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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the "Year 3 Evaluation" of the Home Visit Project currently operating in the Sacramento City Unified School District. The project's purpose is to strengthen the relationship between home and school to enhance and enrich student-teacher interactions and relationships, to improve the frequency and quality of parent-teacher communications and relationships, and to provide parents with additional means of interacting with their child's school. Evidence exists that enhanced relations between home and school, and teachers and parents, ultimately supports academic growth and achievement. Examination of the third year of implementation of the project shows that it achieved its goals of enhancing parent involvement, and, consequently, improving student performance. According to the data, the effects are both immediate and cumulative. The improvement is also seen in improved standardized test scores. It should be noted that 3 years of data are not sufficient to make a definitive determination of the academic benefits of the project. It does, however, provide an initial conclusion that it has positive impacts on factors that lead to improved student academic performance. (RT)

Evaluation Report: The Home Visit Project

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The Home Visit Program Year 3 Evaluation

Introduction

This paper summarizes the “Year 3 Evaluation” of the Home Visit Project currently operating in the Sacramento City Unified School District. This collaborative effort between the district and Sacramento Area Congregations Together (Sacramento ACT) is in its fourth year of operation, and was developed to strengthen the relationship between home and school in order to:

- Enhance and enrich student-teacher interactions and their relationship.
- Improve the frequency and quality of parent-teacher communications and their relationship.
- Provide parents with additional means of interacting with their child’s school.

Evaluative data from the past two years suggests that the Project has had a positive impact on home-school relations, and has enhanced student-teacher relationships and communication between parents and teachers.

Method

A formative evaluation has been conducted throughout course of the Home Visit Project’s growth and development. This process has allowed the stakeholders (i.e. the District, ACT, teachers, parents and students) an opportunity to provide ongoing feedback about the impact that this program is having in their lives while at the same time providing valuable information that allows the evaluation team along with the administrators an opportunity to critically reflect upon and improve the program's implementation. As the evaluation process continued into the third year, the intent was to continue to collect data that would describe the impact of the program with respect to the following variables and research questions:

1. Student Success

- What is the impact of home visits on indicators of student success, such as attendance, behavior, and academic achievement/growth (*Phase 3*)?
- How have student behaviors related to academic growth been affected by the Home Visit Project?

2. Parent/Family Attitudes

- How, and in what ways, has the Home Visit Project affected the level of parent involvement in the school? In the classroom?
- How have the teachers’ visits to homes affected parents’ attitudes toward, and beliefs about their children’s schools? Teachers?

- How have home visits affected parents' participation with their children in the educational process?

3. Home-School Relationships

- Have teachers experienced any changes in relationships with their students and families? If so, what is the nature of those changes?
- How has communication between home and school been affected by the Home Visit project?

4. Educators' Attitudes & Beliefs

- How has the Home Visit Project affected teachers' beliefs and attitudes about their students' potential? About teaching? About the school and its community (*Phase 2*)?
- How have home visits affected student-teacher relationships?

5. Perceptions of the Home Visit Project

- What barriers have been identified to participation in the Home Visit Project? How have they been addressed?
- What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of the Project?
- Is the Home Visit Project perceived and valued as an educational strategy?

6. The ACT/SCUSD Partnership

- How do ACT and the SCUSD work together to administer the Home Visit Project?
- How do school site personnel and SCUSD staff perceive the district's involvement?
- How does the Project benefit, or not, from the partnership?

Subjects & Sampling

Participant groups included program and district administrators, school site principals, participating and nonparticipating teachers, students, and the families visited. Of the 38 schools participating in the Home Visit Project, 20 were selected to participate in the evaluation. Of the participants at the subject sites, 251 parents and 187 teachers responded to surveys and interviews. In addition, focus groups were held at 19 of the 20 schools with teachers, students and parents, and all principals were interviewed.

The sample was stratified and generally reflected the disparities across ethnicities in public education. Table 1 provides a comparison of the ethnic make-up of the subgroups.

Table 1. *Ethnic Composition of Sample*

Ethnicity	Educators	Parents/Families*	Students
Asian/Pacific Islander	16.1%	27.9%	34%
African American	7.5%	17.5%	26%
Latino/Hispanic**	6.4%	21.1%	27%
Caucasian	52.4%	8%	12%
Other	17.7%	10%	1%

*15.5% declined to state.

**The proportion of Latino/Hispanic Parents/Families and Students represented in the sample is low in comparison to the proportion of Latinos/Hispanics in California's general population.

Slightly more than half of the Educators subgroup (50.8%) was teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience. Just under ¼ of the teachers came to the study with 11 or more years of teaching experience.

The subject group, Parents/Families, fairly reflected the Title I status of the participating schools, with regard to income levels. While a large proportion (25.9%) of respondents declined to state their family incomes, for those who did respond, the largest proportion (35.3%) earned between \$5,000 and \$14,999. Using home ownership as a second indicator of socioeconomic status, the data demonstrates that just less than half of the sample (48.6) was not homeowners. More than 1/3 of the subjects reported having lived in their communities for 5 years or less. Academic Performance Index data reflects that the school populations included in the sample were fairly stable (mobility = 27%).

Data Collection

Data collection strategies included survey research, focus groups, interviews and records review. The data was presented and analyzed for each variable explored and a discussion of the data is supported with available research literature.¹

Limitations

Data was collected toward the end of the school year, at a time when schools were reportedly overwhelmed with a flurry of activities and required tasks. The most difficult group to access was Parents/Families. Sacramento ACT assisted with attempts to secure adequate data from that group, but the yield remained low.

¹ Note: the discussion of the data in the context of the available research literature has been omitted from this summary, and can be found in the full text document, "The Year 3 Home Visit Evaluation," which will be available from ERIC.

Findings

VARIABLE 1: STUDENT SUCCESS

For the current analysis, STAR results from the 1999-2000 school year were compared to those of the 2000-2001 year for the original 8 schools, in Reading, Math, Language and Spelling. Comparisons were made on the proportion of students tested that scored above the 50th percentile in both testing periods. Table 2 shows the net change in the proportion of students that scored above the 50th percentile in each subject area from 1999-2000 to 2000-2001.

Schools/Grades	Reading	Math	Language	Spelling
Bret Harte Elementary	+ 3.6	+ 11.6	+ 9.8	+ 7.6
Woodbine Elementary	+ 4	- 2.6	- 0.4	+ 3.6
Parkway Elementary	+ 2.8	+ 4.6	+ 2.6	+ 1
Fruit Ridge Elementary	0	+ 9.5	+ 1.5	- 3.5
Fern Bacon Middle School	+ 3.7	+ 11	+ 5.3	+ 4.3
Susan B. Anthony Elementary	+ 5	+ 19.8	+ 21.2	+ 14.6
Goethe Middle School	+ 5	+ 1.5	+ 2	+ 4.5
C. B. Wire Elementary	+ 6.6	+ 4.8	0	+ 7

Table 3. *Net Changes in Proportions of Students Scoring Above the 50th Percentile on SAT/9, AY 2000-2001.*

The effects of the broad variety of programs and activities implemented at each of the above school sites is not separated from the effect of the Home Visit Project in the current study. It is, however, noteworthy that net growth shown at Susan B. Anthony Elementary School is significantly greater than that shown by the other schools. In fact, the SAT/9 results at Susan B. Anthony Elementary School stand out among the scores of all elementary schools in the district.

While the Home Visit Project cannot be singled out as the strategy or activity that caused gains in standardized test scores, Susan B. Anthony's ongoing participation, and subsequent documented positive outcomes, in the Project suggest that home visits, implemented with the many adjunct strategies and activities do have a positive effect on academic growth. The school's principal commented, "Having home visits made such a difference in the whole school! That's what made the difference in our test scores. The school was different itself. Of course it's not just the home visits; but that's an important – no, critical – part of how we help our kids learn."

Bret Hart Elementary School also posted significant net gains over the previous year. It is interesting to note that the gains in Reading are consistently below 10 percentage points

for all schools. Past years' scores have shown similar results; Math, Language and Spelling gains have continued to be greater, overall, than gains in Reading. This may be concrete evidence that academic growth requires more than home visits. Greater gains overall were made in the other three subject areas, where home visits are a constant across subject areas.

As in previous years, perceptions of homework completion were used as one indicator of the effect of the Project on academic growth. Parents largely (76.5%) either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that teachers' visits to their homes had facilitated more homework completion among their children. Likewise, Teachers responded that they believed their visits had resulted in more homework help from Parents (51.3%), and better quality of homework help from Parents (48.1%).

Further analysis of the data suggests that responses to those questionnaire items can, to some degree, be predicted on the basis of which school site respondents are drawn from. Chi-square values suggest a dependent, though insignificant, relationship between perceptions of the amount of homework help given by parents, and school site. However, the perception of the *quality* of homework help is significantly ($p < .05$) related to school site. The suggestion is that at some schools, the nature of parental participation with their children with regard to homework is valued and, perhaps, actively supported by the school.

The same does not hold true for Parents' perceptions of their children's rate of homework completion resulting from teachers' visits to their homes. According to analyzed data, a dependent relationship is suggested ($\Phi = .460$) between those perceptions and school sites, but does not meet tests for significance ($p > .01$).

A Closer Look at Variable 1: Student Success

To develop a more in-depth understanding of "Student Success," a random sample of district schools not participating in the Home Visit Project was selected and compared to the eight core schools (referred to as "Core") on standardized test outcomes. The sample included 6 elementary schools and two middle schools (referred to as "Sample"). Random selection of the comparison group was carried out scientifically to maximize control of potential variance caused by demographic and program differences among the schools selected. The goal was to determine what impact the Home Visit Project had on the academic outcomes of the core schools over time (three years).

The analysis of this data and its interpretation are limited; among the Core schools, not all classrooms participated in the Project. Therefore, the influence of the Project is limited to those classrooms that did participate, and their contribution to each school's overall academic outcomes in each year. Additionally, the wide variety of other programs and activities implemented at each school site among both Core and comparison Sample schools is unknown.

This comparison focuses on an overview of differences between the two groups, using random selection of the Sample as a control strategy. The implementation of the Home Visit Project for the past three years is the variable that separates the Core from the Sample. The researchers acknowledge the limitations to this analysis; however, we believe that the analysis suggests the potential contribution that the Home Visit Project holds for future Student Success. The findings of the evaluation team were as follows:

- **English Performance:** The district Sample group of elementary schools showed an overall growth of 0.47% in reading scores, as compared to the Core elementary schools, which posted an overall 0.65% increase. In all cases, the total amount of growth over the 3-year implementation period of the Home Visit Project was dramatically affected by a nearly universal decline in scores in Year 2.
- **Math Performance:** The Core group posted a net change of .33% growth, while the Sample group grew by .30% overall. The difference between the two groups -- .03% is insignificant.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Data gathered from individual interviews and focus groups about perceptions of academic growth support the evidence that portends an effect on academic performance. Teachers commented that they saw temporary changes in academic performance, however some questioned the impact of the Project on academic achievement. In general, Teachers appeared to be in agreement that they could not know with certainty that home visits were responsible for any increase in performance that they saw.

A few teachers in focus groups believed that they had seen concrete increase in test scores, but could not attribute them directly to the home visits. Those comments came from teachers whose school sites were very active in the Project, and had been for more than one year.

Overall, their comments are reflective of questions raised in previous years about the value of home visits to the education of children. The Year Four evaluation cycle will continue to examine this issue of home visits as a strategy to increase academic achievement.

VARIABLE 2. PARENT/FAMILY ATTITUDES

There was general overwhelming agreement that attitudes toward school had improved as a result of the teachers' visits to students' homes. Teachers, in response to 4 survey items regarding their perceptions of students' and parents' attitudes toward, and beliefs about, school either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that attitudes on the parts of the students and families had improved.

Parents were also asked about changes in their attitudes and beliefs toward school. On three items related to beliefs and attitudes about school, and about their children's teachers, parents were in general agreement that they felt positive toward both. Ninety percent (90%) believed that they had a "better relationship" with their children's teachers since the visits had taken place.

As indicators of positive beliefs about teachers and their intentions, Parents were asked to respond to the following two statements:

"I believe my child's teacher recognizes my child's academic needs."

"I believe my child's teacher provides extra help to my child when he or she needs it."

Prior years' experiences and discussions with parents had suggested that negative beliefs about how teachers regarded some students had served as barriers to positive relationships among teachers, students and parents, and had facilitated negative attitudes toward school. In the Year 3 Evaluation, parents generally agreed (76.4% and 95.6%) with the two statements above. Their responses indicate a change in attitude from prior reports.

In response to questions about their child's attitude toward school, parents reported a belief that their child's attitude had improved since the visits.

The objective data reflects an overall perception of improvement in attitude toward school. Both Teachers and Parents show an awareness that there has been a change from what were previously negative attitudes that may have contributed to a detrimental disconnect between school and home. Subjective data from focus groups supports these perceptions.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Teachers expressed their beliefs that Parents' attitudes toward school and toward the educational process itself had improved. Some felt that the improvement was due to the establishment of in-person connections between themselves and the families of their students.

- "I was able to report positive things to the mother, which made her feel better toward me."
- "...bonds and connections have increased."
- "I got...better teamwork with their [students'] parents."

Parents also expressed more positive attitudes toward school:

- "They ask us what we want from our kids' education, and they spend more time with us."
- "...they [teachers] care about the student and me."
- "[I'm] more relaxed, feel more comfortable."

VARIABLE 3. HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Attitudes toward school among parents and students appear to be strongly correlated with relations between home and school.

Teacher-Parent Relationships

The majority (90%) of parents responding to survey inquiry believed that their relationships with their children's teachers had improved since the teachers visited their homes. They also felt that they had better communication with the teachers (88.8%) since the home visits began. Most Teachers, responding to two questionnaire items regarding communication with parents and attitudes toward parents, believed that their relations with Parents were more positive since the home visits. To the first item, regarding attitude toward Parents, 63.6% of responding Teachers believed their attitudes had improved. To the second item regarding communication with parents, Teachers felt there had definitely been improvement (91.4% "Improved" or "Greatly Improved"). Chi-square analysis of these items suggests that they are not independent of each other. Respondents who believed their communication had improved, also tended to believe that their relationships and attitudes had improved.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Interestingly, in focus groups and during interviews, more detail emerged. The teacher-parent relationship could be influenced by the nature of the home visit. Positive home visit may improve the relationship. Negative home visits may worsen the relationship.

Teachers indicated that when home visits "go well" they were able to establish a channel of communication with the parent and that they are also able to bond with the parent. Parents communicated that for them home visits demonstrated that the teacher cared about their children as individuals, in addition to their academic and social development. They also indicated that meetings such as these allowed them to feel supported by the teacher.

Teachers stated that, in some instances, parents initiated contact with them after the home visit and were able to articulate their needs or concerns to them. This point is corroborated in the parent data.

When home visits did not "go well," there is evidence that the teacher-parent relationship deteriorated. Parent data indicates that when teachers focused exclusively on their children's poor academic performance and/or negative behavior, they described feelings of discomfort, anger and frustration. As a result of their home visit interaction, parents perceived their children's teachers as distant and impersonal.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Respondents were asked for their perceptions of relations between Teachers and Students following the home visits. Teachers' overwhelming believed that their attitudes toward their students had been positively influenced by their home visits; they also felt that they had "a better understanding of their students' lives and priorities" since visiting their homes. Chi-square analysis of this data again suggests that these two items – attitudes toward students and understanding of students' out-of-school lives – are not independent of each other. Respondents who believed that their attitudes toward their students had improved most likely attributed that improvement to a "better understanding of [the] students' lives and priorities." Data from the focus groups supports that contention.

Focus Groups

A high proportion of Teacher responses indicate that the students who received home visits demonstrated better behavior in class. In addition, Teachers indicated that there was increased trust between themselves and their students, which resulted in an improved relationship. This point was echoed in the Student data and the Parent data. Student responses indicated that they were more comfortable talking to their teachers after the home visits. This comfort may have elicited in students a feeling that their teachers were approachable.

There was some question as to whether home visits "established" better Teacher-Student relationships or simply improved what relationships already existed. One teachers states, "there may be an improvement in [my] relationship with one student, but, overall, teachers are already in the lives of their students, so home visits don't establish those relationships. They might strengthen the relationships, though." It is not possible to determine from the available data whether home visits create or foster Teacher-Student relationships or not. It is clear, however, that there is a distinct impact on those relationships.

Comments made by both Teachers and Parents stress the interaction of knowledge of a child's cultural background and living conditions and teacher attitudes and beliefs about students. Some comments raise questions about Teacher cultural competence and beliefs about Students:

- "[I can] see what kind of home life students have and that explained a lot of things."
- "[by the time I did my last visit, I felt uncomfortable.] I got a new car and everyone stared at me up and down the street. I didn't feel very safe."
- "[I got] a better understanding of how poor [my] students are, and why they behave the way they do."
- "Home visits allowed me to see a discrepancy between what we have and what they don't [have]. But I found their [students'] homes very clean and tidy, even though they're poor."

Conversely, other teachers' comments addressed the effect of home visits on cultural barriers to positive relationships among Teachers, Students, and Parents. The teachers at one school reported that they felt that they were able to cross cultural boundaries through home visits, and that they got the most resistance from White and African American families. One teacher reported that she had learned how students from immigrant families in her class interpreted things like homework. "They see it as 'house' work, and it's a regular part of the routine of keeping up the house, so they tend to do better at doing their homework." These teachers believed that home visits built trust with families who had previously been resistant, "because of the racial divide."

One teacher believed that the visits enhanced mentoring with students, and allowed teachers to see children in their home environments and get to know them better. "We get a bigger picture of the student and new insight into challenges they face."

The improvement of Teacher-Student relationships may be the most concrete evidence of the effect of home visits on participants.

Parent Involvement in School

The issue of parent involvement must be approached from the perspective of both the Parents and the Teachers. In addition to asking both for their perceptions of levels of parent involvement, they were also asked to assess their own comfort levels with their respective roles in parent involvement. Teachers were asked to report on the frequency with which they ask parents for assistance, and their levels of comfort in doing so. Parents were asked to report on their levels of comfort visiting their children's classrooms. In addition, both groups were asked to report on their perceptions of whether or not parent involvement by way of volunteering in classrooms, and helping out with school activities, had changed, and to assess changes in parents' involvement with their children's education by way of helping out with homework and similar activities.

Reaching Out and Parent Visits to the School

Teacher responses indicate that they had experienced some improvement in their efforts to reach out to parents and ask for assistance and their comfort levels in doing so. They also reported that they had seen some improvement in the frequency of parents' visits to classrooms. However both parents and teachers responses indicate that the home visits did not have a considerable impact on how often parents visited their child's school. Indeed, the sample is nearly evenly split between improvement and "No Change." It would appear, then, that while Teachers are both more comfortable and more actively reaching out to parents for support and assistance, the response is not commensurate with the improvements experienced. Focus group data sheds some light on this issue.

Focus Groups

Teacher and parent data indicate that home visits have very little impact on parent participation in the school site. While teachers indicate that they do see a slight increase

in the number of home visit parents who attend open house events, they do not see additional participation in other areas. Parents indicate that their work schedules make it difficult for them to volunteer their time during school hours.

It is likely that home visits will continue to have little impact on how much parents participate actively in the classroom or at school. The nature of the Teacher-Parent relationship is not a key issue limiting parent involvement. Nor is the nature or level of contact between home and school. Issues that the Home Visit Project cannot address seem to have more effect on parents' ability to actively participate at school. One such barrier is suggested by a group of parents at Susan B. Anthony Elementary School. They did not believe that the Home Visit Project had resulted in parents coming to school more often. They believed that there was a lack of translation services for Spanish-speaking parents, which resulted in lower participation among Spanish-speaking parents. "There's no translation, so there's no participation. Since there's very little participation, there's no translation." They believed that the school should enhance that aspect of home visits to increase parents' participation at school. "If parents don't come [to the school, to meetings, etc.], the kids [do not] come to school."

Parent Homework Assistance

Teacher, Parent and, to a lesser degree, Student data indicate that home visits may impact a parent's involvement in his or her child's educational process. Data from all three groups suggest that parents are more involved in both assisting their children with, and reviewing, their homework. In addition, parents indicate that they like receiving advice and tips from their child's teacher on how they can assist in the completion of homework. Students spoke of their parents' help with schoolwork since the home visits:

- "My parents help with homework."
- "Now my Mom checks my homework after I do it."
- "[My] parents now help me more with my homework."

Among the innovations in the Project in the third year was an organized "toolkit," of activities, ideas, and supplies teachers could leave with students and parents. This allowed teachers to help parents help their children. Parents value the input of their children's teachers, and see their efforts as indications that teachers do care about the children and their education:

- "She came to my house and talked to me. Explained how to help my child with homework."
- "The teacher is the teacher at school, but I am the teacher at home. It takes both of us to raise my child."

VARIABLE 4. EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES & BELIEFS

Chavkin and Gonzales (1995) make the point that educators must honestly believe, and be committed to, the notion that parents are their children's first, and possibly most powerful, teachers. They must accept as a fact that parents do want the very best for their children. Acting on those beliefs reflects teachers' beliefs about parents, and attitudes toward the Home Visit Project (as well as other adjunct strategies for partnering with parents to educate children).

Focus Groups

The teacher data indicates that they did change their expectations of students after conducting a home visit. They state that such visits allowed them to develop an understanding of how their student's home environment affected their academic performance and behavior. Teachers communicate that the home visits allowed them to cross cultural and economic class lines in order to build healthy relationships with the families of their students. Parent data reinforces this point given their opinion that the home visits allowed the teachers an opportunity to learn about the student's home environment.

The question of compensation for conducting home visits provided considerable insight into the belief system of teachers regarding their role as teachers. Teachers who communicated a belief that teachers should not be compensated for conducting home visits viewed their responsibility as teaching to the whole student and not just to their academic development. These teachers communicate an altruistic motivation to conducting home visits and believe structured bureaucratic involvement may taint the process of conducting home visits. Teacher from this school of thought indicate that financial compensation obligated them to perform in a certain capacity that could be mandated by an administrator. They felt that the ability or willingness to conduct a home visit should not serve as a benchmark of good teaching. In addition, there comments suggest that providing state funding to a home visit program may impose artificial value to the program, and may induce a higher expectation that home visits should result in improved academic performance. Teacher comments indicate that such an expectation could jeopardize the practice of conducting home visits all together.

Teachers who felt that they should be compensated for home visits indicate that such payment serves as an incentive to visit the homes of their students. The data suggest that while teachers may view this process as extending their day and/or adding to their list of responsibilities, they are willing to prioritize home visits if there is remuneration involved. Other teachers believe that they should volunteer to participate in conducting home visits and communicated a desire that it not be mandated. It can be implied from the position of these teachers, that they view home visits as an additive tool, that may become a natural and ongoing practice as a teacher.

With regard to the relationship between the school and its community, teachers communicate a belief that home visits do help to enhance and improve the reputation of the school in the community.

VARIABLE 5. PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOME VISIT PROJECT

The growth of the Home Visit Project over its 3 years of operation has supported the concept as a tool to enhance the overall education of children. The sample for the Year 3 Evaluation was composed of schools with 1, 2, and 3 years of experience with the Project. Teachers were asked to respond to the following statements about their beliefs and attitudes toward home visits:

1. I believe the home visits are an important part of my teaching responsibilities.
2. I think the home visits are very important to my students' growth and success in school.
3. Making home visits is important enough to me that I make the time for them.

In general, they all agreed that home visits were an important part of their educational practice. Chi-square analysis once again shows that these three items are not independent of each other. It is more likely than not that teachers who agree with one of the three also agree with the other two statements. This suggests that teachers' buy-in to the concept of home visits as an adjunctive educational tool is key to the effectiveness of the Project.

Focus Groups

Teachers had the most to say about the organization and management of the Home Visit Project. While most believed that the Project is a meaningful and productive educational adjunct, some felt that engaged leadership at the school site was necessary to keep teachers involved and to ensure positive outcomes.

The third year of the Project brought with it some turnover among the original schools. Principals who had been with the schools at the beginning of the Project moved on, and new principals and teachers replaced them. The question of institutionalization emerges, after reviewing the experiences of those schools. What had been an enthusiastic and involved school stumbled during the transitions, making fewer visits and less contact with families outside of the school environment.

What is evident from this finding is that the role of site leaders (principals and vice principals) is critical to the involvement of teachers and other site personnel. The attitudes and morale of staff depends in large part on the climate established by leadership.

ACT/SCUSD Partnership

The new collaboration between Sacramento ACT and the Sacramento City Unified School District was in its infancy in the third year of the Home Visit Project's operation. As with any new venture, the first year of working closely together brought unanticipated challenges. Initial agreements about roles, responsibilities and authority were not defined precisely enough, nor communicated throughout the District. Teachers commented repeatedly about the confusion at their level about procedures and roles. In some cases, the confusion was enough to demoralize teachers and prevent them from doing more visits.

The partners in this new collaboration were interviewed with regard to their perceptions of the collaboration, and their recommendations to improve the effectiveness of their partnership.

The administrative data indicates that while the collaborative relationship between ACT and SCUSD has been strained, the two organizations have clear and distinct roles from which the Home Visit Project benefits. ACT's role in the Home Visit Project is identified as:

- Providing home visit trainings for the school sites,
- Standardizing home visit best practices, and
- Lobbying for legislations that will make it possible for the home visit program to obtain continued funding at the state level.

SCUSD's role, as evidenced in the data, is:

- To administer to and standardize the fiscal management process for the Home Visit Program, and
- To assist in institutionalizing the program within the district.

While the two roles appear to be complementary, both organizations face challenges in executing their responsibilities.

ACT and SCUSD indicate that their collaborative relationship needs to continue to exist. However, it is less than clear how these organizations can maintain such a relationship. The crux of the tension lies in two areas. First, there are questions around how the Home Visit Project will fit into the bureaucratic system of the district. There is the concern that the process of standardizing and institutionalizing the program within the district may discourage school sites from participating. The teacher data validates this point, in that the primary concern about the district's role in the Home Visit Project is that the district could mandate or, at the very least, strongly encourage, principals and faculty to participate in the program. Such a step could serve as a disincentive for school sites to participate:

- “They mentioned problems with the funding. ‘The budget limits the number of visits; delays in getting the money kind of killed the spirit we had for doing them.’”
- “I’m afraid that the formalizing of the program will lead to it becoming a formal responsibility of teachers.”
- “We got good support, but there was too much paperwork.”
- Some believed that home visits were being used as “a measure of good teaching,” and that doing so was a disincentive to participation in the program. They said the home visits should not be required; “some teachers are perceived as being lesser because they’re not comfortable doing home visits.”

The second area of tension has to do with ACT’s ability to communicate with school sites and be perceived as an equal partner with the district. While most in the district understand that ACT’s primary function is that of trainer, questions were raised regarding how ACT administers its role. Consistency, clarity and the timely dissemination of information contributed to the confusion school sites had about ACT. Implicit in the data is the notion that school sites will be more responsive to ACT once they become aware of why ACT wishes to collaborate with the district in this manner. Teachers raised questions about ACT’s participation, and the nature of the organization. Teachers new to the Project were unfamiliar with ACT and questioned its participation. Teachers with one or two years’ experience with the Project, in some cases, felt that ACT had withdrawn from its active role, and was “waiting to be invited back.”

The strengths of ACT’s role were also addressed by respondents. Teachers, in general, had positive feedback to provide about the training provided by ACT:

- “[The] training was good—it gave a general sense of home visits and taught us to listen more. It changed our purpose from telling parents things and trying to problem solve, to listening and forming stronger bonds with the parents.”
- “[I] liked the training and the role plays presented. [I think they should] have at least annual follow-up trainings.”
- “[The] training was useful to establish communication skills with parents.”

As the Project continues to grow and develop, the collaboration should solidify. Both ACT and SCUSD will need to re-define their roles, and concretely articulate the boundaries by which both agree to work together. Instituting strategies such as orientation sessions and follow-up trainings, and other ideas drawn from teachers and other Project participants will strengthen the working partnership.

Summary

There is little doubt that the Project continues to be effective. Widespread attention is now being directed to the Home Visit Project, as districts and schools seek creative and productive strategies to improve the education of children. The Home Visit Project has demonstrated the importance of face-to-face contact to facilitate positive working

relationships between home and school. Evidence exists that leads to the conclusion that enhanced relations between home and school, and teachers and parents, ultimately supports academic growth and achievement. Examination of the third year of implementation of the Project reflects that the Project achieved its goals of enhancing parent involvement, and, consequently, improving student performance. The effects, according to the data, are both immediate and cumulative, as demonstrated by a review of both a sample of all schools participating in Year 03, and a closer examination of the original eight participating schools. Henderson and Berla (1994) suggest that the more programs [schools] take on a 'partnership' relationship with families, the more successful they are in raising student achievement to national norms." Standardized test scores reviewed for the entire three years of the Project support their contention.

It should be noted that three years of data is not sufficient to make a definitive determination of the academic benefits of the Project. It does, however, provide an initial conclusion that the Project has positive impacts on the factors that lead to improved student academic performance.



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