



TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS FIRST
**A Toolkit for Healing
and Recovery**



BACK-TO-SCHOOL
TOOLKIT

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**Parent Teacher
Home Visits**

Parent Teacher Home Visits advances student success and school improvement by leveraging relationships, research, and a national network of partners to advance evidence-based practices in relational home visits within a comprehensive family engagement strategy.

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Executive Summary

The indelible mark of COVID-19 cannot be ignored as we welcome students back to a new school year. To fully heal and recover from the unprecedented, concurrent events of a global pandemic and racial injustice, we must focus on efforts that are not only responsive to student, family, and educator needs but are purposefully designed to ameliorate educational inequities. At the center of these efforts should be building relationships of trust, particularly between families and educators.

However, effective, authentic home-school partnerships do not happen in a vacuum. They require certain conditions to be met and actions to be taken. This toolkit offers educators and schools a framework to reflect upon and organize their efforts. It includes guiding questions, recommended activities and resources, and clear connections to Parent Teacher Home Visits. The framework consists of three interlocking components – Building Educator Capacity and Resilience, Building Trust with Families, and Creating a School-Wide Culture that Prioritizes High-Impact Family Engagement – that create the conditions essential to effectively partner with families.

Building Educator Capacity and Resilience

Educators have faced immense personal and professional stress in recent years. To nurture teacher resilience and to prepare them for the work ahead, we must tend to their emotional needs as well as create the working conditions that allow them to flourish in the face of adversity. We must create a safe and responsive space where they can collectively process their emotions and experiences and build their capacity to connect and heal with colleagues, students, and families.

Building Trust with Families

The acute crisis during the earliest phases of the pandemic offered real lessons learned and silver linings. School building closures in March of 2020 thrust families into the spotlight as they assumed new roles in their children's education, while a new, virtual environment revealed the value of true home-school partnership and the critical importance of effective family engagement. Instead of returning to our previous ways of engaging families, we need to lean into this learning and double down on our efforts to collaborate as equal partners to mitigate the ongoing effects of the pandemic and structural racism. Unfortunately, many families – particularly black and brown families – have a justifiable, deeply-held mistrust of the educational system. Therefore, we will need to be intentional in changing our mindsets and practices to ensure that we engage every family.

Creating a School-Wide Culture that Prioritizes High-Impact Family Engagement

Healing and recovery will be a long-term endeavor. By systematizing family engagement, we begin to create the conditions for sustainable success. Critical to this effort, however, is parent voice. Schools must listen deeply to families' experiences as well as engage them – particularly those historically-marginalized families who have been most impacted by the pandemic – in the co-creation and shared ownership of a new, post-pandemic path forward.

Introduction

The unprecedented, concurrent events of a global pandemic and racial reckoning have rocked our nation to the core, and many are weary. However, instead of returning to “normalcy,” we have a rare opportunity and a true responsibility to chart a new path forward — one that transforms the educational experience and ameliorates inequities for students of color. This recovery and rebuilding process will undoubtedly be an emotionally-charged challenge, but returning to the status quo has deep implications for the future of our nation’s public education system.

To begin, we must fully take stock of the widespread impact that the coronavirus pandemic continues to leave in its wake. Preliminary data laid bare the disparities that existed prior to — and exacerbated by — the pandemic. Listening to the diverse lived experiences of students, teachers, and families serves dual purposes. It not only nurtures true connection and promotes healing, it also illuminates key leverage points for transformational change. While schools are encouraged to deeply engage their local school communities in this reflection process, it has become abundantly clear over the course of the pandemic that the education system is capable of rapid innovation, that learning occurred as

families and educators found new ways to support student learning; and that family engagement is not only nice, but necessary. Furthermore, the sheer volume of missing students and the unprecedented drop in enrollment reveal deep fissures of distrust between many families and the education system.

Schools should apply these lessons learned to develop a responsive plan that reverses the compounding effects of COVID-19 and systemic racism. At the center of this plan should be trusting relationships. Parent Teacher Home Visits offers this collection of trust-building guidance and resources that can be used as you welcome students and families back for a new school year.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is organized across three key components:

- ❑ Building Educator Capacity and Resilience,
- ❑ Building Trust with Families, and
- ❑ Creating a School-Wide Culture that Prioritizes High-Impact Family Engagement.

When combined, these components help educators and schools create the conditions essential to effectively partner with families as we heal, recover, and rebuild from the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice. Educators and schools at any stage of high-impact family engagement implementation and/or familiarity with Parent Teacher Home Visits – from emerging to advanced – can use the toolkit to reflect and build upon their existing efforts to engage families, as well as address the trauma and learning loss, experienced over the last few years.

Each toolkit component includes a **description** of what this may look like in practice and why it is important to address as we enter this post-pandemic school year. A **set of guiding questions** nurtures thoughtful reflection and aids strong planning while



recommended activities and resources

ensure efforts are grounded in evidence and best practice. A clear explanation of how **Parent Teacher Home Visits** supports each component is also outlined. A curated set of supplemental **readings and resources** offers additional — but related — perspectives on how we should approach healing and recovery during this new school year. We also encourage you to use the accompanying reflection and action **planning tool** with your school colleagues as you return to school and begin the recovery process.



Florida
SCIENCE - PERIODIC TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS

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Building Educator Capacity and Resilience

The unrelenting waves of COVID-19 have pummeled a vast number of education professionals. In their personal lives, they have suffered through the pain, uncertainty, and fear of living through a pandemic; they have lost loved ones and faced significant hardship. Professionally, they have shouldered the responsibility of continuously adapting an entire system to ever-changing conditions, all while experiencing compassion fatigue and secondary traumas as they work to meet the mounting needs of students. And the cumulative effects of this stress are taking a toll.

The pandemic and its myriad of impacts have fueled an exodus from the field, further compounding an already critical teacher shortage. This is especially worrisome considering that a stable, high-quality workforce is critical to recovery and rebuilding, particularly as we prioritize relational trust as a foundation for all other efforts. Consistent interaction and dependable support are key ingredients necessary to building trust with families, which in turn, helps afford the benefit of working in true partnership.

To nurture teacher resilience and fully prepare them to enter another school year marked by COVID-19, we must tend to their emotional needs, as well as create the working conditions that allow them to flourish in the face of adversity. We must create a safe and responsive space where they can collectively process their emotions and experiences and build their capacity to connect and heal with colleagues, students, and families. In turn, we can anticipate that educators will feel re-energized and fully committed to the important work ahead.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

1

How do we create space that allows educators to heal and practice self-care?

2

What supportive adult networks exist at our school, and how can these communities be reinforced to nurture resilience and well-being?

3

How do we tap into educator purpose and agency to meet the challenges of this historical moment?

4

What unique strength does each adult member of our school community offer to our recovery and rebuilding efforts this school year?

5

What have we learned over the course of the pandemic about what educators need most that can inform our path forward?

6

What professional learning and support are needed to successfully engage **all** families, reflect on our own identities as well as disrupt implicit biases and racism surfaced in our practice, and address the whole child needs of our students?

7

How can we learn about students' unique experiences during the pandemic and use those insights to accelerate learning?



PTHV CONNECTION

Deep listening—to families and educators through several years of conversations and focus groups—informed the development of the [Parent Teacher Home Visits model](#) and, therefore, each of the five non-negotiable practices that make up the model meet the needs of educators remarkably well.

- 1. Visits are voluntary and arranged in advance.** Unlike the many mandatory activities in education, teachers are given the choice to participate in Parent Teacher Home Visits. Visits are not “one more thing” to be done, but something that teachers look forward to and can be arranged during times that are conducive to their schedule. To eliminate some barriers to participation, it is recommended that school leaders dedicate time within the school calendar for teachers to arrange and conduct visits.
- 2. Teachers are trained and compensated for visits.** The premise of Parent Teacher Home Visits is deceptively simple; however, training prepares school staff to build authentic relationships with families and supports fidelity of implementation. The model dictates that educators be compensated for visits outside of the school day to demonstrate value and respect for the time committed.
- 3. Visits focus on hopes and dreams.** Parent Teacher Home Visits is a two-visit model that focuses on building relationships of trust. By asking families to share their “hopes and dreams” for their child at the start of the first visit, educators lay the groundwork for a productive partnership focused on student success.
- 4. Educators visit a cross-section of students.** Parent Teacher Home Visits is not a targeted intervention to address academic, attendance,



or behavioral concerns. Instead, it is universally applied to all students and their families with the expressed intent of building relationships of trust. As such, it is a low-stakes interaction that has a positive impact on educators and families alike. For example, teachers report that their assumptions about families were challenged and they developed more empathy as a result of home visits.

- 5. Educators go in pairs and reflect.** While the initial training introduces school staff to the model and prepares them for their first visit, professional learning continues through ongoing home visit practice and reflection. Visiting with a trained partner provides the opportunity for shared reflection and discussion about what was learned about the student and how to incorporate this learning into classroom instruction as well as what biases were held about the family prior to the visit and how those assumptions

changed as a result. To maximize teacher learning and contribute to mindset shifts, it is recommended that schools incorporate time into staff meeting or professional learning community sessions to collectively debrief home visit experiences.

[Rigorous research](#) proves that Parent Teacher Home Visits improve students' standardized test scores, reduces chronic absenteeism, shift educator and parent mindsets, strengthen home-school partnerships, and improve teaching practices. Of particular interest, however, is how Parent Teacher Home Visits may nurture teacher resilience in the time of COVID-19. Teachers from around the country frequently cite their home visit practice as a protective factor from educator burnout. They share stories of how Parent Teacher Home Visits reinvigorated them by tapping into their purpose for becoming a teacher: that they care deeply for others and are motivated to help!

Gretchen Viglione is a 23-year veteran educator and Parent Teacher Home Visits Training Specialist who credits relational, trust-building home visits for reigniting her passion for education. After nine years teaching primary grades at a Title I elementary school in the Sacramento City Unified School District, Gretchen was burned out. The pressure of high-stakes testing left her in a perpetual state of stress, uncertainty, and fear. Looking for a career change and with nothing left to lose, she agreed to give home visiting a try.

Gretchen's first visit occurred when she was teaching second grade. To her surprise and delight, the older brother of the student

she was visiting had been in her Kindergarten classroom during her first year teaching. She was invited to stay for dinner as she and the family reconnected. Of her first home visit, Gretchen says, "Everything I had been feeling fell away in that moment, and I became hooked on visits."

Gretchen committed to another year of teaching and set a goal to visit the families of every one of her students. During the summer, she conducted up to six per day. She was able to get a glimpse of families' lives as they welcomed her with handmade gifts and food. The experience changed her as she realized, "the stuff that was negative got erased by the beauty of the human spirit. I wasn't scared anymore."

Countless visits and a decade later, Gretchen acknowledges that, "When you have worked to build relationships of trust, you become very protective of those people and relationships." Parent Teacher Home Visits have allowed her to become authentically involved in the lives of families and vice versa, and it doesn't end with the visit. When the pandemic struck, she had families reach out to check on her and offer support. Like



While tough, COVID-19 was not the wave that pummeled everyone else because of the relationships I built.

- Gretchen Viglione

Educator & Parent Teacher Home Visits Training Specialist,
Sacramento City Unified School District

so many other home visit practitioners, she shared that, “While tough, COVID-19 was not the wave that pummeled everyone else because of the relationships I built.”

Time is frequently cited as a barrier to conducting Parent Teacher Home Visits. Gretchen encourages educators, especially those ready to quit, to

intentionally set aside time to build relationships of trust with families. “There is a ton of busywork in education. Take something off your plate in the moment. Change your bulletin board less frequently, skip homework packets the first few weeks of school to allow yourself to do the things that really matter.”



RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

A

UPLIFT THE EDUCATOR EXPERIENCE.

Deeply listening to educators and uplifting their experiences conveys value and respect for the hard work and sacrifice made throughout the course of the pandemic. Providing the dedicated time and space for school staff to collectively process these experiences and the resulting range of emotions allows for healing and community-building.

B

LEAD WITH GRACE AND COMPASSION.

School leaders are responsible for creating a supportive work environment, which includes taking action to [nurture teacher well-being](#). This begins with building authentic, caring relationships with staff. Regular, intentional [check-ins](#) with each staff member are recommended as these candid conversations not only deepen connections but allow administrators to assess needs and provide individualized support to employees in need.



C

**PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE
ACTIVITIES.**

Promoting practices and adopting programs that support [self-care](#) should be an imperative – at both the individual and system level. Adopting healthy mindsets and behaviors, nurturing connections, setting boundaries, and seeking help when needed are necessary to [protect staff's health and well-being](#). The [Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care Self-Assessment and Planning Tool](#) from the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders can aid this effort.



D

**IMPROVE STAFF
ACCESS TO SUPPORT
SERVICES.**

The pandemic has impacted some educators more than others, which may influence their ability to form relationships and their effectiveness in the classroom. To help them heal the trauma, regulate their emotions, and educate to their fullest potential, some teachers may need more intensive support. Community schools are especially well-equipped to deepen community partnerships to link their staff to appropriate mental health and support services.



E

**PLAN
INFRASTRUCTURE
THAT STRENGTHENS
TEAMS AND
COLLABORATION.**

Systems, processes, supports, and schedules that teachers need to be successful should be intentionally planned and implemented. By including stakeholders—from students and families to teachers and community members—in the design process, school leaders realize the benefits of [collaborative leadership](#). Students, families, teachers, and community members share responsibility and accountability for the school's success. Schools should dedicate ample time for building strong teams, as well as for joint learning and reflection to maximize impact.



F

**INVEST IN STAFF
CAPACITY BUILDING.**

The dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice have exacerbated inequities and further sowed family mistrust of the education system, particularly for communities of color. Building educator capacity to meet this moment in a way that is culturally affirming is critically important. Anti-racism and family engagement training address needs that, when implemented well, can truly transform how historically marginalized students and families experience our education system. The most [impactful professional learning](#) experiences are connected to educators' practice and allow for ongoing support, collaboration, and reflection.

G

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST.

Educators have long faced competing demands, and this challenge has worsened over the course of the pandemic; re-engaging students, recovering learning loss, and addressing the emotional toll are monumental tasks that will demand significant, sustained attention. However, we cannot do everything at once. Staffing and time limitations necessitate that school leaders streamline teacher workloads to focus on what matters most. Schools should prioritize, and build into their schedule, high-impact strategies that accelerate learning and recovery – starting with building trusting relationships with families!







Building Trust with Families

Families are children's first teachers. School building closures and the shift to a virtual setting during the early stages of the pandemic reinforced that learning occurs across home and school settings and that we, therefore, need to be more intentional in working together to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic moving forward. However, the success of this effort hinges on the ability of families and educators to effectively partner. Consisting of the four key elements of Respect, Competence, Integrity, and Personal Regard, [relational trust](#) has been proven to be a key ingredient for meaningful collaboration and successful school improvement efforts.

Unfortunately, the pandemic fueled inequities, which further eroded families' trust, particularly that of Black families, in the education system. As we learn to live with the ever-present reality of COVID-19, educators must reconcile their practices

and mindsets that result in this mistrust to fully embrace all students and their families when they return for a new school year. [Engaging every family](#) will require attention to organizational culture, effective communication, family efficacy, shared decision-making, and external partnership.



PTHV CONNECTION

Parent Teacher Home Visits was [founded in 1998](#) by parents from a low-income neighborhood in Sacramento, California. Frustrated by the lack of communication with the schools and the walls that were erected that limited their involvement, these parents used community organizing principles to develop a strategy to build trust and accountability between parents and teachers. Their efforts were intended to interrupt a cycle of blame for low student achievement. What resulted is a relational home visit model—ultimately refined with teacher and community allies—that is entirely voluntary, away from the institutional power of the school, and focused on sharing hopes and dreams. Parent Teacher Home Visits build bridges for productive partnerships that are centered on common goals and student success.

Parent Teacher Home Visits believes it is incumbent on schools and their staff to carry the responsibility for intentionally building trust with families. Sharing in this belief, Tyler Post has made relationship-building with his students and their families a priority through his 25 years in education. As a teacher and dean at a Washoe County School District alternative school, Tyler works with students and families who often have a history of negative interactions and experiences with the education system. Families are typically

angry and frustrated by the time their students enter the school through the disciplinary hearing process. Therefore, the school has to move quickly and intentionally to restore families' trust, rebuild relationships, and create community.

Five years ago, Tyler embraced Parent Teacher Home Visits as a strategy to forge connections with these families. He struggled initially in recruiting colleagues to participate and attributes this to educators' implicit biases, but acknowledges that Parent Teacher Home Visits training and practice help them challenge these assumptions. Since then, he and his home visiting partner have conducted more than 200 visits, including virtual bridge visits conducted during the pandemic.

With the support of his principal, Tyler embedded this practice into the school's welcoming process.



I'm not quitting on them, and I am there to build a strong foundation with them.

- Tyler Post

Dean,
Washoe Inspire Academy



He aims to contact every new family within the first two weeks of enrollment to arrange a home visit. He estimates that 99 percent of families consent to a visit, once they understand that it is friendly and not punitive in nature. Tyler uses Parent Teacher Home Visits as an opportunity to listen to students and their families and to acknowledge their feelings, as well as demonstrate consistency and unconditional care. Tyler shared that he wants to show them that “I’m not quitting on them, and I am there to build a strong foundation with them.”

As a result, families tend to become more responsive, open, and engaged. Students

demonstrate improved behavior and attendance. An unanticipated benefit that he has observed as a result of Parent Teacher Home Visits is the deepening connection between students and caregivers, as many never shared their hopes and dreams with each other. And unlike many educators across the country, Tyler did not experience challenges in maintaining contact with students and families throughout the pandemic. Instead, communication with his students and their families was well-received as they yearned for authentic connection with the school.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

1

What do families experience when they come on our campus or interact with our staff?

2

What does a trusting relationship with families look like, sound like, and feel like to me? To families?

3

What do families say they want and need to build trusting relationships with teachers?

4

What are the greatest needs of families that have surfaced from the pandemic, and how do we meet them?

5

What high-impact family engagement strategies do we currently implement? What can we do differently to better build trust with families?

6

How will we amplify the voice of families who have traditionally been unheard and use their lived experience to inform how we start the new school year?

7

What have we learned throughout the pandemic about how we engage families that can inform our path forward?



RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

A

CREATE A WELCOMING, CULTURALLY AFFIRMING ENVIRONMENT.

When families feel welcomed, they are more likely to participate in school activities and support their student's learning at home. This process begins with the physical environment and how they are greeted, as these factors often shape a family's first impression of your school. Creating space for families at your school communicates that you value and respect their involvement. Ensure that there is ample, designated parking and clear signage in multiple languages to orient families to your school. In this era of enhanced school security measures, it is especially important to include a prominent welcome sign and consider an open-door visitation policy for families. Front office staff should be friendly, knowledgeable, and able to communicate in the languages spoken by your families. Customer service training helps ensure that families have a quality experience. When local COVID-19 measures allow, establish an open-door visitation policy. Administrators should be accessible and offer timely resolution of the concerns families express.

B

USE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION.

During this uncertain time, schools should prioritize [two-way communication](#) methods to provide a much-needed sense of security, reassurance, and trust. Two-way communication requires educators to listen to families in addition to consistently and clearly providing updates. To make communication even more impactful, identify and use the modes that are most effective and preferred by families. It is also recommended to use multiple methods and to ensure that it is accessible to all.

C

AVOID EDUSPEAK.

[What we say and how we say it matters](#). Educators should adopt family-friendly language using a friendly, approachable tone. Jargon and acronyms should be avoided.



CONNECT PERSONALLY WITH EVERY FAMILY.

[Millions of students were unaccounted for](#) during the the shift to virtual learning and [enrollment waned](#) once school buildings re-opened. Countless others have shown up, but are struggling. Reconnecting with each and every family is a critically important activity to launch a new school year focused on healing and recovery. Relationship-building, one-on-one conversations allow every family to feel seen and heard. There are several ways in which educators can personally connect with families, but [Parent Teacher Home Visits](#) are a proven strategy for building the mutual trust, communication, and partnership needed to improve student outcomes.



LEVERAGE FAMILIES' ASSETS.

Historically, schools have underused families' expertise and skills. However, the urgency of this historical moment necessitates that schools actively engage families as equal and valued partners in the recovery and rebuilding process. Schools should invest the time to listen to and learn from families. Not only do families support learning at home, but they also have incredible funds of knowledge about their students' strengths, needs, culture, and interests. This knowledge can inform teaching practices and curriculum, making them more engaging, culturally relevant, and supportive of student success in the classroom.



BUILD FAMILIES' CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS.

Informing families of what they need to do to help their students learn is insufficient. Competence and confidence are required for families to be empowered to support learning at home; therefore, schools must provide opportunities for families to learn and practice relevant skills. Creating a safe, culturally responsive learning environment is as important for adult family members as it is for your students. [Academic Parent Teacher Teams](#) is a research-based family engagement strategy that creates a detailed structure and process for educators to share data, resources, and strategies that families can use at home to support student learning.



SUPPORT THE WELL- BEING OF FAMILIES.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic fallout can be felt across all aspects of life, but they have been especially hard on low-income families and communities of color. To fully heal and recover, schools must consider the needs of the whole child within the context of their family and plan accordingly. [Community schools](#) are good examples of schools that work in partnership with community organizations and service providers to expand families' access to much-needed resources. Likewise, using a structure, such as [Coordination of Services Teams](#), leverages the expertise of experts across multiple disciplines to ensure that students and their families receive appropriate, timely support.

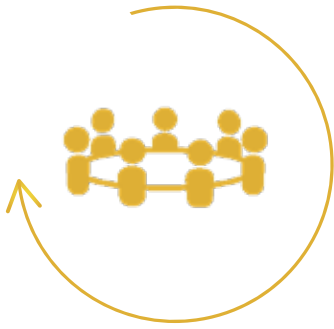




Students shall be the
primary & most important priority
for the school.

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Creating a School-Wide Culture that Prioritizes High-Impact Family Engagement

While many schools doubled down on their engagement efforts as the pandemic revealed just how integral families are to student learning and success, we run the risk of returning to a random, event-driven, and compliance-based practice as we shift to learning to live with COVID-19. Intentionally creating a school-wide culture that prioritizes and systematizes high-impact engagement that makes all families feel welcomed, supported, and valued as equal partners helps mitigate this risk.

Systemic [family engagement](#) occurs when engagement principles are integrated into a school or district's core priorities, policies, and practices. It requires strong leadership, strategic alignment, collaboration, capacity-building, clearly defined expectations and accountability, and investment of time and resources. The evidence-based [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) is a useful tool for developing a plan as it outlines both the necessary goals and essential conditions for effective family engagement. By systematizing family engagement, we begin to create the conditions for sustainable success. Critical to this effort, however, is parent voice. Schools should conduct listening campaigns with families to

understand their hopes and desires for the future of education, as well as challenges with our current system. [Surveys](#) that are rooted in research are potent tools for collecting data about parent attitudes and experiences across a number of engagement indicators, such as school safety and climate, family support, and family efficacy. [Empathy interviews](#) are an especially powerful, human-centered strategy for not only understanding families' experiences and feelings, but allowing the listener an opportunity to reflect on how their assumptions and biases influence how they make meaning of what is shared. The information learned from listening can be used to engage families in co-creating and sharing ownership of a new path forward.



PTHV CONNECTION

Parent Teacher Home Visits is a strategy that schools can use to overcome complex barriers to authentic home-school partnership, such as limited time and funds, mistrust, and implicit biases. Not only are they fast, inexpensive, and replicable, Parent Teacher Home Visits have been found to support positive student outcomes. The benefits are even more pronounced for schools where more than 10 percent of students received a visit. For example, a [2018 John Hopkins University study](#) found that attending a school systematically implementing PTHV was associated with 35 percent higher odds of scoring proficient on standardized English Language Arts assessments compared with attending a school not systematically implementing home visits.

Robust, systematic implementation of Parent Teacher Home Visits is indicative of a positive school culture where family engagement is highly prioritized. To set the stage for a thriving home visit practice, these schools and districts have intentionally [laid a strong, sustainable foundation](#) by enlisting leadership and stakeholder support, investing resources, and building an infrastructure of clear processes and procedures that is integrated into their broader family engagement plan.

A grassroots, teacher-led effort gave rise to and has sustained

a strong Parent Teacher Home Visits practice in St. Paul, Minnesota. [Introduced and championed by the St. Paul Federation of Educators](#) (SPFE) teachers' union, educators have conducted thousands of Parent Teacher Home Visits since its local launch in 2010. Critical to this success has been the collaboration and partnership of St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS). Not only has SPPS invested resources, but the school district also worked with SPFE to create the infrastructure to support strong and systematic implementation. For example, St. Paul has an in-house parent and educator training team through an accredited partnership with Parent Teacher Home Visits. The district also has streamlined budget and payroll processes to ensure timely educator compensation. Likewise, allocating small supply budgets and offering language support make teachers feel supported and eliminate some



A high touch, one-on-one, individualized approach is the best thing that we can do. Families just want to talk.

- Heather Kilgore

Director of Family Engagement and Community Partnerships,
Saint Paul Public Schools

implementation barriers. A strong structure and expectation that educators will reflect on their practice ensure shared learning and collaboration. This process includes the PTHV model's practice of reflection immediately following the visit along with a group debrief process that brings many home visit educators together to engage in collective reflection and learning. The reflection work has been so successful in creating persistence to the Parent Teacher Home Visits strategy that the district is replicating it in other practices.

However, COVID-19 brought about one of many changes that directly impact St. Paul's Parent Teacher Home Visits practice. The district placed a moratorium on home visits when the pandemic struck, but did allow for brief, curbside check-ins with families. Additionally, there were changes in long-time leadership at SPFE, as well as at the district central office. Heather Kilgore, SPPS Director of Family Engagement and Community Partnerships, assumed leadership of St. Paul's Parent Teacher Home Visits practice as students returned to the classroom.

According to Heather, she was constantly balancing the grassroots nature of the Parent

Teacher Home Visits and systemic family engagement. She understands that you "can't mandate that people build relationships" and that the impact will be dampened if it becomes a compliance-driven activity. However, her vantage point in the district's central office afforded her the opportunity to strategically align efforts. Heather worked to migrate data collection to the district's Student Information System to better track home visits and impact over time and had a vision to deepen teachers' family engagement practice by aligning Parent Teacher Home Visits and Academic Parent Teacher Team efforts. Mostly, she wanted people to understand the value of relationship-building.

St. Paul's home visit practice resumed as students returned to the classroom as a means to reconnect with families. To afford the greatest flexibility and to encourage home visiting, they have adopted a hybrid approach allowing educators to do in-person and virtual home visits based on participants' comfort and ever-changing safety conditions. To support healing and recovery, Heather suggested, "A high touch, one-on-one, individualized approach is the best thing that we can do. Families just want to talk."





GUIDING QUESTIONS

1

Which of our school norms, values, and practices best affirm the cultural identity of each student and their family? Which need to be changed?

2

What conditions exist at our school that support true home-school partnership? What do we need to do to improve those conditions?

3

What leadership approach is used at our school? How does this shape how families experience our school? How do we include families in authentic decision-making?

4

How should we address needs in [educators' and families' confidence, cognition, capabilities, and connections](#) to engage in true partnership?

5

What data do we collect at our school that can inform our school culture-building efforts? How will we use that data?

6

What have we learned over the course of the pandemic about how our system is structured to either support or suppress true home-school partnership that can inform our path forward?

7

What systems, structures, and processes need to be put in place to deepen and sustain relationships of trust moving forward?



RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

A

INVEST IN STAFF CAPACITY-BUILDING.

Professional learning opportunities that build staff capacity to form trusting relationships with families, surface and counter implicit biases and faulty assumptions, and share power are prerequisites to designing and implementing effective family engagement strategies.

B

HIRE SCHOOL-LEVEL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATORS.

Family engagement is the responsibility of all staff members. However, schools should consider hiring [family engagement coordinators](#) who reflect the community they serve. These key staff members often provide direct support to families, but the greatest impact comes when family engagement coordinators work to influence the systems and conditions that either promote or hinder high-impact family engagement. They play an important role in building staff capacity, designing systems and processes, and aligning resources to support effective engagement strategies.

C

LISTEN DEEPLY TO FAMILIES.

Schools should prioritize actions that help families feel heard and ensure their voice is reflected in decision-making. Listening through methods such as surveys, focus groups, and empathetic interviews deepens home-school connections, uplifts families' lived experiences, and provides critical insights for robust planning and problem-solving.



D

**EXAMINE SCHOOL
CULTURE DATA.**

Existing data, such as culture and climate perception survey results and attendance data, should be studied to identify areas of strengths that can be leveraged and where there are needs to be addressed. Disaggregating data reveals trends according to population groups; however, educators should be mindful of personal biases when collecting and analyzing data. Care should be taken to investigate root causes and engage in a structured continuous improvement process. Families should be positioned so that they are involved in both data analysis and the resulting improvement work.



E

**INCREASE
TRANSPARENCY.**

Clear, consistent, and transparent communication with families about recovery and rebuilding efforts is critical. Schools should anonymize and share data and key insights with stakeholders, as well as explain how and why certain decisions are made. Move away from one-way communication meant to only inform and use two-way communication methods that invite interaction and feedback instead.



F

**INCLUDE FAMILIES IN
SCHOOL DECISIONS.**

Schools are wisely leveraging relief funds to consult with academic, mental and behavioral health, and family engagement experts. Perhaps the greatest underused resource, however, is the voice of families, particularly those historically marginalized families who have also been impacted the most by the pandemic. Schools should consider assembling a diverse team representative of their school community and inclusive of these content experts to co-create a shared vision and outline a plan for healing and recovery. [Structured protocols](#) promote shared learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and equity of voice when leading stakeholders in the design, implementation, and assessment of recovery and rebuilding plans.



G

**DEVELOP AND
IMPLEMENT A
COMPREHENSIVE
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
PLAN.**

A critical component of any healing and recovery effort should be a coherent, coordinated, and integrated family engagement plan that includes multiple practices and strategies across the family engagement continuum, from providing intensive support services to creating school leadership roles. Schools should prioritize [high-impact family engagement strategies](#), such as [Parent Teacher Home Visits](#). Fidelity, however, is critical to realizing the benefits afforded by these proven strategies. Therefore, schools must consider the systems, processes, and procedures that support high-quality implementation, including codifying decisions into policies, allocating sufficient resources, and building staff capacity.

H

REMOVE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION.

To create a school culture that prioritizes family engagement, schools should identify and mitigate impediments to families' participation. This should be included in the family engagement plan. For example, schools should map the home languages of the students they serve and ensure interpreter availability when needed.

I

PARTNER FOR SUCCESS.

Home-school partnership, where teachers feel supported and parents are valued as equals, should be central to any healing and recovery effort. Likewise, other partnerships that address the whole child needs of students and their families should also be established and sustained to support student success. Research affirms the [value of integrated students supports](#) as they relate to positive student outcomes. Lastly, schools should work closely with their local teacher union to enact family and community engagement strategies given unions' commitment to recovering in a manner that promotes social justice, nurtures shared leadership, and strengthens teacher practice. Teacher unions are fierce advocates and understand the value of working together to advance common goals.



Closing

A new school year offers a fresh start and renewed energy for schools and all the people they serve – students, families, and educators. To make the most of this opportunity, we must consider both short- and long-term efforts that help us fully heal and recover from the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice. We must identify and advance strategies that not only address the acute needs of students and their families brought on by the novel coronavirus pandemic, as well as co-create an equitable, just system that enables all students to achieve their fullest potential.

Trust is a powerful foundation on which many other school-based interventions, programs,

and efforts can thrive. We call on all members of school communities to prioritize the development of trusting relationships with families. We firmly believe that by adopting an inclusive, asset-based mindset and investing appropriate time and resources in high-impact family engagement strategies such as Parent Teacher Home Visits, we will begin to realize the promise of public schools to equitably prepare every child to reach their fullest potential.

For more information about the Parent Teacher Home Visit model, how Parent Teacher Home Visits can support your school's healing and recovery, or for training details, please contact us at info@pthvp.org.

Additional Reading and Resources

We all have a vested interest in strengthening family-school partnerships to heal the traumas of a global pandemic and racial injustice as well as accelerate learning. Below is a collection of reopening guidelines proposed by family engagement, social-emotional learning, and education experts that teachers and school leaders may find valuable as they plan for a new school year. A common thread throughout each set of recommendations: *all recovery and healing efforts should be centered on trusting relationships!*



[By Request: Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers](#)

This school leader guidebook from the **Northwest Regional Educational Library** dives deeper into the elements of relational trust, the implications for school improvement, and how to build trust with and between staff.



[Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement](#)

This **Carnegie Corporation** report challenges us to adopt a more liberatory, solidarity-driven, and equity-focused approach to family engagement.



[Unlocking the "How": Designing Families Engagement Strategies that Lead to School Success](#)

Learning Heroes used national parent data and insights from the field to formulate actionable recommendations to meaningfully change "how" we engage families.



[A Restorative Approach for Equitable Education](#)

[Creating Identity-Safe Schools and Classrooms](#)

These reports from the Learning Policy Institute encourage schools to adopt a restorative approach to school as a mechanism for ameliorating racial inequities, and they offer guidance on creating identity-safe learning environments.



[Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: SEL Roadmap for Reopening School](#)

[Refocus on the SEL Roadmap: Actions for a Successful Second Semester](#)

CASEL offered these in-depth guides on how to use Social-Emotional Learning Critical Practices to successfully re-open school buildings and promote healing following a year of social distancing, but the key messages and takeaways are relevant for any stage of the pandemic.

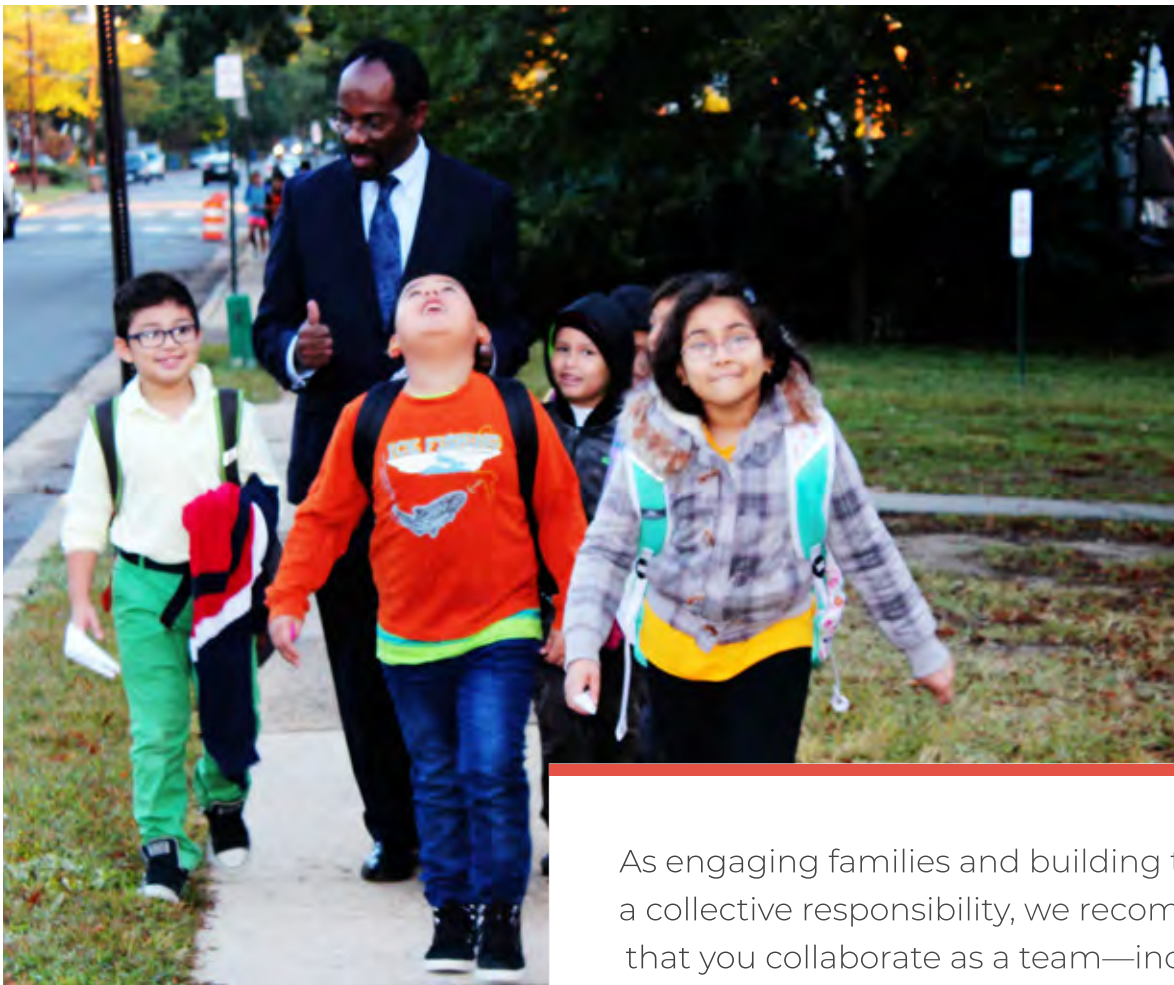


[Learning Beyond COVID-19: A Vision for Thriving in Public Education](#)

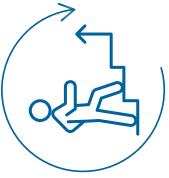
The National Education Association, in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers, outlined their vision for an equitable path forward that includes positive framing, collaboration, innovation, holistic support, and educator excellence.

Back-to-School Planning Tool

The purpose of this toolkit is to provoke deep reflection about your schools' current family engagement conditions and practices. It will also highlight the urgent need for proactive, thoughtful actions to engage families in the healing and recovery process moving forward.



As engaging families and building trust is a collective responsibility, we recommend that you collaborate as a team—inclusive of families—to work through the guiding questions and action planning outlined on the worksheets that follow.



BUILDING EDUCATOR CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE

Guiding Questions

- How do we create space that allows educators to heal and practice self-care?
- What supportive adult networks exist at our school and how can these communities be reinforced to nurture resilience and well-being?
- How do we tap into educator purpose and agency to meet the challenges of this historical moment?
- What unique strength does each adult member of our school community offer to our reunification and rebuilding efforts this school year?
- What have we learned over the course of the pandemic about what educators need most that can inform our path forward?
- What professional learning and support is needed to successfully engage all families, reflect on our own identities as well as disrupt implicit biases and racism surfaced in our practice, and address the whole child needs of our students?
- How can we learn about students' unique experiences away from school and use those insights to accelerate learning?

Recommendation	Current State	Ideal State	Next Steps	Timeline	Resources Needed	Staff Responsible
Uplift the educator experience						
Lead with grace and compassion						
Prioritize self-care activities						
Improve staff access to support services						
Plan infrastructure that strengthens teams and collaboration						
Invest in staff capacity building						
Focus on what matters most						

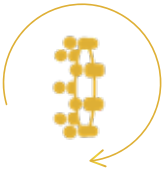


BUILDING TRUST WITH FAMILIES

Guiding Questions

- What do families experience when they come on our campus or interact with our staff?
- What does a trusting relationship with families look like, sound like, and feel like to me? To families?
- What do families say they want and need in order to build trusting relationships with teachers?
- What are the greatest needs of families that have surfaced from the pandemic and how do we meet them?
- What high-impact family engagement strategies do we currently implement? What can we do differently to better build trust with families?
- How will we amplify the voice of families who have traditionally been unheard and use their lived experience to inform how we start the new school year?
- What have we learned over the course of the pandemic about how we engage families that can inform our path forward?

Recommendation	Current State	Ideal State	Next Steps	Timeline	Resources Needed	Staff Responsible
Create a welcoming, culturally affirming environment						
Use two-way communication						
Avoid Eduspeak						
Connect personally with every family						
Leverage families' assets						
Build families' confidence and skills						
Support the well-being of families						



CREATING A SCHOOL-WIDE CULTURE THAT PRIORITIZES HIGH-IMPACT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Guiding Questions

- Which of our school norms, values, and practices best affirm the cultural identity of each student and their family? Which need to be changed?
- What conditions exist at our school that support true home-school partnership? What do we need to do to improve those conditions?
- What leadership approach is used at our school? How does this shape how families experience our school? How do we include families in authentic decision-making?
- How should we address needs in educators' and families' confidence, cognition, capabilities, and connections to engage in true partnership?
- What data do we collect at our school that can inform our school culture-building efforts? How will we use that data?
- What have we learned over the course of the pandemic about how our system is structured to either support or suppress true home-school partnership that can inform our path forward?
- What systems, structures, and processes need to be put in place to deepen and sustain relationships of trust moving forward?

Recommendation

Current State Ideal State Next Steps Timeline Resources Needed Staff Responsible

Invest in staff capacity building						
Hire school-level family engagement coordinators						
Listen deeply to families						
Examine school culture data						
Increase transparency						
Include families in school decisions						
Develop/implement a comprehensive family engagement plan						
Remove barriers to participation						
Partner for success						



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