotal evidence about behavior:
 - The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project found:
 - An increase in attendance and test scores,
 - A decrease in discipline problems and vandalism.

Vignette: A school spent \$100,000 on vandalism the year before implementing the home visit program. After the program, someone came onto school property one weekend, and the police received calls in eight languages reporting it.

(Carrie Rose, Executive Director, Parent Teacher Home Visit Project, interview, December 7, 2006.)
 - Arleta Elementary School observed that students have “a lot less stress” on the first day of school after receiving a home visit.

(Dena Chaffin, Librarian, Arleta Elementary School, interview, December 9, 2006.)

1. The Why

Purpose: student driven

Where the point of the visit is to interact with the students more than it is to build rapport with the parents, a time for teachers to help ease the transition of students into the school.

- Home visits enable a first meeting between child and teacher in an environment that is safe, and where the child feels in control. A visit from “their” teacher shows they are important and offers a familiar face when school begins.
 - At school, mention a particular aspect of the visit as a starting point for conversation, letting the child know the teacher knows about him or her.

(The Association of Teacher and Lecturers, “Should I carry out a home visit?,”
http://www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/help/A_Z/h/home_vists/advice.asp.)

1. The Why

Purpose: parent driven

Where the point of the visit is to interact with the parents, a time to allow them a chance to meet the teacher on their own ground, in an environment where they feel at ease and in control.

- Entering the school to meet teachers can be daunting, particularly if their own experiences of education were less than positive.
 - Parents may feel more secure and in control in their own homes, and therefore able to talk more freely. In familiar surroundings, they may also find it easier to remember important facts about their children.

(“Should I carry out a home visit?”)

1. The Why

Purpose: parent driven

- Home visits provide parents an opportunity to comfortably talk about:
 - Their child and the school,
 - Concerns,
 - Misunderstandings
 - Lessening worries and fears,
 - Medical histories,
 - Children's likes, dislikes, and routines.

("Should I carry out a home visit?")

1. The Why

Purpose: parent driven

- Visits help make a connection with parents “who might not otherwise have been comfortable or inclined to inspire their children to achieve academically.”
 - It leads to more family involvement in review meetings, and a better relationship leading to more regular communication between the teacher and the family. (*Teach for America, 70.*)
- Visits can be a good time to explain technical paperwork for special education. (*Teach for America, 70.*)
- Going into the home and interacting with parents validates their experiences and skills, leading the family to feel greater comfort with and a connection to the school. (*Teach for America, 71.*)

1. The Why

Purpose: for teachers

Whether the focus is on parents or students, home visits offer an opportunity for teachers to observe the home environment and get a fuller sense of the child from watching him or her in a comfortable setting.

- Visits provide the opportunity to:
 - Establish early, positive contact,
 - See children in their own familiar settings,
 - Meet other family members, people, and pets who are important to the children,
 - Understand the problems that children might encounter at school, and also to appreciate the wealth of learning that goes on in the home.

(“Should I carry out a home visit?”)

1. The Why

Purpose: for teachers

- Use visits to observe and ask about learning styles, social-emotional needs, and behaviors.
 - Some students may work better alone rather than with others.
 - Some like an active environment more than quiet time.
 - Do students react to problems with tears, anger, or withdrawal?
 - Identify students' interests or concerns, such as a new hobby, an upcoming trip, or a change in the family.

(Diane Kyle and Ellen McIntyre, "Family Visits Benefit Teachers and Families—and Students Most of All," *Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence (CREDE)*, University of California, Berkeley,
http://crede.berkeley.edu/products/print/pract_briefs/pb1.shtml.)

1. The Why

Purpose: for teachers

- Find funds of knowledge in households and tap them for help in making lesson plans for certain curriculum units.
- Also use this understanding to create activities designed to access knowledge students have from home.

(Kyle and McIntyre.)

2. The How: Preparation and Administration

- At parent orientation, usually held before school starts, hand out a Parent Handbook which includes information on the home visits. (Berlinda Gallegos, Pre-K Curriculum Specialist, Bright Beginnings, interview, December 5, 2006; Patricia Spector, Director of Nursery Admission, St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School, interview, January 31, 2007.)
 - Call to set up appointments for and do home visits during teachers' summer work days. (Bright Beginnings; Arleta.)
 - Compensation may be either an hourly wage, (Arleta,) or built into the summer work days. (St. Patrick's.)

2. The How: Preparation and Administration

- Teacher and assistant should visit as a team, (Bright Beginnings,) so that one person can talk to the parent while the other plays with the child. This means that the parent can talk without worrying about their child. It also provides the opportunity to observe the child at play in a familiar environment. (The Association of Teacher and Lecturers, "What should I do during a home visit?," http://www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/help/A_Z/h/home_vists/during_visits.asp.)
- Allow between 30 minutes and an hour for each visit, (Bright Beginnings.) but let families lead on how long to stay. (Kyle and McIntyre.)
 - At 30 minutes for a visit, a class of 17 students takes 2 or more days to complete. (St. Patrick's.)

2. The How: Preparation and Administration

- For students who enter school after it begins, a visit should be conducted within 10 days.
- In addition to this before-school visit, more may be performed during the year if there is a problem or desire. (Bright Beginnings.)
- If a family is not at home or teachers are not able to contact them via phone, either the teacher or family advocate must go to the house and leave a message with the teacher's name, school name, and number, asking them to call as soon as possible. (Bright Beginnings' document "Home Visits Guidelines.")

2. The How: Process

- Make appointments with families that live in the same area on the same day.
 - It is helpful to give families a choice of times.
(“Home Visits Guidelines.”)

2. The How: Process

- Schedule visits during a time with minimal disruptions.
 - Be sure the parent or guardian understands that you wish to talk to them and that the child should be present. (Kathleen Ford and Sibieanne Smith, “Making the Most of Home Visits,” *Healthy Childcare*, Healthy Child Publications, <http://www.healthychild.net/articles/sh16visits.html>.)
 - State approximately how long the visit will last. (Ford and Smith.)
 - Ensure that parents know the names of the visitors. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)
 - Explain what will happen and what types of questions you will be asking. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)
 - Tell what information you will bring. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)
 - If the family is expected to have specific documents on hand, or needs to make other preparations for the visit, discuss this at the time of scheduling. (Ford and Smith.)

2. The How: Process

- Emphasize wanting to learn from the parents. (*Teach for America*, 71.)
- Allow sufficient travel time between visits. (“Home Visits Guidelines.”)
- Get specific directions from the family when scheduling the visit. (“Home Visits Guidelines.”)
 - Verify the address; if they live in an apartment, ask for the code. (KIPP: SHINE, “SHINEy Actions before and during the visit.”)
- If parents prefer the teachers do not come to the home, you may meet at a mutually agreed upon place instead. (Bright Beginnings.)
- Follow up on making the appointment with reminders via phone or with notes. (Kyle and McIntyre.)

3. The visit: Do

- Create an “action plan” or agenda for your visit to ensure that the necessary goals of the visit are covered. (Ford and Smith.)
- If the visit is intended to make contact with the parents, be aware that the child may want to be the center of attention. Interact with the child, and encourage others to, as well. (Ford and Smith.)
 - Watch and assess the students as they play. (Bright Beginnings.)
- Begin discussions with the parent after you and the parent are comfortably seated, preferably side-by-side. In some cultures the person may avoid eye contact. (Ford and Smith.)

3. The visit: Do

- If parents offer something to eat or drink, accept; it could be insulting in some cultures to refuse.
(“SHINEy Actions before and during the visit.”)
- Make sure to thank the family for their time when closing the visit. (“SHINEy Actions before and during the visit.”)
- All incidents occurring during home visits should be recorded in writing as soon as possible, while events are still fresh in memory. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)
- Send a follow-up note or call to reinforce the visit. (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, “How to Conduct a Home Visit,” *Pathways*, <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa4lk6-2.htm>.)

3. The visit: Bring

- Pens and pencils for completing paperwork. (Bright Beginnings' document "Suggested Items to Take on a Home Visit.")
- A clipboard. ("Suggested Items to Take on a Home Visit.")
- A camera to take pictures of the student alone and of the whole family to post in the classroom. (Arleta; St. Patrick's; "Suggested Items to Take on a Home Visit.")
- A nametag for the child to wear to school for the first week (if desired). ("Suggested Items to Take on a Home Visit.")

3. The visit: Bring

- A selection of toys to engage and observe the child (either together or one of the teachers), making sure the parents understand it is not a test. (“Suggested Items to Take on a Home Visit.”) These may include:
 - Simple puzzles,
 - Crayons and paper (encourage the child to draw one picture for the family and one to be posted in the classroom),
 - Books to look at (and perhaps one to leave),
 - A photo album of the classroom (including pictures of previous students, the classroom itself),
 - Manipulatives,
 - A large baggie for the family to send a change of clothes to school. (Remind families to label the clothing with the child’s name and to send clothing suitable for the season, and change when the weather changes.)
(“What should I do during a home visit?”)

3. The visit: Bring

- Information from the school to discuss with parents, helping to explain how and about what children learn. (“What should I do during a home visit?”)
- Checklist of any missing documents from the school records. (“Suggested Items to Take on a Home Visit.”)

3. The visit: Ask and Tell

To gain the most benefit from a family visit experience, keep in mind:

- Concerning the children, parents and family members are experts.
- Personal sharing may be appropriate at times.
- Observing and listening can lead to insights, as well as asking and answering questions.

(Kyle and McIntyre.)

3. The visit: Ask and Tell

- To begin, establish rapport by identifying yourself and explaining your purpose. (“How to Conduct a Home Visit.”)
- Ask the parents what they want from the visit. Successful home visits have brief agendas, but are flexible and responsive to issues that the family might raise.
 - If the needs expressed are not within the scope, clarify your role and recommend other appropriate resources. (Ford and Smith; Kyle and McIntyre.)

3. The visit: Ask and Tell

- Go over purposes and dates for any upcoming school events (e.g., open house, parent-teacher conferences, expected call from teacher, parent workshop, etc.)
- Describe the daily routine in the classroom to the child and the parent.
- Go over the discipline policy for the classroom.
- Go over the homework policy.
- Discuss ways to help with homework (and provide family-friendly homework ideas).

(“What should I do during a home visit?”)

3. The visit: Ask and Tell

- Possible questions to pose to the parents-as-experts include:
 - What are your child's interests and favorite activities?
 - What has your child done this summer that was a learning experience?
 - What are your child's strengths?
 - How does your child handle stress?
 - What have you noticed that your child can do now which s/he could not do when school was out?
 - What do you think your child needs to work on most?
 - What does your child want to learn about most?
 - How does your child interact with other children?
 - What have you helped your child learn?
 - What have you discovered about how your child learns best?
 - What does your child already know a lot about?
 - What are your goals for your child this year? Ask students and families to write/offer a goal for the year.
 - Would you like to visit or volunteer in your child's classroom? (Kyle and McIntyre.)
 - Are there any medical conditions, special circumstances, concerns, or issues regarding your child? (Bright Beginnings.)
 - Have you observed any learning problems at home? (Kyle and McIntyre.)

3. The visit: Ask and Tell

- Other agenda items may include: sharing your goals for the class, sharing the current achievement level of the student, the importance of hard work, talking about what you will expect from students, how the family can support the goals, explaining ongoing communication pathways, and encouraging/inviting families to get involved at school. (*Teach for America, 71.*)
- Discuss how the parent can help to solve problems. (“What should I do during a home visit?”)
- Ask families to sign a contract stating the responsibilities of all involved.
- Send a follow-up note or call to reinforce your visit. (“What should I do during a home visit?”)

4. The problems: Barriers to getting home visits started

Emotional Barriers

- Fear of the unknown on the part of the visitors.
 - Going into difficult neighborhoods. (Parent Teacher Home Visit Project.)
 - Concern about safety. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)
 - New and possibly uncomfortable situations and surroundings.
(Kyle and McIntyre.)

Solution: Visit in pairs, and have background training and safety information.

- Parents may not feel safe about welcoming strangers into their homes. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)

Solution: Agree to meet at a neutral place.

4. The problems: Barriers to getting home visits started

Emotional Barriers

- Language and cultural barriers. (Parent Teacher Home Visit Project.)
 - Parental views different from the visitor's. (Kyle and McIntyre.)

Solution: Be aware of cultural differences and practices. If possible, visit with someone who speaks the family's language or a translator.

- Assumptions parents and teachers have about each other. (Parent Teacher Home Visit Project.)
 - Parents may view teachers visiting their homes as an intrusion of privacy, or may feel that staff are visiting to assess their parenting. ("Should I carry out a home visit?")

Solution: Assure parents that it is not a test, but rather a chance to meet casually; train teachers to try to withhold expectations and preconceptions.

- Sharing of emotional and troubling information. (Kyle and McIntyre.)

Solution: Alert teachers to the possibility of this, and come prepared with numbers and names of places to refer families to if need be.

4. The problems: Barriers to getting home visits started

Physical barriers

- Lack of availability because of working patterns or care responsibilities. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)

Solution: Be flexible in scheduling visits, including going in the evening or on weekends.

- Cancellations. (Kyle and McIntyre.)

Solution: Try to avoid this by making the appointment in advance and following up to ensure the family remains able to meet. If a family still cancels, schedule another visit as soon as possible.

- Lack of budget or time for the school to cover visits. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”; *Teach for America*, 70.)

Solution: Decide whether home visits are a priority for the school. Also work to keep the visit schedule organized and as short as possible.

4. The problems: Barriers to getting home visits started

Safety

- School management must have appropriate measures in place to protect the health and safety of those carrying out the visits.
 - Staff should receive training in strategies to prevent violence. (“Should I carry out a home visit?”)
- Ensure the safety of the children by having the one teacher play with him or her while the parent and other teacher converse, or by suggesting that the child (and siblings) do something quietly within sight.

(Ford and Smith.)

4. The problems: Barriers to getting home visits started

Avoiding Problems

- **Respect the family's home and their privacy.** (Ford and Smith.)
- **Be sensitive to families in which the child and the parent do not share the same last name.** (Bright Beginnings.)