High School Home Visits: Parent–Teacher Relationships and Student Success

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how home visits conducted by teachers from a diverse, urban high school impacted student success and relationships between parents and teachers. Participants were high school teachers who were invited to conduct home visits for rising ninth graders and the students visited at home. In this mixed methods design, attendance and graduation data were collected for students participating in home visits, surveys were administered to eligible teachers and staff, and semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted with seven home visiting teachers. Data over five years reveals the chronic absenteeism rate was lower for students visited at home (4%) compared to the whole cohort. The graduation rate for students visited at home at this site was also higher (3.7%) than the rate for the whole graduating class. Surveys and interviews indicate teachers who visited students at home were more likely than non-home visiting teachers to report positive relationships with and support from parents. Home visiting teachers also met with parents more in person, and, more than non-home visiting teachers, they believed parents welcome home visits.

Key Words: parent teacher home visits, family engagement, academic achievement, attendance, graduation, high school

Introduction and Literature Review

When parents and teachers build relationships and work together, students are more successful in school (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Wright et al., 2018; Note: throughout, "parent" refers to any adult acting in a parental role for a student). However, despite ongoing federal, state, and local efforts to support family engagement, establishing strong relationships between parents and teachers continues to be a challenge (Balli, 2016; Hong, 2019). Teachers generally are eager to work with families, but often they lack the time and resources to effectively build these relationships (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). In addition, while teacher-initiated collaboration is critical for growing effective home–school relationships, teacher preparation colleges do not systematically prepare teacher candidates with these skills (Collier et al., 2015). Parents also want to be involved, and open and effective engagement with teachers is not only a preference, but a priority for parents (Falk, 2017). Recent studies indicate parent engagement is actually the most significant determinant of parent satisfaction with schools (Falk, 2017; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Marsh et al., 2015). However, some groups of students—including recent immigrants, students with disabilities, and those living in poverty—suffer disproportionally when parents and teachers are not able to work well together (Collier et al., 2015; Hong, 2019; Soutullo, 2016).

Despite decades of parent engagement efforts advanced through federal initiatives and local district policies, improving parent and teacher engagement still requires school leaders and staff to face and overcome significant challenges (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp, 2003; Mapp, 2012). Teachers and school leaders often discuss ways to get parents more involved, but a change in beliefs about parents and a reevaluation of staff and parent roles are required for more substantial improvement (Goodall, 2018). While teachers and parents generally agree that having a strong relationship is important, school leaders are in the best position to support sustainable systems and beliefs designed to build partnerships with parents (Goodall, 2018). Although schools have good intentions about engaging with parents, traditional parent involvement methods such as offering programs or distributing one-way information about school do not translate well into authentic, dynamic relationships between parents and teachers—and principals have authority over these decisions (Collier et al., 2015).

School leaders have begun to acknowledge that traditional parent engagement practices have continued to yield limited parent and teacher partnerships and that new ideas should be considered (Auerbach, 2009; Christianakis, 2011; Hong, 2019). In response, many schools have begun adopting creative ways to improve parent engagement (Stefanski et al., 2016). One strategy that

has gained increasing attention is home visiting (Mcknight et al., 2017; Sheldon & Jung, 2018).

While teachers in some communities have been informally visiting parents for years, efforts to organize home visits with training, scheduling, and compensation have only recently become more widespread (Kronholz, 2016; Meyer et al., 2011). National Title I and state policies require some parent engagement activities, yet methods for engaging parents in compliance with Title I guidelines often involve school parent nights and meetings where the focus is giving information and resources in a one-way approach from school to parents. This limited format may not foster an environment that breaks through barriers and invites parents and teachers to develop reciprocal relationships. In contrast, home visits designed to focus on parents and teachers as partners with equal value have demonstrated potential to build trust and positive relationships (Mcknight et al., 2017).

Notably, there are different philosophies and designs for home visits around the United States, and teachers and parents may have different ideas about the purpose of home visits and what they are intended to accomplish. These differences can result in substantially different experiences and outcomes as the method and relationships are crucial (Saïas et al., 2016). Recognizing that some practices have led to consistent success, an increasing number of schools have adopted effective, research-based models with established core values, strategies, and built-in support. The Parent Teacher Home Visit organization (PTHV) is one example of a model dedicated to supporting home visits designed to grow strong relationships with parents, and they have recently expanded partnerships across the United States.

One PTHV goal is building trust between parents, teachers, and students by focusing on relationships (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017; Nudd, 1921; Saïas et al., 2016). The PTHV model creates a unique space for teachers and parents to be open and vulnerable by meeting in the home of parents—a more neutral setting. Their home visits are designed to build trust by addressing assumptions and implicit bias (Mcknight et al., 2017). PTHV trains teachers to set assumptions aside and to listen to the experiences of families. One premise of this approach is that addressing implicit bias and building trust will result in improved educational experiences and outcomes for students. While research associating home visits with attendance and academic outcomes has been established, nearly all studies about such school and family partnerships focus on the early grades (Barmore, 2018; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Yet dissatisfaction with school interactions spans across all levels including high school (Falk, 2017). Consequently, important questions remain about the possibilities for home visits at the middle and high school levels.

Chronic absenteeism and dropout rates in high school continue to be a concern, especially for marginalized students, students of color, and students in poverty (Zaff et al., 2017). While very little research is available related to high school home visits, studies have shown an important relationship between graduation rate and the strength of relationship between parents and their children (Jeynes, 2012; Zaff et al., 2017). Two specific factors associated with graduation rate or continued enrollment at the high school level are parent academic involvement and the parent–child connection (Zaff et al., 2017). Home visits have been increasingly advanced as a strategy to strengthen relationships between parents, their children, and the teacher; therefore, this study explored the potential of home visits to positively impact teacher and parent relationships and student outcomes at a diverse, urban high school.

Theoretical Framework

The bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) helps explain how the connection between parents and teachers can impact a student's experience with school. Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed the idea of nested environmental systems: the microsystem, macrosystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem. These systems function simultaneously and in different ways to affect human development and success in school (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

When a person participates in more than one setting (multiple microsystems), a mesosystem emerges (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The mesosystem is the space where students participate at home and school as two common, predominant microsystems connect (Hayes et al., 2017). Macrosystems and exosystems are where sociocultural dynamics and more indirect influences are experienced (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Microsystem connections—mesosystems—are at the core of parent and school relationships and home visits and thus the focus of this study. Each microsystem functions differently, and children learn to adapt to expected routines, rules, and rhythms of home, a classroom, or a community (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Tension and conflicts can arise when expectations and norms vary in the mesosystem.

A weak mesosystem can be attributed to a conflict or lack of understanding of cultural norms, transportation barriers, parent work schedules, language differences, and poverty (Auerbach, 2009; Smith et al., 2014). These barriers often prevent parents and teachers from talking regularly and building a relationship (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015). Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that seeing and understanding the life of a student in their home contributes

to a deeper, crucial understanding of the child's experiences (see also Lin & Bates, 2010). This new understanding has the potential to break down barriers. Bronfenbrenner even asserted that observations of students in just one setting ultimately "fail to be developmentally valid" (p. 182). Home visits enable a teacher to gain a new understanding of how different people and contexts influence a child's human development and success in school.

One prediction Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory makes is that home observations will tend to affect not only the behavior and outcomes of the child, but also those of the parents and the family. Bronfenbrenner concludes that a key to an effective public education system is not within the school alone, but in the interconnections with the community (e.g., family and community resources). Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the importance of educators and families working together, and specifically charges educators to reach out to families to establish nurturing, empowering relationships (Ferrara, 2017).

The bioecological theory also recognizes additional, important variables at work in the life of students. Proximal processes, personal characteristics, contextual factors, and time (also known as PPCT) all work together to shape a child's development. (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Tudge et al., 2009; Tudge et al., 2016). PPCT illustrates how home visits may support a proximal process capable of impacting the relationship between parents, teachers, and students, and subsequently student success.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that healthy proximal processes are not actualized alone in the school building. In high-poverty communities, schools have become increasingly isolated, disconnected from the culture and community that students are living in and where relationships and meaning are created (Soutullo, 2016; Vesely et al., 2017). Proximal processes, such as increased parent interactions with children, behavioral and academic interventions, and the crucial interconnectedness realized through partnerships are capable of bridging the divide between home and school microsystems. These connections offer great potential for enhancing relationships, building self-efficacy for parents and children, and fostering behavioral and academic growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The bioecological theory affirms the power of this connection and the potential for providing equitable and purposeful support for students and families.

Bronfenbrenner asserts proximal processes can influence circumstances and people enough to shift possibilities of success (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Consequently, his theory compels questions about best practices for improving relationships between home and school. This study investigated how home visits nurture relationships between parents and teachers and how home visits impact student outcomes. The following questions were addressed:

1. How do high school home visits impact relationships between parents and teachers?

2. Why are some teachers more willing to conduct home visits than others?

3. How do high school home visits impact student attendance and graduation rates?

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included teachers, staff, and students from a large urban public high school in the northeastern United States. After identifying a site, an application was submitted to the district office for permission to research. All teachers and staff involved with this study had been invited to attend home visit training offered by the PTHV organization or using adapted training materials.

This study was designed to capture the beliefs and experiences of teachers who chose to conduct home visits compared to those who did not. All teachers and staff who had been invited for PTHV training at the site were invited to participate in this study. Teachers who conducted home visits were required to complete training comprised of learning the purpose of home visits, procedures, expectations, and follow-up support. Procedures include the requirement of going in pairs, establishing relationships, and how to invite interpreters when needed. Some participants who decided not to go on home visits may have completed the training, but since they did not complete visits, they were assigned to the non-home visiting group. Teachers in this study represented a diverse range of backgrounds. There were new teachers and veteran teachers of 20 and 30 years. Some were career teachers, and others had been career switchers. Several teachers were in their twenties, and others were planning to retire soon. Teachers indicated whether they had conducted home visits at the beginning of the online survey.

Data Sources

A survey was administered using the Staff–Family Relationship instrument created by Harvard University and Panorama Education. The 35 questions are arranged among four different scales. All scales reflect teacher beliefs about working with families and students and home visits. This study analyzes both the overall scales and individual, statistically significant items. The survey includes the following scale categories: beliefs about home visits, parent and family relationships, educating diverse students, and perception of self-efficacy.

All questions in the survey were Likert-style except for individual items relating to beliefs about roles and responsibilities of teachers for which respondents selected teacher or parent. Home visit items were designed to capture teacher confidence and perceptions about the purpose and efficacy of home visits. For example, teachers were asked how effective they believe home visits are for promoting positive relationships with families. Another item asked if teachers believe home visits impact academic achievement. Teachers were also asked to share how safe they feel when thinking of going on home visits. Demographic questions were also included. An electronic invitation was sent using an anonymous link from Qualtrics to all teachers and staff who were invited to participate in home visits at the site. In all, 51 teachers and staff completed the survey, and seven agreed to be available for post-survey, semi-structured interviews. The response rate was initially a concern, and multiple attempts were made to increase survey responses with some success. The 51 surveys were submitted out of 225 eligible participants who received a survey resulting in a response rate of 22.6%. While nonresponse bias has traditionally been an issue for researchers, it has been recently regarded as less of a threat to validity, and lower response rates have been even regarded as statistically indistinguishable from more rigorous surveys with higher response rates (Keeter et al., 2006). While a higher response rate may be considered desirable, studies have revealed response bias in samples ranging from 5% to 75% are not much different, and that time-intensive attempts to increase response rates usually result in just trivial changes (Fosnacht et al., 2016). Another rigorous study showe that response rate does not have much impact on mean, internal consistency, or other statistical properties of a survey, with response rate comparisons ranging from under 20% to 100% (Wåhlberg & Poom, 2015).

Next, additional data were collected by requesting student attendance and graduation data for all students at the high school over multiple years. The data included attendance (chronic absenteeism rate) and graduation rates reported to the state. Chronic absenteeism and graduation rates were analyzed to determine differences for students visited at home compared to the whole cohort.

Teacher participants for the qualitative portion of this study were recruited using volunteers from the survey. All teachers and staff who completed the survey were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Participants were interviewed one at a time. Interview questions were piloted with an expert panel including parent engagement scholars, parent engagement practitioners, and current classroom teachers with experience communicating with parents and conducting home visits. Pilot interviews help researchers understand any perceived problems or confusion with the instrument including reliability issues or researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Participants from this pilot

shared helpful feedback and clarifying questions about interview items and the process of conducting the semi-structured interviews. Adjustments were made to the questions and to the format based on information gathered from this pilot group. Interview sessions with the seven staff members ran between 45–60 minutes. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and any identifiable or personal information was changed.

Data Analysis

The quantitative section of this study included data from the survey and from student attendance and graduation rate data provided by the school district. Survey items were analyzed to determine if there were differences in perceptions and beliefs between the home visiting and non-home visiting teacher groups. While there are different perspectives about whether Likert items should be analyzed using parametric or nonparametric measures, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used for this study since it is an appropriate test for nonparametric data and Likert items (de Winter & Dodou, 2010). Some researchers prefer nonparametric tests for smaller samples sizes, and the Mann-Whitney and the *t* test (parametric) generally have equivalent power (de Winter & Dodou, 2010; Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Survey data were also analyzed to examine trends associated with teachers and demographic information. The independent variable was demographic information, and the dependent variables were the perception of parent relationships and beliefs about home visits. Data from the quantitative survey results were analyzed using SPSS Statistical Software Version 25 (SPSS, 2019). Student attendance and graduation data were analyzed to determine if significant differences in chronic absenteeism and graduation rate were present for students visited at home by a teacher compared to students who were not visited at home.

The qualitative section of this study included semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded, and field notes and observations of the setting and participants were collected to provide helpful information for identifying trends and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Each interview was recorded and transcribed using GoToMeeting™. Interview transcriptions were reviewed and analyzed to identify themes (Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Themes were initially identified by applying in vivo coding and by identifying emerging patterns. Additional notes and questions were recorded when new or unanticipated themes surfaced (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Throughout the process of identifying codes, several strategies were adopted. Key words, phrases, and potential themes were initially highlighted. Precise industry words were added to assist in identifying theme words and phrases spoken by participants such as "trust," "barriers," "don't care," "not helpful," or

"parents are easy to talk to" (Creswell, 2015). After interview transcripts were analyzed multiple times, themes were recorded in a spreadsheet. Responses were counted to identify dominant themes and to review language for possible nuances and subthemes. Member checking emails were sent to all interview participants to affirm that the themes and interpretation matched the participant understanding (Creswell, 2015). Member checking emails included identified themes, direct quotations, and paraphrased responses. Only one minor adjustment was made after member checking.

Results and Discussion

Home Visits and Parent–Teacher Relationships

The first research question asks how going on home visits impacts parent and teacher relationships. Table 1 shows results from each of the four survey scales. When comparing the home visiting and non-home visiting teacher groups on the relationship scale (p = .018), results were below .05, the level considered statistically significant for Likert data, and thus considered statistically significant (de Winter & Dodou, 2010). The relationship scale is the only scale on the survey that showed statistical significance. The home visiting teachers reported having more positive relationships with parents than teachers who chose not to go on home visits. This statistically significant result means the differences found between the two teacher home visiting groups and their views of parent relationships are not attributable to chance, and that these results are generalizable to larger, similar populations (Creswell, 2015).

One primary benefit of visiting with parents at home is the potential of developing relationships (Llopart et al., 2018; Saïas et al., 2016; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Since home visit research has been nearly all related to elementary schools, the results from this study show that home visits at the high school level also are associated with better relationships between teachers and parents.

Table 1. Mann-Whitney U Test by Survey Scale

Scale	Relationships	Home Visits	Educating All Students	Teacher Efficacy
Mann-Whitney U	181.500	163.000	172.000	146.500
Wilcoxon W	371.500	268.000	263.000	611.500
Z	-2.359	-1.343	-.655	-1.341
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**.018**	.179	.513	.180
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]			.557[b]	.202[b]

Notes. a. Grouping Variable: Have you completed at least one parent teacher home visit?
b. Not corrected for ties.

Next, individual Likert items were analyzed for statistical significance. H0, or the null hypothesis, was tested for each item on the survey. The null hypothesis states the distribution for the group who completed home visits and the group who did not are equal. Four survey items are statistically significant when the two groups were compared (see Table 2). Each of these items were below a p-value of .05 resulting in a 95% level of confidence that there is a relationship between the two groups and each variable (Creswell, 2015).

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Test: All Survey Items With a Rejected Null Hypothesis

Item	Significance
How safe do you feel when thinking about going on a parent teacher home visit?	.005[a]
How supportive are families of participating in parent teacher home visits?	.001[a]
How often do you meet in person with the families of your students?	.032
When you face challenges with particular students, how supportive are the families?	.015

Notes. *P*-value: The significance level is **.050**.
a. Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Home Visits and Barriers: Safety and Perceptions

The second research question asks why some teachers are more willing to conduct home visits than others. Teachers in this study offered many explanations, and several expressed concern about home visits and safety. The response to teacher safety concerns while going on a home visit for the two home visiting groups results in a p-value of .005 (see Table 2). Conducting home visits at this site is voluntary, and teachers did not have to share why they chose not to volunteer. However, in the interviews, home visiting teachers shared that safety was cited as an obstacle by multiple teacher peers who chose not to conduct home visits. One participant was told by a teacher who declined home visits that he or she did not feel "comfortable going inside the homes of strangers." Another participant who completed over 100 home visits said that some hesitation for conducting home visits related to questions about "when to report issues to social services like drugs or suspected abuse." Others expressed concerns about strange smells or big dogs.

Teachers and staff were also surveyed about how supportive they believe families are of participating in home visits. When comparing the two groups

of teachers, the *p*-score for this question is .001—a strong, statistically significant result (see Table 2). Teachers who chose not to go on home visits reported parents are far less supportive of home visits when compared to teachers who had completed home visits. In addition, interviews of home visiting teachers revealed parents overwhelmingly appreciate home visits, and each interview participant shared about parents expressing gratitude afterward. One participant said she and the parents always walk away with something positive:

> For a teacher to come to a parent home—they are honored; they are blessed; they are so thankful. I've never walked away from a home visit where a parent talked about their child's hopes and dreams, and they thought it was a waste of time. Parents…when we leave, they're always very thankful. Parents say, "I can't believe you're asking about my child's hopes and dreams. No one has asked this before."

Home Visiting Teachers: Relationships and Communication With Parents

Home visiting teachers in this study met with parents more, and they believe parents are more supportive. When analyzing the survey item asking how often teachers meet in person with families, the *p*-value is .032 (see Table 2). The result shows a statistically significant relationship between frequency of meeting with parents and whether a teacher conducted a home visit. Teachers in this study who conducted home visits were significantly more likely to meet with parents in general. This view of the practice and importance of spending time with parents stands out because building trust and relationships requires time and contact between teachers and parents (Hong, 2019; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Participants shared stories of experiences from home visits that led to continued conversations and open doors for talking about academics and more difficult topics. Home visits were cited as paving the way. Diane shared that, after a home visit, her confidence and willingness to talk with parents grew: "Home visits have affected my confidence level in speaking with parents quite a bit. It's because humanizing the parent and humanizing myself to them…definitely an improvement in effort to talk and an improvement in our relationship." Susan believes learning about their family in a neutral setting built trust and capacity for future interactions. She explained,

> When you already know their name, you remember the birth of a sibling or a family story, when you need to get your student's trust during any sort of difficult thing, if it's an essay, or they're not comfortable talking about a test they failed, if you have something non-academic in the beginning, it's powerful.

The next statistically significant survey item asked how supportive families are when dealing with difficult students. The *p*-value for this item is .015 (see Table 2). Teachers who conducted home visits are more likely to report families are supportive when dealing with difficult students. According to Rey, too many teachers have assumptions about why parents are involved or not, and home visits "…help to uncover the discrepancy between teacher perception of parents and what is really happening with parents." When teachers understand a parent's culture and background, relationships are more likely to develop (Nievar et al., 2018). When relationships and trust grow, both teachers and parents feel more supported.

The survey also asked participants to share who they thought should be most responsible for various school experiences related to their child. The chi-square statistic was applied since the data available in this item contained two nonnormally distributed categorical variables (Creswell, 2015; Hoy & Adams, 2015). Only one item resulted in statistical significance: the question asking teachers and staff who should be most responsible for communication between home and school. The two-tailed Pearson chi-square *p*-score of .46 is statistically significant (see Table 3).

Participants who conducted home visits responded that teachers should be more responsible than parents for communication between home and school. In this study, 74.3% of teachers who conducted home visits believe that schools should be primarily responsible for communication, while a far smaller 25.7% of teachers who did not complete home visits believe schools should be primarily responsible for communication between the school and home. Communication between the school and home has been a source of discontent for many years. Previous studies affirm there is also a discrepancy between teacher and parent expectations for how communication between the home and school should happen, and more than half of parents are not satisfied with interactions they had with schools (Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Kraft, 2017; Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

This study suggests one reason for communication problems between parents and teachers at the high school level is having different expectations about who is primarily responsible for initiating and sustaining communication. Importantly, there is an association between teachers who have completed home visits and their expectation about who is responsible for communication. Teachers at this high school who chose not to conduct home visits were far more likely to believe that parents are primarily responsible for communication between the home and school. This difference in the belief about who is primarily responsible for communication between the home and school may exist before teachers decide whether to complete a home visit, or the belief

may change after completing home visits, but the difference in beliefs and the significance between groups are important. While literature indicates cultural and language barriers contribute to communication problems between teachers and parents (Schneider & Arnot, 2018), this study shows underlying beliefs by teachers also contribute to communication challenges in high school parent–teacher relationships.

Table 3. Chi-Square Tests: Ensure Good Communication Between Home and School

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.967[a]	1	**.046**		
Continuity Correction[b]	2.301	1	.129		
Likelihood Ratio	3.679	1	.055		
Fisher's Exact Test				.069	.069
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.870	1	.049		
N of Valid Cases	41				

Notes. a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.90.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

When teachers going on a home visit learned about struggles or specific fears the student or the family were experiencing, communication and follow-through were the norm. Connie explained how learning something new about each student affected her approach:

> I realized that a child might need an extra hand…like a little softer glove. One person wanted to be known as gender neutral. Another student's parents said their child was struggling with weight. I learned these things at the home visits.

Susan also realized she adapted and her relationship with the parent and student improved after learning more about families through home visits:

> One girl did not have a place to study at home. We learned this on a home visit. We thought she could work at school, but parents didn't want her walking home…so we made a call to get her picked up later from school one day per week. I may not have been this forward without the home visit.

In this study teachers reported parents shared far more at home visits than usual, and they left feeling a stronger bond. Home visiting teachers explained

this type of personal communication was not as common with traditional methods such as parent–teacher conferences or phone calls. Emily believes there is "something unique about being in the family space versus being in our space…that's why we do it [home visits]." She added, "I think, again, working with immigrant families. They are—I don't know that they're always comfortable coming into the school. They're not sure [what] the norms and expectations are in an American School setting, and it's not their space." Phone calls and school visits were still important in the eyes of teachers in this study, but home visits and their potential for fostering understanding and trust enrich the relationship between teachers and parents, and this may lead to more optimal student support.

Participant interviews from this study also show that acknowledging family traditions, culture, and language translates into better relationships. Susan revealed how her perspective and expectations changed after visiting homes. She began to realize, "Parents are universally concerned about the trajectory for their child's future. It might be more heightened for parents who made such sacrifices to leave their country and come here because there's a lot riding on the future of the child." Rey explained how her assumptions were challenged, and she began to understand more parents wanted to be involved, but some parents' lives were just different than others. Rey believes: "effective or positive home visits happen when assumptions are left at the door…socioeconomic status, culture, etcetera. Some teachers assume a lot, and too much about why parents are involved or not." When families in this study predominantly spoke another language, home visitors brought a translator. Teacher home visitors shared stories about families who feel uncomfortable visiting the school due to a language barrier, but when home visiting teachers arrived at their home prepared, communication was better, and the relationship was healthier. Riley explained home visits taught her that "most parents want to be involved, but they don't know how" and "…some Latino parents…it takes a while because of language and culture." Susan quickly realized how families of English learners feel empowered by seeing a teacher on a home visit as "a first point of contact" and that more "buy in" to the relationship happens. After completing several home visits, Emily remarked: "Seeing kids in their home environment with families gave me a richer context for background and home life…a wider view." Susan also explained how the visit opened her eyes to a new perspective: "[There was] not a quiet place to study. Lots of activity. The student had a lot of responsibility. So vastly different than others. Once you get inside the home to see what they live with…[your perspective shifts]." This teacher's approach toward relationships and communication changed because of this new insight.

Home Visited Students: Chronic Absenteeism and Graduation Rate

The third research question addressed how home visits impact attendance and graduation rates. The chronic absenteeism rate reported to the state was used for all students at this site for three consecutive school years starting in 2016–17 and ending with the 2018–19 school year. Determining the chronic absenteeism rate for students visited at home required using the district's attendance data to calculate the total percentage of days absent for all home visited students. For comparison, the schoolwide chronic absenteeism rate published on the state's department of education website was used. The chart below displays the schoolwide chronic absenteeism rate for three consecutive years and the home visited student group only for the same three years. The chronic absenteeism rate was lower for home visited students for every year (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Group
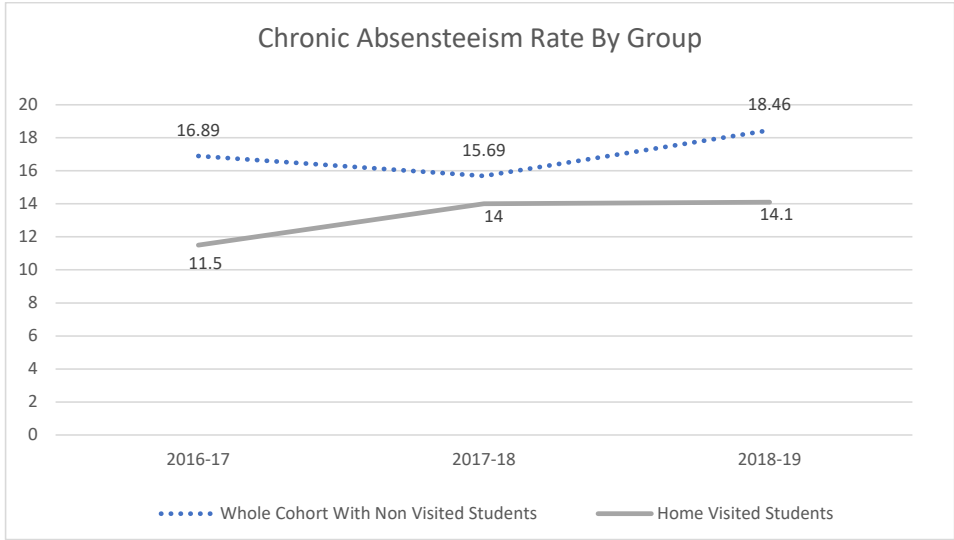
While home visits are known to be associated with better attendance at the elementary level, questions have remained about how home visits at the high school level might be associated with attendance and the likelihood of students graduating on time. To help answer that question, graduation rate data were collected for the whole school and for the home visited student group who were first visited as rising ninth graders in 2014. Five years of graduation data were analyzed for the whole school and for the home visited students ending with the 2018–19 school year. Comparisons show that for students visited at home by a teacher, the graduation rate exceeded the whole high school cohort rate for four out of five years. The graduation rate for home visited students

over five years in this study was 95.08%, while the whole cohort rate for all five years was 91.36% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Graduation Rate Home Visits vs. Whole High School
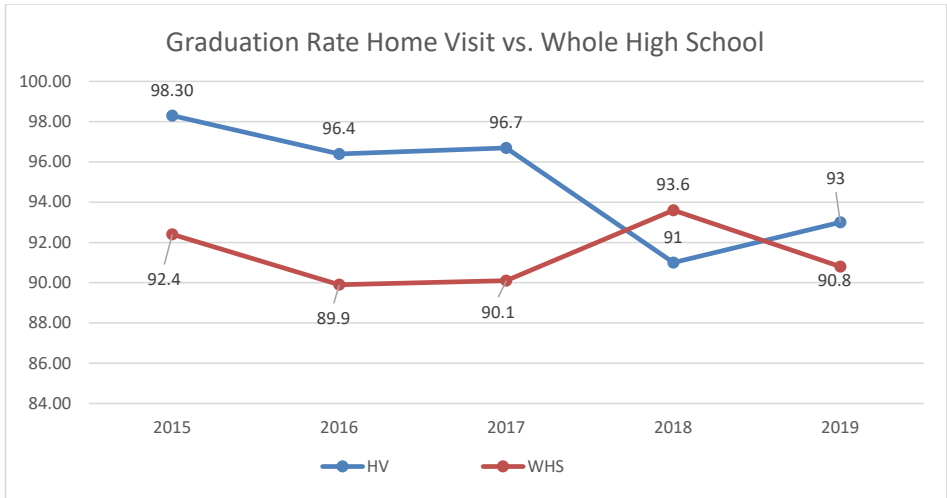
Several interview participants shared stories of how building relationships with students through home visits may have contributed to better attendance. Some students were connected to a club or to a counselor to help with a concern specifically shared during the home visits. Susan recalls one student who shared apprehension about school during a home visit, and home visiting teachers "made sure this student was in touch with club leaders right away… didn't want bullying to happen, God forbid. I think if this didn't happen at home [home visit], it could have taken a while." Susan believes this visit helped the student "get connected and to not fall through the cracks."

Teachers indicated that students who felt supported and more connected also expressed feeling more comfortable attending school. Diane believes learning about students encourages success and better outcomes: "When talking about their experiences, travels, hobbies, you just become a person and more than a teacher…and that changes how they view me. I've definitely seen an improvement in outcomes like attendance and grades. But usually in behavior. Definitely. Definitely." Information shared and relationships built during home visits may have changed the dynamic and perception of school for teachers and students.

This study indicates a link between students who are visited at home by teachers and the likelihood of graduating from high school on time. Schools are committed to all students graduating from high school, and students in this study who were visited at home by teachers through a home visit model

were more likely to graduate. Important questions remain about whether students who participate in home visits are more likely to graduate because of the home visit, or whether students who are already more likely to graduate due to environmental or other mediating factors are also more likely to participate in home visits. Further study is needed in this area.

Conclusions

In this study, beliefs of high school teachers and staff who conducted home visits were compared to those who opted out. Attendance and graduation data for home visited students were also analyzed to answer the question about whether home visits impact school outcomes for high school students. Teacher beliefs captured in the survey include perceptions of home visiting, parent support, and assumptions about who is responsible for communication. Results show significant differences in beliefs and practices between teachers who completed home visits and those who did not. The home visiting group of teachers reported parents appreciate home visits and that they make a difference. The group of teachers who did not conduct home visits believe parents are not as receptive to home visits and that home visits are not worth the time and investment. Teachers who never conducted a home visit are less likely to meet with parents, and they are more likely to believe parents are less friendly and less supportive of teachers when conflicts or challenges arise. This group is also more likely to believe that communication with parents is challenging, and that when communication happens, parents are less likely to be caring. In contrast, teachers who conducted home visits are more likely to report having a better relationship with parents.

Teachers who opted out of going on home visits cited safety concerns. Interview participants also shared that those who opted out believe home visits are not worth the time. Studies at the early childhood and elementary levels support this finding about home visits and safety concerns (Burstein, 2020; Rosa, 2020). Teachers, preservice teachers, and principals have all communicated some apprehension about going into certain neighborhoods and feeling unsafe about visiting homes (Peralta-Nash, 2003). However, if teachers feel anxious or unsafe about visiting homes in the neighborhoods where their students live, the likelihood of overcoming assumptions and building relationships with parents may be negatively affected (Mcknight et al., 2017).

Home visitors who are trained to understand different family worldviews, cultures, and language barriers are better equipped to build relationships with parents (Nievar et al., 2018). It is important to note that the school in this study hired professional trainers to prepare teachers for home visits. This training is

likely vital to the success of the home visits and teachers working more closely with families. Even with formal training offered to all teachers, significant differences remain between teachers who see the value of home visits and those who do not.

For students visited at home by a teacher in this study, the graduation rate exceeded the whole high school cohort for four out of five years of available data. Previous research has demonstrated relationship strength between parents and their middle or high school child can predict the likelihood of graduating from high school (Jeynes, 2012; Zaff et al., 2017). This study suggests high school home visits contribute to building relationships between the parent–teacher–student triad described by Bronfenbrenner that may impact the likelihood of student success and graduating from high school.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Several implications for practice arise from this study. Teachers often are not adequately trained to work with parents. Nearly all teachers who were interviewed shared that they had held beliefs about parents and practices that stifled open, trusting relationships with parents and students. Emily had been trained as a new teacher to call parents as a best practice, and she often "questioned why parents wouldn't return calls." After new insight gained from home visits, she commented, "I can't imagine keeping that assumption anymore after meeting face-to-face, because being in the environment with parents shows that they're working too much, or they're not sure how to call back, or not sure if you expect a call back—but interest in their child is definitely there." One strategy for supporting teachers with parent engagement is focusing on teacher preparation. Preservice and in-service training for teachers about assumptions and cultural responsiveness is vital. University teacher preparation should prioritize parent engagement in its coursework and practice, and professional development for practicing teachers should be provided to support more effective parent engagement.

Teachers at this site shared stories about the importance of learning from the training and from other teachers who had already completed home visits. Annual refresher trainings and review of procedures contribute to the success of home visits as teachers discuss the purpose of home visits, communication guidelines, and follow-up debriefing notes. Teachers who participate in this training and review are more confident and equipped to conduct a positive home visit. For example, teachers are reminded the conversation should focus on relationships, listening, and asking parents what their hopes and dreams are for their child. Ensuring successful home visits requires training and review with a clear purpose and procedures.

Future studies should include an analysis of how high school home visits are associated with academic achievement by comparing achievement for students who participated in home visits to those who did not. This study shows the student group visited by teachers at home has a lower chronic absenteeism rate. Low chronic absenteeism (good attendance) has a positive and strong correlation to achievement in high school courses (Kirksey, 2019). As a result, since high school home visits are associated with better attendance, and attendance is positively correlated with higher course grades, then high school home visits may be a contributing factor to high school academic performance. Additional studies could focus directly on home visits and academic achievement, and additional design elements could control for other variables including student demographics.

Limitations of this study include an absence of direct student and parent voice, and a lack of non-home visitor participation in the semi-structured interviews. Future research on this topic should also include parent and student interviews. Parents may be able to share stories about what their assumptions and fears were before home visits and what changed after. Students could provide insight about how relationships formed through home visits impact relationships with their teachers and parents and the school experience. The parent and student perspective could provide additional context and new insight.

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