



**Parent Teacher Home Visits
Initiative
Final Report
Year 2 Pilot Project January – June 2023**

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Introduction

We are living in an outdated model. We need to change our system and listen to the voices of parents and engage with them. Let's look at the structure [of schooling] and re-imagine it.

(PTHV forum participant, May 30, 2023)

In mid-December 2022, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education informed the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) that its application for funding to support a second year of the Parent Teacher Home Visit (PTHV) Pilot Project had been approved.

The intent of the proposal for year 2 (2023) was to build on the experiences and understandings gained during the project's first pilot during the 2021-2022 school year. This would allow for a better understanding of the model as a strategy for encouraging and developing closer teacher/parent engagement and rapport. PTHVs are seen as a means to an end: stimulating and enhancing student well-being and success in Saskatchewan schools. The Advisory Committee recommended that the key research questions in this second year of the pilot would focus on two critical issues: (a) the integration of home visits into teacher practice and (b) ways to make this practice sustainable in a variety of contexts in school divisions in Saskatchewan.

Executive Summary

Following the news in December 2022 of funding for a second iteration of the Pilot Project, the SSBA contacted the 5 school divisions involved in year 1 and invited them to participate again. The PTHV Advisory Committee then arranged for training for new participants in January 2023. A total of 259 home visits occurred across the 5 participating divisions between February and June 2023. This involved 57 school staff engaging with 125 families.

In this 5 month period the Advisory Committee met twice and offered 2 professional learning opportunities for new school-based participants. Two new schools were added (one in Regina and one in Biggar). The focus in Ile-a-la-Crosse switched from the high school to the elementary school. A contracted researcher did site visits to participating schools in Regina and in Swift Current and connected virtually with the Division Leads, Superintendents and/or Directors of

the five participating School Divisions. In addition, members of the Advisory Committee disseminated information about the Pilot Project at two conferences held in Saskatoon (the National Congress on Rural Education Canada in March and the Walk Alongside International Parent Engagement Think Tank in May).

From the Year 1 Pilot Project four areas of focus emerged:

- a) relational congruency in small town settings,
- b) building relations with Indigenous families,
- c) establishing relations with recent immigrants and refugees, and
- d) the importance of leadership at the local and division level.

(See: <https://saskschoolboards.ca/wp-content/uploads/SSBA-PTHV-Initiative-Final-Report.pdf>).

In the Year 1 Report, the value of parent teacher home visits in supporting children's success in schooling was well-documented in the research on parent engagement and verified by the experience of teachers and families in Saskatchewan. (See also <https://saskschoolboards.ca/wp-content/uploads/008-Parent-Teacher-Home-Visit-Project.pdf>).

In a limited time frame, the Year 2 Pilot turned the focus on exploring issues of integration and sustainability of home visit practices. This included looking at modifications and adaptations of the original San Diego PTHV program to imagine a "made in Saskatchewan" model to reflect the diversity of school settings in this province.

An on-line forum for school-based participants was held May 30, 2023 to discuss many aspects of these issues. A follow up virtual meeting was held on June 6 with the participating Division Directors and/or Superintendents for the same purpose.

The purpose of this report is not to provide specific recommendations to the SSBA. It does provide five key findings or understandings from Year 2 of the Pilot Project.

1. PTHVs have a positive impact because they are voluntary for both families and teachers.

There is broad consensus from pilot project participants that a) PTHVs have a positive impact on enhancing student enthusiasm for schooling and opening communication between the school and the family. For this to be maintained, b) the visits must be voluntary for both school staff and families to ensure they build mutually reciprocal relations. (See p.14).

2. PTHVs sit on a continuum of parent engagement and are not a one-size fits all "solution."

There is now a better understanding of situating PTHVs as an activity with families on a continuum from passive involvement moving through participation and toward active engagement. It follows that there are different starting points on that continuum depending on the contexts of the schools and family situations. As a result, a one-size fits all approach to PTHVs is not appropriate and has never been advocated. There are many apt modifications of promising practice that have occurred in different contexts in Saskatchewan that fit on this continuum and could continue to be explored (See p.24 and pp.28-31).

3. Most participants agreed that there are ways to “fit” PTHVs into school practice.

There is an appreciation that PTHVs are “high-impact” activities and that teacher time so expended needs to be acknowledged as valuable and worthwhile. “Where there’s a will there’s a way” said one school principal. How this is done may vary from one school division to another; however within any division a sense of respect and equity for all appropriate teacher practices needs to be maintained. Practically and financially, situating PTHV practice within the time allocated for paid professional development time is attractive to the School Division administrators who participated in this study. There was considerable agreement among teachers and administrators that time spent in traditional parent-teacher conferences twice a year could be used in more flexible and imaginative ways to enhance parent engagement. (See p.15 and pp.21-24).

4. PTHV practice is consistent with Ministry of Education Goals.

The relational nature of PTHV practice is complementary to and congruent with and a useful tool for narrowing the gap between home and school and building a sense community for the academic and social development of children. This is consistent with the goals of the Ministry of Education’s Comprehensive School Community Health framework and of the educational outcomes for students identified in the Provincial Education Plan 2030. (See pp.27-28).

5. Leadership at all levels is critical for successful implementation, especially for those students who have the most to benefit.

This study demonstrates how effective leadership at the local school, division, and provincial levels is vital in building relational “family-centric” practices of engagement for the sake of the welfare and well-being of children of this province. Not surprisingly, this study also confirms that those parents and children most in need of such encouragement, support and engagement would have the most to benefit from such leadership. (See pp.31-34).

Foundations of the Year 2 Pilot Project

The pilot project built on more than 40 years of community engagement in Saskatchewan. This occurred in the 1990s through the community schools mandate to engage parents through 2 initiatives. These were: a) the use of Indigenous Elders and outreach workers to connect with families in the neighbourhoods surrounding community schools, and b) the invitation extended to families of pre-kindergarten children to partner with the school to enhance the development of those children. Both these initiatives were grounded in good intentions and looked for improved educational outcomes for students, but they did not necessarily see families as co-educators. Some have argued that they were built on an implicit deficit model targeting those “most in need” of support and the most to benefit from this form of intervention. This is in contrast to the PTHV model which offers an invitation to build a mutually engaging and beneficial relationship between the teacher and the family.

In addition to an action research stance using Indigenous methodologies, the project continues to be informed by the Ministry of Education’s Comprehensive School and Community Health (CSCH) Framework designed to “encourage strong families, school and community partnerships, and to improve student success and well-being.” CSCH encompasses four integrated components: high-quality teaching and learning, a healthy physical and social environment, family and community engagement, and effective policy.

More broadly this research is consistent with and aligned to the four areas of focus of the Provincial Education Plan 2020-2030 which emphasize: skills and knowledge for future learning, life and participation in society; mental health and well-being; connections among people and relationships between systems and structures; and inclusive safe and welcoming learning environments. The Provincial Education Plan 2030 priority areas and actions will address learning and assessment, Indigenous education, mental health and well-being, and student transitions. Implicitly the PTHV pilot project addresses the question, “how might home visits particularly and parent engagement more generally help to reach the goals articulated for each of these priority areas?”

Emergent Themes from the Year 1 Pilot

1. Relational Congruency

It was not surprising to learn that if a parent, for a variety of reasons, had a positive experience of their own schooling, then the benefits of parent teacher home visits were readily apparent to them and families eagerly volunteered to participate. Additionally, if families had experience of a home visit while one of their children was in a pre-K class, they already appreciated the benefits of building a relationship with the child's teacher. This was particularly true in small town Saskatchewan where there are but a few degrees of separation between a teacher and a parent; this "relational congruency" is not as immediately available in larger more diverse urban environments.

2. Indigenous Relations

The Year 1 Pilot provided opportunities for enhancing Indigenous relations and taking steps toward reconciliation with families whose experiences of schooling perhaps had not been positive. There is work to be done in overcoming resistance and suspicion grounded in parents' negative experiences of schooling. For teachers to overcome this breach between the intimate and private space of the home and family (on the one hand) and the open and very public spaces of the classroom and the school (on the other hand) was a challenge. Indigenous teachers especially were enthusiastic about this aspect of the home visits, in both the urban setting of Regina and the northern Métis community of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

3. Relations with Newcomers

A third theme from last year was how home visits connected the needs of newcomers to Canada to the school. For these newcomers, especially recent immigrants and refugees, the parent teacher home visits filled a void created by their lack of familiarity with the culture of Canadian life and educational institutions. This sense of isolation was exacerbated by the lack of contact imposed by the necessary constraints of pandemic protocols. For families new to Canada, home visits became acts of hospitality and reciprocity. Mutual respect grew as teachers learned about difference and were humbled in light of some of the challenging and sometimes desperate circumstances that prompted families to come to Canada in the first place. This led to invitations to family members to come to the school and share elements of their background and culture with the class. This is a significant act of integration for such families and serves as reminders of the diversity in Saskatchewan schools today and of the history of immigration to this country which has always been of people seeking a better life than the one they left behind. The findings of the second year of the pilot confirmed this finding.

4. Leadership

The first year of the pilot also paid attention to educational leadership. Parent teacher home visits were most successful when there was support at all levels of the system, from the school board, and senior administrators through superintendents and principals. This enabled PTHV practice to become embedded in the culture of the school itself. Successful leadership meant administrators and teachers were imbued with a “can do” attitude, ready for provisional tries, to look for small and incremental improvements in professional practice that in turn would translate into greater student engagement and success at school. The report of the Year 1 Pilot documented that “knowing how to do things differently emerges from doing things differently” (Holye and Wagner 2005).

In any new situation, leadership depends and builds on trust, a generosity that allows for an openness to not always succeed, and with the ability to adjust to unique contexts and circumstances. The impact of COVID last year was a test of such flexibility. Perhaps the greatest wisdom of leadership from the SSBA was in adopting a model premised on ***teachers and families invited to volunteer to participate***. This aspect of the model appears to have been one of its greatest strengths.

Integration and Sustainability

Direction for Year Two

Given that the value and efficacy of home visits is not in question and is well-documented in the Year 1 final report, and with new funding extended to the SSBA in 2023, the SSBA with the PTHV Advisory Committee asked, “what critical issues should be explored?”

Integration and Sustainability

One of the key questions raised and left largely unanswered at the end of the pilot’s first year was how home visit practice could be made sustainable and integrated into the busy lives of teachers and families. This in turn raises the question, ‘if home visits are not just another add-on, what might schools do less of in order to integrate this practice into the lives of parents and teachers?’ Given the value of this being a volunteer activity, ‘how might this practice be adapted and tailored to unique contexts and circumstances of schools, teachers and families?’ The assumption here is that looking for appropriate and feasible integration and sustainability is in itself a form of leadership at the division level, but also at the school and community level.

Since the exigencies of coping with COVID were no longer a major pre-occupation in 2023, it was hoped in this second round that school division leaders might explore creative ways this

sustainable integration might occur. The 5 participating school divisions would continue to look for innovative ways to integrate home visit practices into the professional work of teachers and think about potential ways to make it financially and practically sustainable.

Participating teachers and school and division administrators were canvassed for their ideas about sustainability and integration. An on-line forum to discuss these issues proved beneficial in identifying issues and opportunities. These informal discussions included the impact of home visits on classrooms, gauging the impact of the “new normal” that a non-pandemic environment makes for PTHVs, and assessing kinds and levels of leadership at the school and community level, and at the division and provincial level.

Limitations on Research and Practice

It must be noted that this report on the second year project activities needs to be read in light of the Year 1 final report’s research findings and literature review completed in August 2022. For the Year 2 Pilot, a number of constraints on the research and documentation were identified early in January 2023. As several superintendents noted, it had been almost a year since the last parent-teacher home visits occurred in February 2022 (because of the March 31 funding cut-off and some second visits held virtually because of COVID).

Similarly, with no knowledge of further funding, most participating divisions were unable to include PTHVs in their planning for the upcoming school year. Momentum had been lost and for some individual participants involved it was a bit like starting over again. The flexibility demonstrated by the participating School Divisions involved in engaging again on short notice is impressive in itself.

For volunteer parents and staff at three schools this was a new experience. In Regina, Arcola School and Ruth M. Buck School were added to the mix. In Rosetown, the Walter Aseltine School joined for the second iteration of the PTHV pilot. In Regina two seasoned administrators brought their experience from year one of the pilot to the new schools. In Rosetown a PTHV team leader from the school in Biggar took this role to her assignment at the Walter Aseltine School. In these instances these three experienced individuals proved most helpful in bringing the volunteer staff participants of the new schools quickly up to speed. Personnel changes at the school and division level occur annually. Teaching assignments change; priorities are shuffled; budgets are tighter than ever. Practically speaking the window for more home visits was a relatively short 4 months (February 1 through May 30, 2023). This compression limited the range of new findings.

We know little about the impact PTHVs might have if applied in a high school setting. Last year, the high school in Ile-a-la-Crosse had two teachers engage with 20 families who had students moving from the elementary school into Grade 7 at the High School. The family visits at the beginning of the school year became a capstone experience of the “keep in touch” summer program for this cohort of students designed to encourage and support them transitioning out of two years of interruptions and isolation caused by COVID and be ready for a full load of classes at the high school.

Other studies would be useful in finding correlations between PTHV practice and data derived from sources of outcomes and indicators such as records of student attendance, achievement, and transience, and assessments through Early Year Evaluations, and Math, Reading, and Writing scores, and OurSCHOOL data. Such studies would need to span several years and include different cohorts of students to control for variable factors. This would require a team of committed school teachers and leaders and skilled researchers and graduate students. Research on such a wide scale was not within the parameters of this relatively brief study.

Year 2 PTHV Participation

| School Division | # of Schools | # of Participating Staff | # of Families | # of Visits First/Second |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Northern Lights | 1 | 3 | 6 | 20 (12/8) |
| Ile-a-la-Crosse * | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 (2/1) |
| Holy Trinity | 1 | 6 | 21 | 60 (40/20) |
| Sun West | 3 | 16 | 21 | 60(30/30) |
| Regina Public | 4 | 30 | 75 | 116 (75/41) |
| Total | 10 | 57 | 125 | 259 |

*Please see ahead to the Made in Saskatchewan section (p. 29) which describes a parent-teacher home visit initiative of the staff at Rossignol elementary school in Ile-a-la Crosse at the beginning of September 2022, prior to the Year 2 pilot project starting in 2023. The numbers involved in that initiative are not reflected in this table.

Reported Impact of Home Visits 2023

School staff who volunteered to participate in the second iteration of home visits were invited to attend an on-line forum on May 30, 2023 to discuss their experiences and identify the value and constraints on the home visit model. (See Appendix 2 for the complete agenda of this meeting). Forty school staff were joined by 6 members of the PTHV Advisory Committee who acted as discussion facilitators and by 3 graduate students who took notes of the small and large group conversations. In the second half of the forum, specific questions were raised about the integration and sustainability of PTHVs into the repertoire of teachers' professional practice.

School staff for whom this was a second year of engagement noted, in comparison to last year's COVID environment, there was less hesitancy by teachers and parents to volunteer. As a result building relationships with families was generally more relaxed. Strategies for meetings were simplified and stress and anxiety were minimized.

Not surprisingly, as in the previous school year, teachers heard from parents who wanted their kids to be happy, to feel fulfilled and to succeed in whatever they chose to do with their lives. **Such hopes and dreams are very much a universal starting point for relational parent-teacher engagement.**

A vice-principal who was part of the pilot for the second time commented on the "snowball effect". The children and parents they got to know last year remained connected because of the relationship established with them. One teacher surmised that a sustained home visit program would over time be able to engage a large number of students and parents in a meaningful way. Another noted, "I continue to have strong connections with kids I visited last year; it's easy for me to check in with them" [in a casual, but meaningful way].

The stories of building relational engagement with families continued in this second year of the PTHV pilot. Teachers new to the home visit pilot "experienced a rich sense of purpose", as one of the recorders described it. Many of the narratives came from teachers who were participants for the first time. There are more telling examples.

One Arts Education teacher did visits with the Language Literacy Teacher with grade one students. She also has a child in grade one. The parents and children now see her as a teacher but also as a mother with shared interests and a willingness to talk about her own schooling and how she hopes it will be better for her own kids. The teachers are "part of the community, not just at the school" as one parent described it, so the relationship shifts. There is a social aspect to it; "not just about my child's academic progress" said another parent.

Parents interviewed in Swift Current at All Saints Catholic School in June confirmed how much they liked the opportunity home visits provided to meet teachers informally “as people, not professionals”. It feels “more comfortable” [than parent teacher interviews at school]. Another family echoed what we heard last year from parents in the Sun West School Division: we volunteered for this program “because we would do anything to help our child succeed.”

In one instance, a home visit allowed a family in Regina to share what was involved in dealing with a grade 7 student’s complex medical needs. As one of the visiting teachers explained, “We were now able to understand her absences, pain, and challenges. We have a much better understanding of what’s going on” [in the life of the child and the family]. “We were also able to share with her and her mother that we miss her when she is away.” In turn the mother no longer felt “judged” by the school. The teacher went on to say that when they do their second visit they will ask “how we can support the family over the summer by making connections with community supports and agencies.”

A family in Swift Current who had arrived in Canada from Mexico seven months earlier spoke of the kindness extended to them by the teachers at their school. The home visits have helped them “feel closer” to the new experiences in school of their three children (in grade 5, 7, and 11) and to feel part of the community through their connection to the school. In the Catholic School system, this sense of community is bolstered through the connection of the home and school to the church of the local diocese.

In another home visit, teachers met a single parent family where the mother works full-time and looks after her daughter, but does not have any adult contact and felt isolated and lonely. With her, the visiting teachers “brainstormed ways the mom might access low and no-cost programs in the community.”

At one Regina school, the administrative assistant was involved in home visits. She noted that there were many newcomers to Canada who were so pleased to be able to welcome school staff into their home. “Their children feel lost when they first come.” The parents too feel cut off and the school is often their only connection. “They had so many questions: How do we do this? How does this work?” Home visits provided “relief” to families new to Canada who did not know how else to access much needed information, direction, and support.

Another visit to a family with a student in the same school was to a single mother with one son. At school the boy always seemed to be distracted and “too busy to pay attention.” The mother explained that at home she had him doing an extensive amount of schoolwork. Staff learned that the boy’s time at school had become his time to socialize. His behaviour began to make sense and opened up new understandings and “new avenues for him and his mother and his teachers.”

In another school, a teacher described a student from the Philippines who was new to the community. During the home visit, the parents shared that the girl wanted to change schools

because she felt she was being bullied by some girls. Mediated by the principal, the children involved met with the new student to discuss and resolve the issues. “She’s a totally different person now – happy, bubbly.” The home visit was part of the solution.

In the second year, a new theme emerged of how home visits initiated ways in which the teachers and school might help families find supports available in the larger community. Identifying resources and connecting families, especially those new to Canada, was a concrete way of bolstering the families of the students in their class. In this indirect and relational way such connections play a role in fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. However, as a member of the Advisory Committee noted, “there are other agencies in this province with a mandate to support immigrant families”, but school staff are stepping in too, “doing this important work without compensation.”

At another school, a teacher returning from maternity leave, described her first visit to the home of a very shy girl in her grade 3 class. She discovered that this girl has a two year old brother who is deaf and she uses sign language with him. The big sister then agreed with parental encouragement to volunteer to teach sign language to the students in her class. “She really started to open up once we made this connection and I convinced her to sign for our school’s talent show.”

Last year and again this year, we heard the impact home visits have on relations between teachers and families and teachers and their students. A kindergarten teacher described a boy who “when I spoke to him would not speak to me but just look at the floor.” He was shy too when I visited his home, but the next day at school he came up to me and told me about his hockey game.” The home visit broke the ice and began to build a relationship.

And although the purpose of home visits is to begin to build respectful relationships, it also leads to problem-solving. As one teacher explained, “I have a boy in my class with behavioural issues and very strong emotions. I reached out to the mother and was able to connect her to some community support in town.”

Another teacher commented that building relationships is a “human not just a professional” endeavour: “I am a mother like the parents I visited. I always thought I had to appear to have it all together, but [in a home visit] I am as vulnerable as they are.” This was echoed by several teachers who, as one note-taker described it, “gave themselves permission to be a whole person.”

In Regina, a principal described a family with 5 children attending his school. The visit he and the vice-principal made to the home forged a strong connection between the home and school that had never existed before. The children were excited about the visit and school attendance of all 5 siblings improved. The mother feels less overwhelmed and sees the school as part of her support team and not as the adversary. The principal also noted that “by flipping the script”, he now has more empathy for this family and the struggles it faces on a daily basis and realizes

there is a “degree of vulnerability in having school personnel coming to your house.” This humanizing affect provides opportunity for meaningful engagement and allows for an impact on classroom and school practices.

A teacher new to the PTHV program enthused, “I had no clue that this family beads, and sings and plays guitar! Now I can invite them to the classroom. It was so nice to see the grade sixes be so excited!”

A teacher in La Ronge commented, “I have been doing home visits since the beginning of my career, but never before with a mindset of building a relationship with the family. The kids are so positive about the visits.” Now she wants to meet more families in this informal way and bring parent knowledge into the classroom.

A seasoned teacher and strong advocate for the PTHV program, articulated that the visit was his way to ask for and receive some constructive criticism. In the homes he asked the families and his students, “What is something that I can do to make your learning experience better?” This is a direct approach to influencing teacher practice.

Integration and Sustainability Issues

Two points of consensus

Over the course of the last two years, the issues of integration and sustainability have emerged and been discussed by teachers, other school staff, school administrators, parents, and school division superintendents and directors involved in the pilot program. The questions raised are built on 1) a broad consensus acknowledging the utility of home visits in building relationships between home and school and thus encouraging parent engagement for the benefit of children’s well-being and success.

The second point of consensus from the pilot participants was 2) that a home visit must be an activity that staff and parents voluntarily choose to do, and not an imposed or mandated activity for any one or group of teachers or support staff or families.

Five approaches to PTHVs explicitly discussed

The 5 approaches emerging over the past two years and explicitly discussed during the May 30th forum were:

a. Regarding voluntary home visits as part of the 1044 hours of assigned time a teacher is paid for, including non-instructional time for such things as preparation days at the start and end of the school year, and professional development days for such things as conferences and

professional learning time. Related closely to this approach is providing compensation in the form of time-in-lieu, in the way that after school and evening parent/student/teacher conferences are compensated and paid for as instructional time.

b. Regarding voluntary home visits as another “extra”-curricular activity like volunteer coaching or lunch or playground supervision and compensated under LINC agreements as “professional service recognition.”

c. Regarding voluntary home visits as “discretionary professional teacher time” much like the kind of lesson planning, marking and supply and resource gathering and other preparation a teacher does that is not “counted” or included in the assigned time a teacher is paid for.

d. Regarding voluntary home visits not as part of the assigned time a teacher is paid for, but compensated at an equivalent rate (in much the same way as the exploratory pilot project provided financial compensation for teachers’ and support staffs’ “extra”-time, over and above all their other duties and responsibilities.

e. Regarding all four of these voluntary exploratory options as possibilities that could come into play depending on the context or circumstances of the particular school division, the school, the teachers, and the families in the community.

Discussion of the Issues

General Discussion of the Issues by School Staff

As the discussions ensued, it was clear that there could not be a “one-size-fits-all” approach to home visits. Each of these approaches had benefits and limitations. It also emerged that perceived advantages and disadvantages often were contingent on the situation of the specific teacher and dependent on the context and culture of the particular school and community. What follows is intended to give the reader an understanding of this complexity.

Several teachers suggested adopting a hybrid approach when it came to modifying the twice yearly scheduled afternoons and evening of parent meetings with teachers. For example, part of this time could remain for traditional parent/teacher school conferences (these often include the child too) and part of the time could be devoted to home visits. This was seen as a way to accommodate both parents and teachers by giving them a choice of both format and location.

Another teacher suggested having visits via zoom (as happened to some extent in the 2021—2022 school year because of the pandemic). However, another teacher quickly added that

home visits are much more personal. “I feel grateful to be in the family’s safe space and treated as a special guest and am able to see the dynamics of the family directly which isn’t possible on Zoom.”

Another school staff member feared that in any hybrid model the focus on relational engagement would be lost and the focus would return to more traditional discussion of a child’s academic achievement.

Timing of Home Visits

Timing Home Visits

Timing was another point of discussion: Some saw efficiency and value in doing home visits right after school so “I can give my time back to my family.” Others saw the need to be flexible, accommodating the parents’ schedules as well as their own family’s life: “always in the evenings, even on the weekends, whatever works – works”, said one teacher.

Many in the discussion noted that teachers are “expected, but not required”, to participate in many after-school activities such as concerts and talent shows, and other events designed to involve parents such as family nights and pot-luck suppers. This “discretionary” time is not compensated in any formal way even though it is obviously aimed at building parent involvement and participation in school planned activities with the intention of moving in the direction of more engagement of the teacher and the family.

A suggestion that received positive endorsement was scheduling home visits at the beginning of the academic year in late August, using preparation and planning and meeting time, before students return to the classroom. The rationale is that this initial connection would allow for “bridge-building” in a personal and informal way that would serve as a foundation for the coming school year.

Several participants commented that the January start of this year’s program detracted from the pilot’s impact on teacher practice and on relations with families. They suggested that such visits would have a more lasting impact if they happened at the start of the school year. Others agreed, saying that schools administrators should have the autonomy to make such decisions based on their knowledge of the student population and the community where the school is located

Paid Professional Development Days

Paid Professional Development Days

In this wide-ranging discussion, several school-based administrators returned to the flexibility provided by non-instructional days devoted to professional development as a source of “real paid time” that could be used for home visits. One said, “As a school principal, I can allocate some of our professional learning time to do home visits for those who want them.”

Of the five participating school divisions, Regina Public has 13 such days throughout the school year for planning, orientation, in-service, and professional development. One of those days is for a division wide convention. Holy Trinity Roman Catholic SD identifies 195 total days and 184 of them as school days, leaving 11 days allocated for planning, preparation, management, and leadership. For the 2023-2024 school year Sun West SD identifies “197 operational days” and “181.5 instructional days”, leaving 15.5 days devoted to teachers’ professional practice and planning, including 6 days at the end of August before students return September 1. In the 2022-23 school year Northern Lights SD identified 10 Division-based and 4 School-based PD days for a total of 14 PD days, including 4 days in mid-October following the Thanksgiving long weekend. Ile-a-la-Crosse SD’s 2023-2024 calendar identifies a total of 10 professional development days plus “5 school holidays” over and above any statutory holidays. See chart below:

| School Division | Division PD Days | School PD Days | Other Days | Total* |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|------------|--------|
| Northern Lights | 10 | 4 | 0 | 14 |
| Ile-a-la-Crosse | 10 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| Holy Trinity | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Sun West | 2.5 | 13 | 0 | 15.5 |
| Regina Public | 1 | 12 | 0 | 13 |

Some see in these paid professional development days an opportunity to engage, perhaps with flexible timing, in home visits. Others are concerned that this will create disparities and inequities among staff doing “different things at different times.” Others asked, “What is there that we can take off the plate?”

Across the small group discussions and in the large group as well, there was a consensus that there needs to be compensation paid for the time outside of regular school hours. It signifies that this is important work in building relationships and cultivating family engagement. The research indicates that home visits are “high impact” in their results. A teacher stated baldly, “This is an important initiative but if we don’t properly compensate it, it will fizzle out.”

A teacher who provided strong evidence from his own experience this year of the value and impact of relational home visits, remarked, “You can’t be asking people to do this out of the goodness of their hearts. This kind of work needs to be compensated.”

A seasoned teacher who “loves home visits” mused about the different stages of a teacher’s career. Perhaps for younger and older teachers without young dependents, “home visits aren’t an issue time-wise.” But she went on, “no teacher should be made to feel that they aren’t doing their job because they aren’t doing home visits. It must remain voluntary.”

The same holds true for parents. They must be invited to participate as volunteers. Some families are not ready for home visits for a variety of reasons and this can create tensions and apprehension. While others did not disagree with this general assessment, they did point out that non-instructional time (as outlined above) is already part of a teacher’s “work-load” (responsibility). Using some of that time flexibly, particularly at the beginning of the school year, to engage with families makes pedagogical sense. As one teacher noted, “Let’s cut down on staff meetings.” We know “when parents are actively engaged it is better for students”. Another added, “Non-instructional time is already there. It is about [using that time] flexibly, not necessarily about more costs.”

Itinerant Teachers and PTHV

Itinerant teachers

A vice-principal reflected on the role of itinerant teachers within a school. Such teachers work across the school allowing preparation time for classroom teachers. As a result they get to work with most of the students in the school on a regular but part-time basis. Other itinerant teachers move from school to school teaching subjects like band or art or library. So while the itinerant teacher is in the school teaching band for example, the classroom teachers have preparation time which could be used for home visits. This person then asked, in such a situation “Could home visit time be contracted as contact time?” Another vice-principal thought itinerant teachers also have more flexibility during parent teacher conference time and could be part of meetings in family homes.

One such teacher said she liked that home visits don’t have to be with students that she teaches: “It gives me an opportunity to meet with other families and build a sense of community across the whole school.” Other teachers agreed that sometimes this was the most practical arrangement

The Role of Support Staff and Administrators

The Role of Other School Staff

Several teachers commented that it would be a shame to limit home visit work to teachers alone; educational and teaching and administrative assistants could and have played an important role. Teachers and school administrators as well as support staff themselves said that they have a crucial role to play in home visits and need to be acknowledged and fairly compensated. They often have longer standing relationships and connections with the communities than the teachers themselves. “We are looking at a narrow view.” But “EAs (educational assistants) can also do this work. It just requires a bit more funding.” A support staff asked, “Is there a long term goal or outcome for the implementation of home visits?” She explained that works within her union’s [CUPE] collective agreement and she is compensated on an hourly basis for any additional work.

Teacher Time and Work Intensification

Teacher time and work intensification

Several teachers over the course of the morning expressed frustration with the continued intensification of teacher time and how, even though voluntary and compensated, home visits added to this burden. It was one thing in the first year when home visits “were the only game in town” because of the restrictions on contact caused by the pandemic. But in the second year, it was “business as usual” and home visits competed with all the other practices and activities expected of teachers.

Others suggested that in a female dominated profession, teachers have the right to a work life balance. The question was posed: “What is too much to ask of a teaching professional?” Doing “teacher work” such as lesson and material preparation and marking assignments in the evenings and on weekends, has not been regarded as “contact time”, but meeting and visiting with parents and students is of another, “higher order” of professional responsibility, as one school administrator described it.

“How do we prioritize teacher time?” asked the representative of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation on the PTHV Advisory Committee. Teacher supported extra-curricular activities,

including after hour field trips and sports teams and travel and various “clubs” like GSAs and debating teams and year book committees and student councils, have obvious value in fostering student engagement and success. Such activities involve teachers who are usually compensated in some way for their time through local agreements between school divisions and local STF staff. “Incentivizing something signifies a level of importance” the representative continued. If some teachers are volunteering to do home visits and being financially compensated while some are volunteering for other activities and banking a very small amount of time-in-lieu, “that will create dissension and a competitive atmosphere where there shouldn’t be one.” Without continued additional government funding, “it won’t be sustainable.”

This disparity rests in the compensation for extra-curricular time that is no-where near the actual amount of time spent. Such School Division LINC agreements identify anywhere between 70 to 120 hours of “volunteer” time compensated by “one “day off.” Clearly such compensation is not meant to reflect a teacher’s professional time; it is more like a small thank-you for engaging in activities the school staff provide for children and youth outside of instructional time. No one would question the value such additional activities have on the well-being and engagement of students, but they are not activities specifically designed, like teacher visits in the family home, to foster parent engagement.

Several teachers noted that engaging with the family is part of a teacher’s duties in Pre-K programs. “That contact time should fit as an [integrated or embedded] element of my program.” The implication of such integration, however, is a reduction in instructional time with the children, but some observed that engaging with the child and the family could be seen as a more complex variation of such contact time spent in the classroom.

If that were the case, then a “staggered mid-September start to classroom instruction” as one advisory committee brainstormed, would make room and time for engaging families through a variety of strategies, activities, and events. This could include home visits for those families interested in having the teacher visit in the family home or any mutually agreed upon venue. Others pointed out that delaying the start of school would create a hardship for working families with child-care needs and be unpopular with most parents, many of whom already complain that teachers “have too much time off.”

Having explored the options and advantages and disadvantages of embedding home visits into existing practice, the forum brought the small groups back together. The conversation became more wide-ranging, with individuals wondering about provincial funding for education, current negotiations of the Provincial Government with the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, and local options and local agreements. The forum ended with voices advocating for greater recognition and resources to acknowledge the significant benefits of parent engagement and a call for provincial wide support for these efforts.

Views of Division Administrators

Perspectives of Directors and Superintendents

The researcher led a virtual meeting on June 6, 2023 with Directors and Superintendents of the participating School Divisions to share some of the ideas and suggestions from the School Staff Forum held May 30th and to hear their perspectives on the issues of sustainability and integration of Parent Teacher Homes Visits.

At the beginning of the meeting the researcher reminded the group of the comment by a teacher in the previous week's forum that "teachers can't be expected to solve these problems of integration and sustainability." This remark aptly turned attention to issues of practicality, decision-making, and the leadership at the division and provincial level such decisions will require.

In this section, the commentary provided by representatives of each of the divisions, are briefly summarized in order to demonstrate the commonalities as well the diversity of responses from across the province.

Sun West School Division

Sun West would like to "re-imagine some of the 13 school level professional development days". This division wants to encourage teachers to see family visits "as another form of professional development because of the understanding that it can make them more effective teachers."

Sun West acknowledges the need to create a strategic plan to guide the implementation of parent engagement initiatives. Similar to the current pilot project, it would include an advisory group composed of parents and teachers and school administrators from across the Division. Members of the School Community Councils (SCCs) may well have a liaison and leadership role to play in such an initiative. The SCC for the Biggar School played a leadership and liaison role in the first year of the pilot. Speaking broadly, Sun West School Division sees an alignment of parent engagement in reaching the goals of the 2030 Provincial Education Plan.

Regina Public Schools

The leads on this pilot were one of the Division's Superintendents and the principals of the 4 participating schools. With a history of outreach through Community Schools, Regina Public Schools understands the advantages of engaging parents in a variety of ways to enhance student success.

Regina Public favours what their participants referred to as a “hybrid model” by using some of the time devoted twice a year (Fall and Spring) for parent teacher conferences to make room for home visits with some families. For example, the morning could be used to schedule school-based conferences and the afternoon could be devoted to home visits. As the Arcola School Principal, explained, “not all families attend the conferences anyway for many reasons”, including lack of transportation and child care issues and at Arcola School language can be a barrier for some immigrant and refugee families. As a result “50% of families do not attend school conferences.” Home visits would remain voluntary and based on an invitation such as “Would you like us to come to your home for a 40 minute visit instead of you coming to the school for a 15 minute conference with a teacher?”

The Superintendent also expressed concern with what he described as his “show me the money” attitude. What he meant was that the compensation paid to teachers during the pilot was not just an incentive but a real validation of the importance of this kind of work. However he acknowledged, without any more financial resources, the so-called “hybrid approach” could be viable, but only on a limited scale.

Holy Trinity Catholic Schools

The operational lead for this pilot was the Superintendent of Learning for HTCS. This division has schools in Moose Jaw, Swift Current, and Shaunavon. In this second year pilot, parent teacher home-visits continued with families and teachers at All Saints Catholic School in Swift Current.

In preliminary conversations, Division administrators have been talking about using a professional learning committee as a place perhaps to “settle” home visits. A professional learning community, or PLC, is a group of educators who meet regularly, share expertise, and work to improve their teaching skills and the academic performance of students. Such collaboration usually occurs as part of non-instructional but paid professional development time. (<https://www.edglossary.org/professional-learning-community/>).

Looking ahead, the superintendent also noted that there might be an interesting “fit” to connect family visits with the exploration of “playful learning”, an early childhood education initiative in the Division. Holy Trinity also sees the advantage of identifying a person to be responsible and to provide leadership for parent engagement across the division.

Other School Division leaders agreed, “This can’t be done off the side of someone’s desk.” If Divisions make parent engagement a priority, there needs to be a designated position to provide support for a cultural shift from “teacher-centric to parent-centric” perspectives and practices and for it to be “embedded in the culture of how schools function” in the everyday.

Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division

At the heart of the home visit is the idea of building relationships with families and this can happen beyond the confines of the walls of the house people live in. (Again, this was widely demonstrated in year 1 of the pilot when COVID demanded social distancing). In addition to 10

professional development days and regular statutory holidays, this school division has 5 others days of holidays for students and staff. There is discretion about when and how to use them. Historically, these days have been used in hunting season and provide an opportunity for families to engage in traditional land-based learning, which includes a form of parent engagement, since land-based learning and the Michif language are part of the locally developed curriculum and the school utilizes local people to lead this learning.

The new Director of Education would like to see the school year start with a school-based community-wide traditional feast to celebrate the many members of the community, including elders and knowledge keepers and “just ordinary kokums” who actively participate in educating the children and to celebrate the “hopes and dreams of the children themselves for the educational journey they are on since “our children are our future.”

The legacy of broken trust imposed by the residential schools operated by Oblates and Gray Nuns in the area from 1860 to 1976, means that parent-teacher home visits were not automatically welcomed with open arms, either last year or this year. There is still a fair bit of passive resistance to what can be seen as an intrusion. The Division Director confirmed that this was felt by some teachers as well as by some parents. Some teachers, for example, were intimidated by the barking dogs outside the houses. But the teachers agreed that in the end it was a worthwhile experience to meet the families and be reminded of how much they care about their children and their children’s future. (Please see p. 29 ahead for a description of a unique home visit adaptation in Ile-a-la-Crosse in September 2022).

Northern Lights School Division

The impact of the Lac la Ronge Anglican Boarding School which opened in 1894 is still felt today in La Ronge, the administrative centre of the Northern Lights School Division. A fire destroyed the school in 1947 and students were moved south to Prince Albert or even further south to another Anglican School on Gordon’s Reserve near Punnichy until it closed in 1996. This legacy of being uprooted from home and family still resonates with the parents and grandparents and great grandparents of Indigenous students attending Pre-Cam Community School in the La Ronge area. Two teachers and a student support worker there participated this year in the parent teacher home visit initiative and worked with 6 families in the community. As in the previous year, the principal of the school was careful not to over-burden any staff with extra work and this was supported by the Superintendent for this region of the Division. During the 2023 pilot the participating staff were seasoned educators and eager to try something new. They had positive experiences of being welcomed into the homes and of getting to know some of the families of their students, including younger and older siblings in a “refreshingly social rather than academic atmosphere.” (“We shared pizza with the family and my student’s older sister asked me if she could paint my finger nails!”)

Northern Communities have a close relationship with the land. This is reflected in there being no school in the week following Thanksgiving Monday in October which is in the middle of hunting season. Teachers are typically involved in professional development during that week.

But we also know that there are many local teachers in the North who regularly hunt and fish with the families of their students. The same is also true of school personnel engaged with families at the local curling and skating rinks. In such ways informal parent-teacher engagement has been happening without it even being acknowledged.

A continuum of parent connections

Issues raised

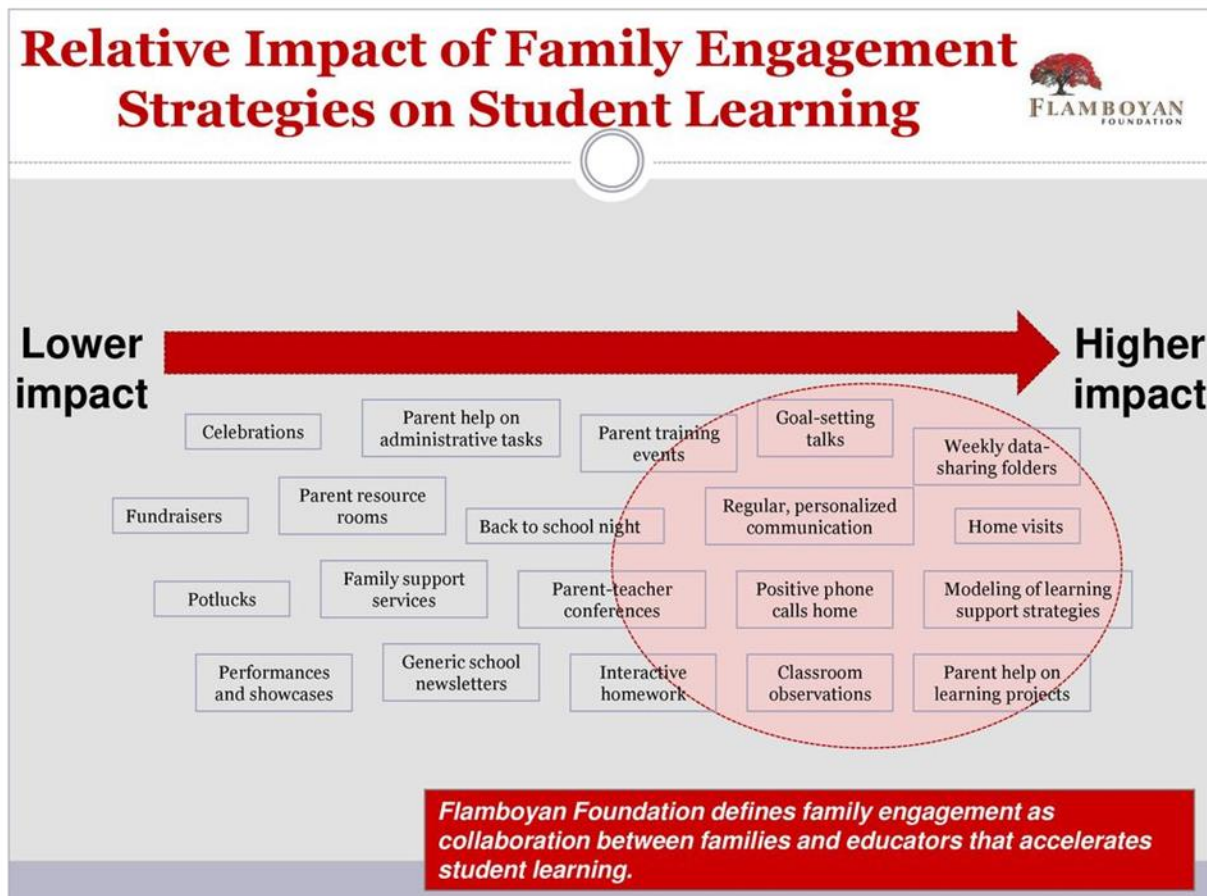
The continuum of parent involvement, participation and engagement

The Saskatchewan PTHV pilot project has underlined the importance of starting with appropriate steps to build confidence, respect, and trust between the school and the home. This is determined by the particular context of the school and community. The pilot has seen home visits occur in divisions where encouraging parent engagement has been a priority for many years and in other divisions where other priorities have taken precedence.

In the post-pandemic environment of the second year of the project, there have been many opportunities to welcome parents into the schools and organize events for families. The Holy Trinity School Division, for example, organized and covered the costs of a Family Bowling Night. “The event attracted lots of newcomer families who had never bowled before.” This is a good example of an effective invitation for families to becoming involved and participate in a school sponsored event that lays the ground work for further family participation.

Such engagement can happen, as one superintendent explained, in many different locales. It can happen on a sports field or at the rink, for example. By taking the initiative to get to know students and their families outside of the classroom, and “letting them know you and see you as more than just a teacher, but as an ordinary person and a member of the community like them” is a critical part of the engagement process. This is, in part, why such engagement is less complicated in a small town environment where “everybody knows everybody else.”

It is helpful to visualize parent engagement as a continuum of activities ranging from involvement to engagement, moving from lower to higher impact practices illustrated on the next page by the image provided by the American not for profit Flamboyant Foundation that supports literacy and family engagement initiatives in Puerto Rico.



PTHVs or “Family Visits”

What’s in a Word?

Superintendents and Directors also discussed the importance of language. Despite the voluntary nature of parent-teacher involvement, they realize that a “home visit” can sound like a threatening or at least an uncomfortable or potentially awkward situation. Perhaps the name of a home visit is in itself a barrier to the intent of authentic relationship building with the family. Undoubtedly in the past, the connotation home visits had was of surveillance by social service and child welfare agencies, as well as the Church and the School. Who would want to invite representatives of such authorities into personal and private space for fear of being judged?

Certainly the San Diego Model of PTHVs on which this Pilot Project is based emphasizes words like “authentic” and “relational”, and a respect for the culture and dynamics of the domestic environment. Even calling it something like “a visit with the family” sounds less intimidating and may be more appropriate in the Saskatchewan context. “Relational” in a home visit context means seeking common ground which is clearly the well-being of the child/ren. It does not mean focusing on the many differences that may quite naturally separate the parent and the teacher.

The Provincial Education Plan 2030

The Provincial Education Plan 2030

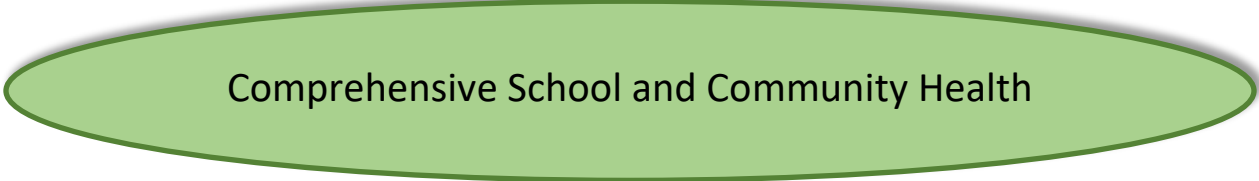
There was an awareness among the administrative leaders of the participating divisions, as well as among members of the PTHV Advisory Committee, that parent engagement, of which home visits are one striking method, can be seen as a complement and a catalyst to help reach the outcomes envisaged by the Provincial Education Plan 2030. The Plan has identified 4 priority actions regarding Learning and Assessment, Indigenous Education, Mental Health and Well-Being, and Student Transitions.



The extensive research referenced in the Year 1 final report, as well as the many examples from teachers, administrators, other school staff, and parents across both years of this pilot project provide ample and promising indications that parent engagement, through such practices like relational home visits, can improve students’ academic outcomes, honour Indigenous ways of knowing, support student well-being, and encourage children and youth through the many transitions they experience as they learn and grow to become adults.

Such transitions begin as children enter pre-K and Kindergarten, and as they move through elementary and middle years to high school and when they leave school for the world of work and/or further training and education. Parent engagement and family visits can be seen as particularly important at these critical times in a child's schooling.

As the division administrators and advisory committee members discussed, the priority areas of the Provincial Education Plan 2030 clearly are not meant to be understood as mutually discrete. They are linked and bound up with one another. Actively engaging with families, as this pilot project has done, illustrates this integration and the holistic nature of student success. Academic success will not be reached if students do not feel supported by both the family and the school. If they do not feel welcome and safe, and/or if they do not see themselves and their family reflected in the curricula, then the gap between home and school will only widen. If students feel they don't belong and are the "other", their sense of self deteriorates, their self-esteem is diminished and this interrupts and interferes with effective learning and good mental health. As a result, goals (like those initial hopes and dreams for their children that parents shared in the home visits) will remain out of reach.



Comprehensive School and Community Health

Comprehensive School and Community Health

Members of the Advisory Committee were well aware that Community Schools envisioned by the School Plus initiative of the 1990s were framed in a holistic way to position the school as a service centre and support hub for family engagement in the school and in the local community. Such a concept is also consistent with the Comprehensive School and Community Health framework already championed by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. This pilot project demonstrates the importance of engaging the family across all these priorities in an integrated way.

Comprehensive School Community Health as a framework for GSD



- High Quality Teaching & Learning
- Healthy Physical & Social Environments
- Effective Policies
- Family and Community Engagement

Division administrators and the Advisory Committee in this pilot understand that established practices and procedures need to be broadened by “ever-widening circles of engagement” (Kolomitro and Pearce, 2023). Communicating openly about adapting home visits in their particular contexts is a form of the leadership needed to move in the direction of a “made in Saskatchewan” model as the following section enumerates.

Made in Saskatchewan Initiatives

Made in Saskatchewan initiatives: the adaptive dimension

The Role of Learning Management Systems

The social distancing required during the COVID pandemic increased the speed with which learning management systems were adopted and utilized by school divisions to administer and manage learning. Systems such as Edsby and Blackboard and SeeSaw enable communication among teachers and students and parents.

Many educators see how these systems provide an effective and efficient and confidential on-line space for teachers and families to communicate about the assessment and reporting of student learning. Parents are able to quickly see how their child is progressing through a particular subject area, including curricular content, assignments, projects, tests, and grades. Some would argue that this accessibility to information allows for parental “involvement” and some participation, but not “engagement” because it is not particularly relational. Still others would agree that such information management systems open a space and time for the possibility of other more direct parent engagement strategies. The Regina Public system, for

example, sees how these information systems are helpful in initiating face-to-face relationship building, particularly for families who may be experiencing challenging circumstances that interfere or interrupt their children's learning.

As one of that system's teachers noted in the staff forum, many families are not familiar with these programs and/or don't have the technology and hardware to access them. Another teacher said she spent her first home visit helping the parents to access Edsby so they could see for themselves the work and progress their child was making. It made her think that if this kind of communication is assumed to be a norm, then the school should provide an evening orientation to the learning management system the division uses. Others suggested an on-line step by step video lesson could be posted as well to provide reinforcement for this new form of parental involvement. Such information sharing via technology can begin to allow teachers and parents to "walk alongside" each other, valuing and respecting the knowledge they each bring to their children's educational journey.

Several superintendents in other divisions noted that because of these on-line learning management systems, they have changed to "activity based activities with families" instead of the traditional parent-teacher conference. These are "more social events to engage parents in learning activities with their children and with other families". In other words, because of technology, the traditional parent teacher conferences are already being adapted and create opportunities for more parental participation and engagement.

One superintendent expanded on this idea: Let us for a moment, contrast the relative informality of a social visit in the home with the more formal 15 minute parent teacher conference held in the school classroom. The teacher shows the parent some of the work the child has done (or the child is prompted by the teacher to "show their work"). The parent listens and may ask a few questions, but it is a very controlled environment and there is no doubt "who is in charge." For some teachers "it is tough to let go of that control." It doesn't feel like a partnership or a collaboration, "and that is what needs to change" said one superintendent.

Building Relations face-to-face

But a learning management system is just a tool and not necessary to begin to build a connection between the home and the school. On September 7, 2022 the school staff at Rossignol Elementary School in Ile-a-la-Crosse posted the following notice through their informative and engaging Facebook page:

Good morning to our beautiful families

This year we are trying something a little different. We are heading out to meet you and our students outside your homes. Staff groups will be heading out from the school at 5:00pm and all we want to do is say hello and gift you with a bag of tea. This is one way that we would like to work on our relationships and relationship building. We would love for you and your child/ren to meet us outside your home.

There are several “adapted” elements of this initiative which involved more than 20 teachers and other school staff and more than 175 K-6 students. First, it was meant to include everyone and not to appear to single out any family or student. Second, it was respectful of each family’s personal space by asking to meet outside the home. Third, it was premised on the giving of a small token of appreciation as a simple way to start the school year and saying hello. As one teacher said, “You don’t go empty-handed when you want to visit.”

The Division’s Director noted this was a way to encourage communication and “start the school year off on the right foot.” Small gifts, like books for the child/ren, became common across the participating school divisions in year 1 of the pilot because “that’s what you do in Saskatchewan.” This Rossignol School initiative occurred outside the official PTHV parameters of the Year 2 funded pilot project, but it amply demonstrates the unique flavour that building relations with families can have in the local context.

A relational adaptation that Sun West School Division will encourage at the start of the 2023-2024 school year is for elementary teachers to make a “friendly phone-call” to the home of each of the students in their class. With the understanding that relationship building has to start somewhere, the objective will be to simply say hello, introducing themselves and opening a line of communication with the family that can continue during the school year.

Another Sun West adaptation that took place outside the parameters of the pilot project shows promise for the future as well. This initiative was recommended by an executive member of the local SCC who participated in the home visit pilot last year. Most schools work with students who require individual assessments and the development of individual education plans to best meet their particular learning needs. This year, the school initiated support meetings that were held in the family home. There the assigned educational assistant and the classroom teacher with the student and the student’s family were able to draw up these plans through conversations together. The plans benefitted from the parents’ knowledge of their children; the teachers’ planning incorporated what was possible and what was doable. The home environment for the meeting reinforced the home-school partnership required to ensure success for the student and “made everyone feel they were all part of the same team.”

Another made in Saskatchewan adaptation that happened in both years of the pilot project was the participation in home visits in both rural and urban environs of educational assistants and non-instructional school staff. These support workers often have close relationships with the students and the community in which the school operates. As CUPE employees they have some flexibility and are paid for every hour they work. The support staff who volunteered spoke of the benefits of meeting the student’s family and learning about the home environment and strengthening their connection to the students they work with every day. In a school in Biggar and one in Regina, the school secretary (aka administrative assistant) took part in home visits. Such a person is often seen as the “glue that holds the whole operation together”, and is on the front line for the parents who contact the school for a myriad of reasons. Including such staff in

home visits reinforces the idea that a team approach is used by the school to support each child and each family.

In a number of schools, vice-principals and principals also volunteered to engage in home visits. Not only did this serve to 'lead by example' for their staff, it provided them with an opportunity to engage with their school community in a more informal way. They were able to demonstrate their commitment to the success of their students by establishing a relationship with those students' families, in the knowledge that such connections build trust and open communication on which student achievement is premised.

With a financial commitment from the Holy Trinity School Division, All Saints Catholic School in Swift Current was able to start home visits again in September 2022 and visits continued over the whole school year. This continuity proved to be important for the success of the engagement of teachers and families, many of whom were new to Canada and with multiple children attending the school. This adaptation, using existing locally available division funds to continue to compensate school staff for undertaking home visits, is an example of innovative leadership establishing and then supporting local priorities.

Conclusions and Generalizations

It was not the intent of this report to provide specific recommendations to the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. The report does provide an overview and summary of the experiences of piloting parent teacher home visits (PTHV) in the final 5 months of the 2022-2023 school year. Its focus has been on capturing the experiences and attitudes and opinions of participating school staff, families, and Division Administrators.

This pilot project has been able to explore perceptions of the benefits and challenges of one particular form of parent engagement: parent-teacher relational home visits (PTHVs). It has opened up a discussion of the role that families can play, in partnership with school staff, in supporting the education of their children.

This pilot project has situated parent teacher home visits on a continuum of parent involvement and engagement. On such a continuum, a home visit might not be the first contact with a family. An invitation to participate in a school social event like a feast or barbeque, hosted by the School Community Council, can begin to break down the distance between home and school. Teachers can then assess how the trust is building and when it might be a suitable time to suggest that a family consider a social visit in, or at least at, the home.

During the Walk Alongside Think Tank on Parent Engagement held in Saskatoon in May 2023, Linda Young and Vernon Linklater presented a session titled “A Relational Conceptualization of Indigenous Parent Knowledge”:

We imagine the dismantling of the “protectorate” structure of schools and re-imagine schools where the parent knowledge held by Indigenous parents is used to co-construct all aspects of schooling. In this imaging and re-imagining, we explore notions of reciprocity and intercultural responsibilities within the Cree concept of ‘miyo-wîcêhtowin,’ a “good relationship” founded in an equitable and authentic partnership and a harmonious balancing of values. We invite educators to act as ‘oskâpêwisak’, that is, as individuals who are enlightened and guided by Indigenous parent knowledge.

The language used to describe this session speaks to building authentic relationships based on respect, humility, collaboration, and listening and learning, which are all key elements of home visits. This extends to the acceptance of the hospitality offered by a family in their own environment. Some teachers are able to embrace and embody this stance and “to be comfortable with discomfort” so that trust and learning can grow. This is a softer, more vulnerable side of teacher professionalism that can be fostered as they walk with the families who are doing their best to raise and educate their children.

Parker Palmer, an esteemed educator and Quaker elder, in *The Courage to Teach* (1998) writes that teaching from the heart with passion and love can only happen relationally and in community. Palmer suggests that the hallmark of community is “in its claim that reality is a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality only by being in community with it” (p.95). This is about “community and collaboration not fragmentation and competition” (p.96). Engagement through parent-teacher home visits seeks that community and collaboration for the sake of the children.

According to Palmer, authentic relationships seek out and invite diversity and find strength in difference and learn from it and are enriched by it. Such communities and individuals are characterized by being able to live with ambiguity, knowing that simple answers and right/wrong binaries are limiting. By extension we can learn to live with our own lack of ease by understanding that internal and external conflict can be a creative force that opens us to respecting the views of others. This work calls us to honesty and humility and hope – qualities that effective teachers by example imbue in their students. (Palmer, pp. 89-113. Cf. <http://www.journal.kfionline.org/issue-6/review-of-the-courage-to-teach-parker-j-palmer>) Western science is finally catching up with Indigenous ways of knowing as Ian Barbour writes, “[N]ature is [now] understood to be relational, ecological, and interdependent. Reality is constituted by events and relationships” (cited in Palmer, p.97).

Mohawk scholar Rob McCormick at Thompson Rivers University summarizes in this way: “What we must not forget is that the connection we have to family, community, culture, the land and spirituality [and those who came before us and those who will follow] is

what provides us with...knowledge. This philosophy is summarized by many Indigenous peoples in the expression: “All my Relations”. <https://www.tru.ca/edsw/research/all-my-relations.html>)

This understanding of authentic relations provides the philosophical underpinning for parent teacher home visits specifically and other forms of parent engagement more generally. It is also clear from this pilot that encouraging parent engagement can be initiated and supported by effective and enthusiastic school and school division leadership.

Moreover, parent engagement practices can serve as an integral response and critical factor in animating key aspects of the Saskatchewan Provincial Education Plan 2030. If divisions make parent engagement a priority, then home visits can become “part of the mix” of a teacher’s repertoire of professional skills for enhancing family engagement and student learning. Lessons learned in this pilot project about the value of home visits come from the experiences of Saskatchewan families with children in elementary schools, including middle years.

Are parent-teacher home visits for every child and every family and for every teacher and every school? Certainly not. But is a parent teacher home visit a proven and effective tool for engaging families and enhancing student success? Yes.

This two year pilot project has provided local evidence that shows the way in which home visits can become one of many approaches to parent engagement that school divisions employ in a variety of different ways, nuanced by the needs of teachers and students and their families and by the culture and climates of the schools and communities in which they live and learn.

The research is clear that parent-engagement is a contributing factor in student participation and school retention reflected in such indicators as school completion and reading and numeracy levels at or above grade norms. Collaboration between home and school based on mutual trust and respect could contribute to success in building, as the Provincial Education Plan 2030 outlines, student resiliency and the skills, knowledge and competencies they need as they make transitions through learning and work, and live their lives. Parent Teacher Home Visits are one example of the value of such a collaborative approach.

As the final draft of this report was being completed, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education introduced a policy, without consultation, dealing with name changes and the use of pronouns for children under the age of sixteen. The policy is really directed at children who are wondering about their gender identity and may feel they are “gender fluid”. The policy seems to champion the rights of parents over the rights of children and has raised immediate concerns, challenges and rebukes from many educational and political quarters. It also reinforces the right of parents to excuse their children from participating in sexual health education which allows them to avoid not just the biology of sexual reproduction, but also hallmarks of healthy and safe relationships, and the realities of gender and sexual diversities.

Documenting the impact of the home visit model in Saskatchewan since the Fall of 2021, I can think of no better use of parent teacher home visits than for engaging parents in such sensitive and personal and controversial topics as the gender identity and sexual orientation of their children. Such intimate issues can be awkward, embarrassing, emotional, irrational, and just plain difficult to say the very least for students, for parents, and for teachers. Here at the cross-roads of the private lives of families and the very public domain of schooling, there is a critical need: not for confrontation, not for disengagement, not for fear and anger, and not for a government imposed solution complete with a template administrative procedure and an accompanying form to fill out. On the contrary, there is a critical need to provide an opportunity for respectful conversations and collaboration and problem-solving between the home and the school, in the best interest of the child or youth.

In discussing initiatives in the contested and often conflicted fields of “I-EDIAA (an acronym standing for Indigenization, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Anti-Racism)” Kolomitro and Pearce (2023) talk about the need to start by building “circles of engagement” which can then lead to “a convergence of people, processes and priorities.” The “relational” aspect of a home visit rests on building empathy, compassion, and understanding as an outcome of the humility and respect nurtured in the frame-work of a parent-teacher home visit.

The very idea of a parent teacher home visit and its implementation in both years of this pilot program has provided a catalyst for a wider and deeper discussion of connecting parent engagement to successful outcomes for students. And not just academic achievement, but the achievement of hopes and dreams fulfilled through “all our relations” on each person’s life journey. Despite limitations and constraints, this pilot project on parent teacher home visits has provided strong indicators of how a collaborative effort of engagement between the home and school can benefit everyone: individual students and families and the communities and wider society in which they live.

“We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time ...”

(Richard Wagamese).

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Appendix 1: Year 2 Timeline of Activities

January 18. Meeting of the PTHV Advisory Committee (virtual).

January 24. PTHV training for new school-based participants (virtual).

February 27. Professional Learning: “Home Visits and Parent Engagement” presented by Advisory Committee member Kirsten Kobylak (virtual).

March 8. Visit by researcher to Rosemont Community School in Regina to meet with participating staff and administrators.

March 15. Professional Learning for new participants: Relational Home Visits presented by Advisory Committee Members Ted Amendt, Genevieve Candelora and Debbie Pushor.

March 20. Researcher met with PTHV lead at George Ferguson School in Regina.

March 24. Researcher met with PTHV lead at Arcola Community School in Regina.

March 27. Presentation in Saskatoon to National Congress on Rural Education in Canada. PTHV Advisory Committee Chair Debbie Pushor (with James McNinch video-taped).

April 5. Researcher met with the principal and two participating teachers at Pre-Cam Elementary School in La Ronge (virtual).

April 17. Researcher met with a superintendent at Sun West School Division (virtual).

April 18. PTHV Advisory Committee Meeting (virtual).

May 12. Promising Practice in Saskatchewan presentations at Walk Alongside International Parent Engagement Think Tank 2023. Conference Organizer and Host: PTHV Advisory Committee co-chair, Dr. Debbie Pushor.

Session 2 – Implementing Family Engagement at the System Level with Advisory Committee Member Vicki Moore. Session 6 - Relational Home Visits: A High Impact Practice with Advisory Committee Member Kirsten Kobylak, (and researcher James McNinch previously recorded).

May 18. Researcher met with the Acting Director of Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division.

May 30. Forum for school-based participants to discuss their experiences in the Year 2 pilot and explore issues of the Integration and Sustainability of the PTHV model in the Saskatchewan context.

June 6. Forum for Division Leads to discuss Integration and Sustainability of the PTHV model.

June 21. Researcher attended a thank-you BBQ and spoke with participating parents and staff at All Saints Catholic School in Swift Current.

June 26. Researcher met with a Superintendent with Regina Public Schools to discuss PTHV sustainability and integration options.

July 20. Researcher met with an Assistant Deputy Minister of Education (and member of the PTHV Advisory Committee) to discuss the issue of parent engagement as it related to the Provincial Education Plan 2030.

Appendix 2: Forum Agenda May 30, 2023

9:00 am to 11:30 (time: 150 minutes)

Welcome and Introductions (Debbie Pushor and Ted Amendt) (15 minutes)

A1. Whole Group Discussion of 3 questions: with intro to Guiding Questions about the visits themselves and their impact (James) (20 minutes)

1. If this year was your first year of doing home visits, please share one of the more memorable "meet-ups" or home visits you participated in? What made it a unique or special event? or
2. If you were involved last year as well as this year in the pilot PTHV project, what for you was the biggest difference between the first (and COVID impacted) year and this so-called "back-to-normal" school year?
3. Are there any unanticipated outcomes from the home visit experiences you would like to share?

A2. Break into 4 Smaller Groups to discuss the following questions, facilitated by Advisory Committee member and supported by a graduate student recorder. (20 minutes)

1. Please share some of the hopes and dreams for their children that the adults in the families shared with you this year.
2. Have these home visits changed your views of the children, having now seen them in their home environment? Have the visits impacted the way in which you and the child interact at school?
3. Have home visits impacted your teaching and if so, in what way?
4. What insights have you gained about yourself as a person and as a teacher?

A3. Whole Group to return together to share and summarize thoughts from each smaller group from the recorders. (15 minutes).

While still in the whole group, James will emphasize that all 5 options below are considered voluntary and outline the 5 that have been suggested and discussed over the past two years.

B. Small Group Sessions to discuss Integration and Sustainability of PTHVs. re-mixing the groups so they are different from the first small group) and again supported by Advisory Committee member and a recorder. (40 minutes)

Presumption: All 5 approaches that have been discussed to date, are built on a broad consensus that PTHVs are to be regarded as an activity that staff and parents choose to do, and not as an imposed or mandated activity for any one or group of teachers or support staff or families. The 5 approaches to be explored are:

- a. Regarding voluntary home visits as part of the 1044 hrs of assigned time a teacher is paid for, including non-instructional time which includes such things as preparation days at the start and end of the school year, Professional Development, Professional Learning Time and Community of Practice time, or compensated as time-in-lieu for after school and evening parent/student/teacher conferences.
- b. Regarding voluntary home visits as another “extra”-curricular activity like volunteer coaching or lunch or playground supervision and compensated under LINC agreements as “professional service recognition”.
- c. Regarding voluntary home visits as “discretionary professional teacher time” like the kind of lesson planning and marking and supplies and resource gathering and other preparation a teacher does that is not “counted” or included in the assigned time a teacher is paid for.
- d. Regarding voluntary home visits not as part of the assigned time a teacher is paid for, but compensated at an equivalent rate (in much the same way as the exploratory pilot project provided financial compensation for teachers’ and support staffs’ “extra”-time.
- e. Others have suggested that all four of these voluntary exploratory options may come into play depending on the context or circumstances of the particular school division, the school, the teachers, and the families in the community. Thoughts?

Questions to guide the discussion:

1. In your particular circumstances, if you were to continue engaging in voluntary home visits, is there any one exploratory “model” identified above that for you would be the most appropriate? Please provide an explanation of what the best fit would be for you.
2. Every teacher’s situation is always unique and not always static. Given your busy life and the busy life of families, would there be a “best” day/time for you to schedule voluntary home visits? Why?
3. Some participants have suggested that the twice a year parent/student/teacher conferences might be modified or reduced or even eliminated in order to make room for PTHVs. What do you think of these suggestions? In what ways do you think voluntary home-visits might best be situated within other communication and engagement strategies with families?

C. Whole Group: Sharing the Conversations (20 minutes)

Thank-you so much for your participation in this project. Please also note that if you choose, comments about any or all of the questions asked today can be sent in confidence by e-mail to the SSBA c/o <mbiro@saskschoolboards.ca> An administrative assistant will strip the names and e-mail addresses from the comments and collate and forward them to James McNinch anonymously.

Wrap Up: Was there consensus or diversity of opinions within the groups?

Final thoughts. Door Prize draws. Thank-you to all.

Appendix 3: PTHV Advisory Committee

Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative - Advisory Committee **Terms of Reference**

Purpose of the Committee:

The SSBA has received funding to extend a pilot Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative into 2022/2023. An Advisory Committee is being created to support the SSBA and participating school divisions in the implementation of this initiative. The Advisory Committee will primarily comprise individuals who have been engaged in in-service teacher education with Dr. Debbie Pushor and who have demonstrated a deep understanding of community education philosophy in their practice. Specifically, the Committee will:

- Be a resource to the participating school divisions (staff, board, SCCs) who are engaged in this initiative (at the invitation of the participating school divisions). This may include:
 - offering professional learning sessions for participating school divisions (staff, board, SCCs) to share high impact practices regarding home visits and/or authentic and meaningful parent engagement strategies
 - considering the statutory and contractual implications that inform this project
 - participating in and/or facilitating debrief sessions with staff participating in the initiative.
- Supporting the research connected to this initiative, including advising the researcher in defining the research question(s), methodology, and potential data collection efforts.
- Planning, facilitating and generally supporting a gathering of the participating school division staff to dialogue and reflect on their experiences with home visits, with each other and the researcher.
- Supporting the alignment/reporting of this initiative with the Provincial Education Plan.
- Contributing to the development of ongoing efforts to support parent engagement strategies, such as home visits, through a systematic sector-wide approach.

Background

Parent Teacher Home Visits (www.pthvp.org) has been in existence in the U.S.A. since 1998. Their mission is to increase student and school success by building and sustaining a national network of partners who effectively implement and advance their relationship-based home-visit model of family and teacher engagement. This initiative is in 700 schools across 28 States. Home visits are a high-impact strategy for family engagement. In the development of the interim provincial education plan for 2021/2022, the SSBA and boards of education advocated for greater engagement in building relationships and connections between school and home, particularly post-pandemic. Dr. Pushor raised the PTHVP model with the SSBA, and arranged a discussion with PTHVP to begin the conversation. A proposal was developed by the SSBA, in collaboration with Dr. Pushor, for a parent teacher home visits initiative in 2021/2022. The proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Education, and Ministry funding was committed to support this project in 2021/2022 and again in 2022/23.

Committee members demonstrate a commitment to:

- Community education and parent engagement philosophy and practices.
- Familiarity with the PTHVP philosophy, research, and model.
- Work collaboratively to achieve the committee's purpose.
- Provide organizational, technical, and/or practical/experiential perspective.

- Attend committee meetings and follow through in a timely manner on any commitments.

Composition of the Committee:

| <i>Member</i> | <i>Participating Organization</i> |
|-------------------------|---|
| Dr. Debbie Pushor | University of Saskatchewan, College of Education (Co-Chair) |
| Dr. Ted Amendt | SSBA Staff (Co-Chair) |
| Vicki Moore | Superintendent, Sun West School Division |
| Genevieve Candelora | SCC member, Pre-Cam School, Northern Lights School Division |
| Adrienne Durocher | SIIT |
| Tammy Wuttunee | Saskatoon Public Schools |
| Kirsten Kobylak | Teacher, Saskatoon Public Schools |
| Rory Jensen/Mike Walter | Ministry of Education Representatives |
| Ian Krips/Patrick Maze | Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation |
| Others | Additional education sector expertise may be invited if deemed necessary, and agreed upon by the committee. |

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Debbie Pushor and Ted Amendt will co-chair the Committee.
- The co-chairs are responsible for calling the meetings, setting the agenda and chairing the meetings. The co-chairs (or delegate) send notice of meetings, and records and distributes minutes.

Meetings:

- Meetings will be called by notice of the co-chairs. Meetings will be conducted virtually and/or in-person.
- It is anticipated that the Committee will meet 3-4 times during the project. It is anticipated that most meetings will be virtual and 1-2 hours in length.
- At least one meeting will be in-person to bring together the Advisory Committee with the participating school staff. This will likely be a full-day meeting.

Expenses:

- Each Advisory Committee member participates at their individual or organization's expense.
- The SSBA will be responsible for the travel expenses (as per SSBA policy) of Advisory Committee members attendance at the full-day meeting with the researcher and participating school staff.

Term of the Committee:

- The term of the Committee is from January 2023 – June 2023.

Deliverables:

- The Advisory Committee provides advice to the SSBA to inform the Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative. As such, the committee is not tasked with a specific deliverable, other than advice to the SSBA and the participating boards of education/staff engaged in this initiative.
- The initiative will be monitored and documented throughout by the SSBA, participating boards of education, and through the research connected to this initiative. While not specifically tasked with this as a deliverable, it is anticipated that the Advisory Committee work will largely inform these efforts, and the committee may also be consulted for feedback on any reporting/research report.

Reporting/Communication:

- Communication regarding the progress of the Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative will be shared through a variety of means. Participating boards of education in the initiative may report on progress as they deem appropriate. The SSBA will monitor and report on progress of the initiative with the SSBA Executive and member boards of education, and through to education partners and ultimately the Education Council of the Provincial Education Plan. Committee members may also choose to provide committee progress reports back to their organizations.

Decision Making

- This Advisory Committee is formed to advise the SSBA on its Parent Teacher Home Visit Initiative. The Advisory Committee is formed from representation of individuals and/or education partners who ultimately will make decisions regarding their own engagement and/or endorsement of the work of this committee. As an Advisory Committee, we will work to consensus on the items of work of this initiative.

**Appendix 4: PTHV Partner
Roles and Responsibilities**

| Central Office | Site Coordinator/Principal | Participating Staff |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commit to the 5 non-negotiables of the PTHV model.• Provide central office support for the initiative.• Participate in a focus group or survey with the researcher to document your experience with the initiative.• Provide the researcher with existing data sources such as attendance, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commit to the 5 non-negotiables of the PTHV model.• Support participating staff in this project.• Provide time for participating staff to debrief following the visits.• Provide time, as possible, for participating staff to engage with the Advisory Committee.• Conduct promotions/activities within | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commit to the 5 non-negotiables of the PTHV model.• Participate in 3 hours of training (virtually) for this initiative.• Participate in pre-and post-surveys.• Journal your experience, as you're able to, throughout this project and share your experience with other |

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| <p>achievement, transience, EYE, Math, Reading, Writing, OurSCHOOL, which may be relevant as indicators of the project outcomes during 2022/2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide participating staff with time for 3 hours of training (virtual). • Provide support and resources (e.g. time and travel expense) for participating staff to gather with the Advisory Committee (virtually or in-person) at one meeting (TBD) to share their experience with other participants and the researcher. • Ensure participating staff conducting home visits have or obtain a Criminal Records Check. • Log the hours of participating staff for the visits. Submit an invoice(s) to the SSBA for reimbursement of staff costs for home visits, and for any promotional activity undertaken, within budget. | <p>the school community to raise awareness of this initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to broaden the learning regarding this initiative within the larger school staff, and SCC. • Participate in a focus group or survey with the researcher to document your experience with this initiative. • Support the collection of relevant existing school data such as attendance, achievement, transience, EYE, Math, Reading, Writing, OurSCHOOL, which may be relevant as indicators of the project outcomes during 2022/2023. • Participate in training (virtually) for this initiative. | <p>participating staff and the researcher.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the logistics regarding home visits such as discussing with parents to confirm participation, preparing for calls/conversations with parents to discuss the initiative and answer questions, conduct two home visits with each family, log your visits and submit required forms to your division office for compensation purposes. • Participate in a meeting (TBD) with participating staff, the researcher, and the Advisory Committee to share your experience with the initiative. • Engage with the Advisory Committee, as you feel necessary, who can support you in this project. • If appropriate, align this project within your own professional learning plans for 2022/2023. |
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Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative 2022/2023 - SSBA and Advisory Committee Roles and Responsibilities

| SSBA | Advisory Committee |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure funding for this initiative and comply with the Ministry's expectations. • Secure the commitment of the participating school divisions. • Provide funding to the participating school divisions (actual costs as invoiced to the SSBA) for: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a resource to the participating school divisions and their staff who are engaged in this initiative (at the invitation of the participating school divisions). This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ meeting with participating school division staff to share high impact practices regarding home visits |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff costs to conduct two visits for up to 400 families (salary costs will be based on contractual arrangements and at actual salary cost of each participating staff member, calculated at a rate of 1 hour per visit x 2 visits in the year x the number of families visited). The maximum budget has been communicated to each participating school division, and the budget assumes two staff participating in each home visit. If applicable, school divisions may invoice the SSBA for any associated staff travel expenses for home visits, also within the maximum budget set for each of the participating divisions. ○ Events and/or communication or promotional materials to raise awareness of the initiative within schools/communities. School divisions have been made aware of the maximum budget available to them for this. ○ Contracted training expense associated with the 3-hour training session for participating staff. (School divisions are responsible for the salary/time for their staff to attend.) ○ Research – The SSBA will contract a researcher, and conduct a research project associated with this initiative. ○ Travel expenses of Advisory Committee members to attend a one-day gathering of participating staff. ● Arrange and co-chair an Advisory Committee to provide supports to participating staff conducting home visits. | <p>and/or authentic and meaningful parent engagement strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ considering the statutory and contractual implications that inform this project ○ participating in and/or facilitating debrief sessions with staff participating in the initiative. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supporting the research connected to this initiative, including advising the researcher in defining the research question(s), methodology, and potential data collection efforts. ● Planning, facilitating and generally supporting a gathering of the participating school division staff to dialogue and reflect on their experiences with home visits, with each other and the researcher. ● Supporting the alignment/reporting of this initiative with the Provincial Education Plan. ● Contributing to the development of ongoing efforts to support parent engagement strategies, such as home visits, through a systematic sector-wide approach. |
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