



The Ripple Effect: How Parent Teacher Home Visits Impact Attendance

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SPEAKERS

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Rachel Brice 00:00

Since the pandemic closed schools 40 years ago, our nation's school districts have struggled to recover on several fronts from enrollment and learning setbacks to school climate issues and social emotional development. Perhaps no issue, however, has been as stubborn, persistent and pervasive as the dramatic increases we're witnessing in chronic absenteeism. It's a challenge that cuts across geography and demographics and has continued long after schools reopened and returned to normal. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 72% of public school leaders reported that their schools were experiencing increased rates of chronic absence. This is a grim reality, but it's something we can face and we can change.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 00:50

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us for this special episode of parent, teacher home visits podcast. My name is Gina Martinez Keddy, and I'm the Executive Director of pthv, and we're thrilled, in particular, to be with you here during National Parent Teacher home visits week. This is an annual week that we take time out of the year to celebrate the incredible power of relationship building between educators and families and all of the educators and families who are out there building these relationships every day throughout the year. This year, for pthb, we're placing a particular emphasis on chronic absence. If you're like me, you've heard a lot of statistics about how chronic absence rates have just skyrocketed after the pandemic, and so today we want to explore a little bit more about what those numbers mean, and go a little bit deeper than just the numbers and really understand what might be behind some of those numbers to guide us through this conversation, I'm honored to welcome Parent Teacher home visits program director, Rachel Bryce, Rachel, thanks for joining me today.



Rachel Brice 01:59

Thanks, Gina, I am so excited to have this conversation with you today. You know, parent, teacher home visits. We have been partnering with the federal administration to offer recommendations and solutions to school districts across the country on how to get learners back into the classroom and on that pathway to success. This is a really meaningful topic for me, because it's been just a central part of my work as a middle school math teacher, a school social worker and a district administrator leading Community Schools efforts in my local school district and through my 20 years of experience, I have seen a lot and experienced a lot as it relates to attendance. I've seen effective strategies for working in partnership with families, but I've also seen a lot of interventions that have not yielded the impact that we had hoped, and now, in the wake of the pandemic and our skyrocketing chronic absence rates, we need solutions that meet this moment, and

Gina Martinez-Keddy 03:13

solutions, as you say, are so, so important, and I'm looking forward to diving in a little bit more deeply and understanding some of those solutions with you. But let's first of all start by understanding the terminology we've learned a lot at parent, teacher home visits from our partners at attendance works and lots of other folks who have really helped us understand what chronic absence is and why it's a problem. Could you help all of us understand a little bit more about that definition as well. Absolutely.

Rachel Brice 03:42

Gina, so chronic absence is a term that we use to describe when students miss 10% or more of a school year, and that's for any reason, whether it's excused or unexcused. And when you first kind of state it that way, it might not seem a lot, but that actually adds up to about 18 days per school year in a typical school year, that's about a month of school the problem with chronic absence isn't just those missed days. There's a lot of research out there that kind of paints this picture, that students who are chronically absent are more likely to fall behind academically, they often struggle with social emotional development, and they don't graduate at the rates of their peers. This is a really complex issue that has far reaching consequences for those students who are chronically absent themselves, but also the broader school population.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 04:43

That's such a great point, Rachel, because it might seem like just a few days missed, but really, the consequences are much deeper, and as you say, far reaching. We know that even before the pandemic, chronic absenteeism was an issue, and the rates of chronic absent. Were high and concerning, but the pandemic itself really led to a whole different story about chronic absence. We saw sharp record breaking increases after the pandemic, and our school districts are still contending with those high rates of chronic absence and the implications that they bring so, for example, we recently saw some data coming out of future Ed and the American Enterprise Institute that showed growth. In Alaska, for example, went from 29% chronic absenteeism before the pandemic to 49% during the pandemic. School year in California, where I am, we went from 12% to 32% Hawaii went from 15% to 37% those are alarming increases in chronic absence rate. And most recently, I think we've been able



to see a little bit of leveling off of some of those rates. But still, this is a really stark reality that school districts are having to contend with here. So I wanted to talk a little bit about how school districts typically approach chronic absence. I know that we've worked with advocates and researchers, and we've worked with school systems across the country to understand what they do to try to address this issue of chronic absence, and I know we've heard some really great stories about how they're trying to improve communications with families. They're working on enhancing transportation issues. They're texting, they're knocking on doors, they're doing public relations campaigns. They're using peer mentors to support attendance and lots of other really great and creative options that school districts are using. But I want to come back to you know, when we think about chronic absence in parent, teacher, home visits, and when you think about it, Rachel, when a school district first begins to see that they're experiencing serious chronic absence rates, what are some of the first things that they need to do when they start seeing that number go up?

Rachel Brice 07:01

Oh, that's a great question. So I'd like to start with a positive I am just really encouraged that schools are using data to inform their approach to solving this attendance crisis. But I do want to say that chronic absenteeism it's more than just a number. There are people and stories behind those numbers. Really, we can use data to flag when something is going on with a student. It's kind of like a check engine light for our kiddos when we see a pattern of missed days, it is kind of an alert signal to us that this student might need some extra support, or that they're facing some challenges in which we need to kind of more deeply understand, and that is where the Multi Tiered System of Supports comes into play. It's like having a variety of different tools in our toolbox, and we pull them out and use them for different situations. So with the MTSS structure, we start with universal or general supports that are for every single student, and we layer on additional help for those who need it, and provide the most intensive support for kids who face the biggest challenges. It's all about meeting students and their families where they're at and giving them what they need to be successful. So if you think about tier one, the bottom of the triangle, the MTSS triangle, this is where we think about Universal Supports, it's about building a culture of attendance for every single student in the school. One analogy we can think of is like taking your daily multi multivitamin to prevent those bigger problems that might affect students academic achievement and attendance. Now that might not work for every student, and that's where we have to start thinking about students who might be missing a bit too much school. And that's where we lean into tier two, or the middle layer of that triangle. These are the students who are missing about 10% of the school year. This is, if you kind of think of a stoplight. This is the yellow light. It lets us know that we need to step in and intervene and give some extra attention. You can think of this as kind of a tune up, rather than a full overhaul. We want to work with families to figure out what's going on and provide them with the support that they need to get back on track. But again, there might be a subset of students who continue to struggle, despite those tier one and tier two supports, that's where tier three comes in. This is a full on robust, individualized support system. Sometimes it means that we are partnering with outside organizations to provide integrated student supports. Sometimes it is coming up with a full plan in partnership with the family. Basically, it's customized for each individual student and really helps them with whatever challenges they may be facing.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 10:14

Thanks, Rachel, that was a really comprehensive response about MTSS, and I have to say, one thing I really appreciate about MTSS is that it recognizes that one size doesn't fit all, that our students need different kinds of support depending on whatever they're experiencing. And I really appreciate that MTSS provides a framework for schools to identify different kinds of support that they can offer to students and their different that meet their different needs. I'm also curious, given that MTSS framework, how school districts use it to address chronic absent and then also, where does parent, teacher home visits fit within that MTSS framework?

Rachel Brice 10:58

Great question. So if I can offer one thing is that the pandemic has broadened the scope of the challenges that we're facing with attendance. MTSS is tiered, and as you approach tier three use you typically support fewer and fewer students, because those tier one and tier two supports really should be designed to meet those needs. But the pandemic has changed some things for us, and there are far more students now experiencing high rates of chronic absence, and so districts need to step back and take a deeper look at the bigger picture. I would encourage districts to revisit their foundational practices and supports beyond just tier one. They need to think about what, what are our relationships like? What is the school culture like and climate like, and use that to inform what they are going to do, to really promote a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness, and really enhance all of the conditions that students need to learn and be successful in school and Parent Teacher home visits is a foundational practice that really gets to those core needs that all students have and all students deserve to have supports around.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 12:31

Thanks, Rachel. I think your point about a sense of belonging and connection is so important now more than ever. I think it's always been important, but particularly as we face these challenges post pandemic and that we're still contending with. You know, when I talk to teachers and families across the country over and over and over again, I keep hearing them talk about how important that sense of connection is, because they know they can trust each other. Now they can partner together. And creating that kind of relationship really does contribute to a strong culture and climate that encourages not only students, but also families and educators to really show up in their best way at school and and therefore kind of creating this virtuous cycle of a positive school culture and climate, the parent teacher home visits. They build those relationships of trust. It allows families and educators to really get to know each other as human beings in a completely different way than they might at the school building. It allows them to share what their hopes and dreams are for the student and for the student themselves, to share what their hopes and dreams are, all of that contributes to a stronger partnership to support those student needs and creating, again, a climate where students and families and educators all want to show up for each other. We know from the stories that we hear that those things happen. We also know from research that the parent, teacher, home visit model can dramatically improve student outcomes by strengthening those relationships. It can decrease chronic absence rates. It can increase



academic achievement, but we also know from the research that those things happen because of that relationship of trust. And I wanted to see if you could share a little bit more about what that research actually says about the parent teacher home visit, model

Rachel Brice 14:34

Parent Teacher home visit, research, this is something that gets me really excited. As a former school social worker and district leader, I was constantly looking for evidence based strategies that were proven to generate a real impact on students lives now, parent, teacher, home visits. We had a trio of national studies that was completed just prior to. A pandemic, and that research points to really strong evidence of an impact on attendance, which I find fascinating, because Parent Teacher home visits isn't an intervention. It's a foundational practice. But what they found, what the researchers found, was that when students whose family received a home visit, they had a 21% lower odd of being chronically absent compared to those students whose families did not receive a home visit. But what is really, really intriguing and powerful to me is what happens when schools achieve what we call systemic implementation, and that's when 10% or more of students at a school site receive a home visit. That's when we start to unlock school level outcomes. We know that the increase in attendance and that decrease in chronic absentee rates, those are amplified when we achieve that systemic implementation, and that's for students who receive a home visit and those who don't receive a home visit. So it's really, really powerful findings, and I think that points to a few important kind of lessons learned. We know parent, teacher home visits are good for kids. The research points to that, but that that systemic implementation finding is really fascinating, because I think that points to a bigger change, a bigger like shift that starts to happen at a school, and that shift is with what's happening with the educators on that campus. It's clear that there is a ripple effect happening. It's changing their mindsets, it's changing their beliefs, and it's changing their relationships, for students who receive a visit and those who don't, and it's having a great ripple effect. So all of that to say it's clear that building strong relationships with families is key to keeping kids in school and fostering their success now that research finding Gina, I just want to point out that that's an important reflection point for schools and districts as they struggle with chronic absence and reflecting on their data. So I invite them to think about if they are implementing the MTSS structure for attendance, and that MTSS triangle is being flipped upside down, and they are having far more students struggle than what the structure kind of can allow for In terms of intervention, I would invite them to think about, what does that foundation practice look like, right? Because if we can't interway intervene our way out of some of these challenges, but if we can unlock the potential of relationships in schools to really create this ripple effect that our findings have pointed to, I think that there's something really valuable for us to take away and consider what that means for us in our local context.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 18:09

So what I'm hearing you say is that chronic absence has gotten to be so widespread that the top of that MTSS triangle has been filled with so many students that it might be hard to address the needs of all of those students. Is that what I'm hearing

Rachel Brice 18:30
absolutely

Gina Martinez-Keddy 18:32

okay and so then again, just to clarify for myself, then what you're saying is that when you have that many students who need those kinds of specific tiered interventions that puts a lot of stress on the system, and systems aren't really designed to provide that level of support for that many students. And so then it's important for school districts to try to get to that root cause analysis and pay attention to that foundation of relationship and school culture and partnership. The

Rachel Brice 19:11

problem is too big to fit within the structure as it is which requires us to revisit our data and what the data is telling us, and so to do that, we encourage districts to do a root cause analysis figure out, what are the challenges, what is leading to this widespread problem? There's lots of different reasons for this stemming from the pandemic, but we also know that there were some challenges pre pandemic that have really been exacerbated through the course of the last several years, and I would feel very confident in saying that a sense of disconnection and a lack of trust. Best is often at the root of these challenges, and it's also a mentality that those within the school system often hold when it comes to problem solving, and that it is we need to fix, and that we're going to do unto rather than do with right in partnership. And so what feels really different about parent, teacher, home visits is that it gets to a lot of those root causes. It gets to the challenge of mistrust, and it builds a bridge and allows families and educators to connect as human beings. It allows them to learn about each other's strengths and goals. It allows them to build a partnership so that when we do get to facing some challenges, they, in turn, can work together to come up with a solution that really is meaningful and creates a positive difference for that student and their success.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 21:08

You know, one of the things that I've been struck with you mentioned earlier that you know you bring 20 plus years of experience in different roles within schools to some of these questions, and I know you yourself as a school social worker, as a math teacher and as a district leader, that you dealt with issues of chronic absence in different ways depending on what role you are playing. You've done home visits, I know that you have some perspectives on the role that relationship plays in addressing some challenges in schools. So I wonder if you could share a little bit about from your own experience, how you kind of addressed issues of chronic absence, of building relationships, where you saw those two kind of connect and fit together. So

Rachel Brice 22:00

as a school social worker, working with educators and families to problem solve attendance challenges was a big part of my day to day work, and in fact, I have done countless home visits with families who students were struggling to attend school on a daily basis. As a social worker, I can say that there are some lenses that I try to hold in all of those home visits I ever completed, I tried to always hold an asset



based lens of families trying to find their strengths and their interest, their unique kind of perspectives and experiences and learn from those. So one of the challenges that I had as a school social worker trying to improve attendance at my school sites, really was rooted in the fact that I was doing this work alone, and this problem, this challenge, is bigger than one person, and it's bigger than one staff member. It is the work of the entire school. All too often, I would have teachers reach out when a student would miss a few days of school and they would say, Miss Bryce. I have a student who's been absent. What are you going to do about it? And my first response to them was always, well, what have you done? Because I wanted to really deeply understand what steps that they had taken to communicate and partner with the family. And I would say nine times out of 10, there hadn't been a really strong effort, and I felt like that was such a missed opportunity, because I understood both as a social worker, but also just as a mom, right that it's the parent or caregiver and the teacher who are really the most important people in a child's life. They're the ones that they spend the most time with, and who have a real difference to make in that student's experience and in their coming to school on a daily basis. And so by my stepping in as a school social worker, I felt like I was really taking away the power of the family and the educator to work together to come up with a solution together that would make a meaningful difference for the students. And so yes, I played an important role as a school social worker, but I feel like there is just something that could meaningfully change or be different if the teacher were to partner with me and with the family in a whole different way, for instance, if they just came along on a home visit and really got to understand and learn about the family in the way that I was understanding and learning about the family.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 24:55

You know, it's not a quick fix. I think it's important. For everyone to understand that care, teacher, home visits, are an ongoing practice. It's not kind of a magic wand. It's not a button you can push and all of a sudden your chronic absence issues have been resolved. It really is a sustained practice over time that that has all kinds of great outcomes for students, including reducing chronic absence and so when school districts reach out to us asking for a parent teacher home visit training, sometimes they'll say, you know, we want to do parent teacher home visits to reduce our chronic absence rates, and that's fantastic, because we know that it will have that kind of impact. And we also make sure that we share with those school districts that parent, teacher, home visits is really not a chronic absence intervention, that it really is that sustained, foundational practice over time, and that ultimately it does have that benefit of reducing chronic absence rates, but we always ask school districts to go into it with a little bit of a different mindset that you know that we want to do parent, teacher home visits, because we want to build those relationships of trust, knowing that all kinds of great things are going to come out of that, including reductions in chronic absence.

Rachel Brice 26:24

Yeah, I am always just struck when I hear educators say that parent, teacher, home visits isn't something that they have to do, but it's something that they want to do, and that they really understand that it is an investment of time and their energy that pays great dividends. In the long run. It's like this



upfront effort that has big rewards, and on the back end, it makes everything that they do attendance related and otherwise, because it has far reaching effects, it makes all of that just so much easier.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 27:07

Yeah, I agree. I always say that, you know, if you have relationships of trust between families and educators, probably everything else is going to work a whole lot better because you've got that strong foundation. But you do bring up another point, Rachel, that I want to explore here, and that's, you know, we we get a lot of questions about how much time does it take for educators to do home visits? And as you said, we know that it's, it's not a quick fix. It does, it does require some time. And we know that those long term benefits far outweigh the time spent. So love to hear you say a little bit something about the time. Time

Rachel Brice 27:51

is really up to the educator this. That's the beautiful thing about Parent Teacher home visits, one of our core practices, it's voluntary, and that means it's not just voluntary for families, but it's voluntary for educators, so they have voice and choice over the degree to which they want to invest their time and energy. Now it starts with a three hour training that will prepare them with the technical skills and the mindsets to go out and do our Parent Teacher home visit with fidelity. Once they have that training, they're kind of ready to go out and do home visits. And we typically say that it's one hour per home visit that allows for the scheduling the phone call to the family to schedule the home visit. It includes the post visit reflection and paperwork process, and then the visit itself usually is a 30 to 40 minute conversation. So all told, it is a great use of time that really will pay off in the long run.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 28:57

Thanks, Rachel. You remind me also of another common question that we get, and that's around a sense of safety home visits is not necessarily a very widespread practice in schools, and so oftentimes we hear from educators that they're feeling, you know, a little anxious about going out to do a home visit for whatever reason that might be, it's something new, right? Every time we try something new, it might feel a little bit little bit scary for us. It's understandable for educators to have those feelings when they're doing something that they've never done before. And so I wonder if you could kind of help people understand how we address that concern. Also,

Rachel Brice 29:36

absolutely, I just want to say that 26 years ago, our founding parents and educators really leaned into their collective wisdom and experience to design a model that gets to some of those common fears and some of the challenges. Is that educators may face in getting started with a home visit practice, and I, I would recommend that they lean into that model, because it was designed with real purpose and with a lot of listening. So we have a set of core non negotiable practices that make up our home visit model. There's five of them, and all together, they create the impact. But there's several, in particular, Gina that I think get to that issue of safety and fear. The first home visit core practice that I'd like to kind of highlight is our core practice that all home visits are voluntary. This is a mutually agreed upon kind of



appointment or visit between the educator and the family. So it's agreed upon time place, well in advance, so everyone knows and aren't going to be caught off guard, right? People are not going to welcome you into their home if they don't want to there. So if you stick to that voluntary nature, you're starting to set yourself up for success. Now, another core practice that is really kind of specific to this idea of safety is that educators go in pairs. That has been around since Parent Teacher home visits inception, and it was really born out of this concern for safety, right? But the beautiful thing is, after 26 years, it's evolved a little bit, and we've now expanded that core practice, we're creating the conditions to partner together, and that this is a willing agreement between two equal partners. So the beauty of that go in pairs is that we now go in pairs and reflect, and this is an opportunity for the educators, the two educator partners, to talk about what they've learned during that home visit, what they've learned about the student and the family, what they've learned about themselves, and how they're going to go back and inform their practice as a result of that home visit learning. So that's what it's all about, of course, safety and other questions or concerns that might be surfacing for folks, that's all addressed in our three hour training. Thanks,

Gina Martinez-Keddy 32:27

Rachel. I'm always so in awe of the wisdom of our founding parents and educators when they initially created this model 26 years ago and how it's lasted all this time. So thank you for sharing that. My pleasure. I feel like we've talked about a lot today, just to kind of recap, we've talked about how Parent Teacher home visits are really can be a powerful tool in addressing chronic absence and improving lots of other student outcomes, and really focusing on building those relationships of trust between families and schools. That's what really creates that foundation for student success in so many ways, we know these visits are not a quick fix, it's a long term investment in students futures. So thank you, Rachel for joining me and kind of unpacking this really critical and timely topic for us these days. One last question Rachel that I had is, if school leaders have questions about how to get started with parent, teacher home visits, what should they do? Great question.

Rachel Brice 33:33

So first and foremost, we invite them to head to our website. That's www.pthvp.org, dot pthvp.org, and click on training there, they'll find a bunch of details and have the opportunity to submit an inquiry in which one of our staff members will follow up with them to talk about their specific questions and local context and how parent, teacher home visits might help them in their community. All right.

Gina Martinez-Keddy 34:00

Thanks, Rachel. I think that's going to be it for today's conversation. But let me leave you with just a couple of parting thoughts. I think that at the heart of our work at parent, teacher home visits is really a very simple truth, and that's that strong schools are built on strong relationships between educators and families, and I think for too long, those two worlds have felt very disconnected from each other, far too often, that disconnection has led to misunderstandings, frustrations, and really created some barriers to student success. And I think parent, teacher, home visits is really more than just about the act of doing a visit. They're really a catalyst for change. And so by investing in these relationships, we're investing in



our children's futures, and we're investing in each other as partners in supporting those futures for children. And so we invite you to. Join us in building that future where every student feels seen, heard and supported and for every family and every educator are working together in true and trusting partnership to support their students. Thank you all so much for joining us today. You