Students perform better, academically and behaviorally, when parents are involved in their child’s education. Yet, it can be difficult to “get parents on board”. Traditional methods of calling home, requiring planner signatures and sending invitations to school events often fail to get parents engaged in their child’s education. Because connecting with parents is vital to student and school success, consider adding home visits to your routine.

**Why are schools turning towards home visits?**
Hosting family events at school just isn’t enough if people don’t come. Home visits set the foundation to build a healthy parent/teacher/student relationship and increase the lines of communication between home and school.

**What are the benefits of a positive parent-school connection?**
- Connecting with parents in their own environment can increase the likelihood that they will become more involved; volunteering, attending parent/teacher conferences, joining the PTA or attending parent meetings.
- Increasing parental support can improve students’ behavior and test scores because students know that you are communicating with their parents and that you are all on the same page. This is what I call “making a child’s world small.”
- Communicating academic and behavior problems becomes easier because you have met the parents, gone to their home, been in their territory. When your initial interaction with a parent is positive they are often more willing to support and work towards a solution with you.

**What’s the purpose of home visits?**
Home visits are about being proactive and building a positive relationship. This is not a time for sharing rules, discussing academics or disseminating information. Avoid taking notes when visiting with families in their home. It looks official and may make them feel like you are spying. Keep it relational and casual.

Focus on getting to know the family. Introduce yourself. Find out more about what the student likes to do outside of school. Ask the parents to share their hopes and dreams for their child as well as sharing your goals for the student and the school year. Treat the family members with respect and validate them as knowledgeable.

The goal here is to foster a true partnership and try to understand each other’s perspective. You want parents to see you as an advocate for their child and to get insight into the family dynamic. Valuing another’s perspective stops the blame game and can give you a peak into what your students’ lives are like outside of school.

Educators are the experts on content and learning, family is the expert on the child. Pairing up just makes sense.

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How can you make home visits successful?

- Discuss your goals with administrators beforehand.
- Schedule visits one to two weeks ahead of time.
- Let families know that visits will last 15 to 30 minutes and that your goal is solely to get to know the family better in order to be a better teacher to their student.
- Visit all your students.
- Meet families where they’re comfortable: their home, the park, a fast food restaurant, etc.
- Travel in pairs: Bring the teacher of the student’s siblings, a translator or other staff member.
- Introduce yourself and your partner.
- Show empathy and respect.
- Don’t take notes during visits. Do make notes after the visit and use them to include student interests into class time and relate to families during future communication.
- To close the visit, invite the family to an upcoming event. People are more likely to attend when extended a personal invitation.

Home visits can be very powerful in transforming the impact we make on students, families and communities. Parents and families can be one of your greatest allies in positively affecting a student’s behavior and academics, improving classroom culture and your ability to teach. The time and energy put into a home visit is paying it forward to increase student success.

We have more tips on creating connections here.