



# **Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative Final Report**

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# INTRODUCTION

In June of 2021, The Saskatchewan School Boards Association received funding from the Ministry of Education to launch a pilot project to implement a Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) Initiative in 2021/2022. This report documents the activities of the pilot project and the thoughts and feelings of the various participants from August 2021 to the end of May 2022. It is divided into 5 sections and 4 appendices:

1. Participating School Divisions and Schools
2. The Legacy of Home School Visits in Saskatchewan
  - a) Aboriginal Elders and Community Liaison Workers
  - b) Family Engagement in Prekindergarten
3. Impact on Parents and Families
  - a) Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
  - b) Concerns of and for Newcomers
  - c) Voices of Parents and Children in Rural Saskatchewan
  - d) Hospitality and Reciprocity
4. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic
5. Future Considerations
  - a) Communication and Leadership
  - b) Staff Roles and Expectations
  - c) Teacher Time and Work Intensification
  - d) Support for a Saskatchewan Home Visit Model
6. Appendices
  - A: Research Methods and Tools
  - B: Composition and Role of the PTHV Advisory Committee
  - C: Response to the Interim Report by the STF rep to the Advisory Committee
  - D: Parent Engagement and Parent Teacher Home Visits: A Review of the Literature
  - E: References and Resources

Consistent with the intended outcomes of this pilot project, the documentation and research is guided by Indigenous methodologies which respectfully honor the voices of the participants. An action research approach complements this methodology because both approaches are about engagement, inclusivity, dialogue, and building relationships. See **Appendix A** for more details, including dates and questions for Fall and Winter surveys and zoom conversations as well as interviews that form the basis of the data compiled from the participants.

One of the ways in which the value of this project can be measured is by the qualifications of the guidance provided. In this case, an Advisory Committee was carefully selected to include individuals with a depth of knowledge and experience in home visits and academic and practical expertise. See **Appendix B** to learn more about the Advisory Committee and its members, including participant profiles of three committee members, and a description of three professional development sessions provided by the Committee in response to participants' requests.

In addition, the training and support for those 68 educators across the divisions who volunteered to participate in the pilot was provided by The PTHV Project which has been in existence in the United States since 1998. Their mission, as stated on their website is “to increase student and school success by building and sustaining a network of partners who effectively implement and advance their relationship-based home-visit model of family and teacher engagement.” With the support of PTHV, home visits are occurring in 700 schools across 28 States. See [www.pthv.org](http://www.pthv.org) to learn more about this organization.

Saskatchewan is rich in abundant natural resources, such as potash and uranium and oil and gas, but parents and teachers would agree with the statement that *'all the children of the province are our most valuable resource; the future of this province depends on them'*. This pilot is about shifting educational norms - to encourage a long view animated by confidence in the future.

In 2019, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association published **Connections**, the result of their review of Prek-12 education initiatives, and consultations and visioning with Board members and other educational stakeholders across the province. The resulting recommendations emphasized the importance of fostering relationships and connections among people. This includes working to:

- adopt, in every school in Saskatchewan, community education philosophy and practices to create a welcoming environment where students, staff, parents, and communities are engaged in the pursuit of student achievement;
- commit (by all education partners) to actions to address reconciliation in the development of the new education vision and provincial plan;
- strengthen the communication and engagement around student achievement by making student success reporting more meaningful and consistent for students, parents and families.

Enhancing the relationship between the home and the school is a proven way to improve educational outcomes for students. See for example, the works of J. Goodall (2017), and K. Mapp (2013). Such improvement increases our province’s social capital through augmenting the sense of connection and belonging that is crucial for student engagement and student success. It is hard to put a price on such well-being because it impacts all aspects of our society. This pilot project mediates between the personal and intimate relationship between a parent and a child in a home and the very public and social relationship between a child and a teacher in a school. **Appendix D provides a summary review of the literature on parent engagement generally and of parent teacher home visits specifically. Appendix E follows and provides a list of relevant references and resources in this regard.**

## PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DIVISIONS AND SCHOOLS

Five school divisions and eight schools were part of this pilot project.

School Division	# of Schools	# of Participating Staff	# of Families	# of Visits (first/second)
Northern Lights	1	2	3	3 (3/0)
Ile-a-la-Crosse	1	2	20	40 (20/20)
Holy Trinity	2	10	32	55 (32/23)
Sun West	2	19	46	67 (46/21)
Regina Public	2	15	42	84 (42/42)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>249 (143/106)</b>

**A. Northern Lights School Division #113** serves a predominately Indigenous school population in 21 schools in 17 locations across the northern half of Saskatchewan. The Division administers four Prek schools, three 7-12 schools, seven K-9 schools, two K-8 schools and five K-6 schools. Division offices are in the town of La Ronge. Situated on Lac La Ronge on the western edge of the Canadian Shield, the town La Ronge is two and a half hours by car north of Prince Albert with provincial government offices and commercial and retail services.

**Pre-Cam Community School** is a Prek to Grade 6 school in La Ronge. The Town of La Ronge and its surrounding area have a population base of approximately 6500 people. Pre-Cam School has 500+ students, predominantly of First Nations and Métis ancestry. It offers a dual track English and a French Immersion program. K-6 students attend three satellite classes in Cree Language and Culture, Arts Education, and Physical Education. The school offers a Prek program in house as well as at the Kikinahk Friendship Centre through a partnership with their Aboriginal Head Start program.

<https://www.nlsd113.ca/>

- B. Ile-à-la-Crosse School Division #112** is composed of an elementary school and a high school in the historic Métis community of Ile-à-la-Crosse. It is situated on a peninsula on the Churchill River system in northwest Saskatchewan. It was the site of trading posts first established by the Hudson Bay Company in 1778. Today, commercial fishing, forestry, wild rice harvesting, and the hospital and schools are the primary sources of employment for the area's population of approximately 1200 people.

<https://www.cameconorth.com/community/community-profiles/ile-a-la-crosse>

**Rossignol High School** is a Grade 7 to 12 school. This year there are 164 students registered and eight adult students in Adult Basic Education Level 4. The school offers Michif language 10, 20 and 30. The school board has mandated that students have at least Michif 10 to graduate. The students' learning environments include both the school and the local outdoor setting for land-based learning. This allows the students to actively be involved in the formal aspects of education with connections to the local community and its surrounding environment. <https://rossignolschools.com/>

- C. Holy Trinity Catholic School Division #22** is a publicly funded Catholic school division serving approximately 2200 students in nine schools in the communities of Moose Jaw, Shaunavon, and Swift Current in southern Saskatchewan. Each of these cities are service and distribution centres for agriculture, including grain and mixed farming and ranching, as well as tourism and recreation. The oil and gas industries have contributed to the diversification of the economies in the area. A Catholic education means that Catholic Christian values and teachings are integrated into all aspects of learning.

**École Saint Margaret School** is a K-8 single track French Immersion Catholic School in Moose Jaw with a population of approximately 190 students. Students arrive by bus from across Moose Jaw and surrounding area. The school partners with the YMCA to offer Prekindergarten for 3 and 4 year olds. It serves as a feeder school for Vanier Collegiate.

**All Saints Catholic School** is a K-8 Catholic School in Swift Current with a student population of 500 students. It serves all of Swift Current and the surrounding rural area with a comprehensive bus service. The school has a strong relationship with local Christ the Redeemer Church.

- D. Sun West School Division #207** in west-central Saskatchewan provides Prekindergarten to Grade 12 education to over 6000 students. Sun West covers an agricultural area extending from the Saskatchewan border in the West to Highway 11 to the East. It is positioned between North Battleford to the north and Swift Current to the south. The division is committed to an educational philosophy known as PeBL: Personalized electronically Blended Learning. In 20 towns and cities, the Sun West School Division has 42 schools including 13 K-12 schools, six elementary schools, three high schools, as well as schools on 18 Hutterite colonies across the division. <https://www.sunwestsd.ca/about>

**Westberry Elementary School** is located in the town of Kindersley, population 4500, a service centre for the local agricultural and oil and gas industries. Westberry Elementary provides busing to all the Prek to Grade 4 students of Kindersley and to 20% of its students who live rurally around the town. The Filipino population of the school has risen to 17% in recent years. The school is explicitly committed to valuing and encouraging parent engagement in a variety of ways.

**Biggar Central School 2000** is a Prek to Grade 12 school in Biggar, an agricultural and railway service town of 2100 people about 100 km west of Saskatoon. The school has a current population of 334 students, a third of whom come from the rural catchment area around the town. Many high school students take advantage of the services of the division's Distance Learning Centre to access on-line courses to complete their program.

- E. Regina Public School Division #4**, one of the largest school divisions in the province, serves the educational needs of more than 24,500 students in 44 elementary schools, eight high schools, three faith-based associate schools, as well as at Campus Regina Public and the Allan Blakeney Adult Campus.

**Rosemont Community School** is a Prek to Grade 8 Community School in the neighbourhood of Rosemont/Mount Royal in the central west area of Regina. The school reports a 10% newcomer population and a 35-40% self-identified Indigenous population. Household incomes in this neighbourhood are below the Regina average.

**Dr. George Ferguson School** is a Prek to Grade 8 School located in the Dewdney East neighbourhood. Census Canada information (2016) indicates the school catchment area has a 25% self-identified immigrant population and a 10% self-identified Indigenous population. Household incomes are below the Regina average.

## THE LEGACY OF HOME VISITS IN SASKATCHEWAN

*Historically, Saskatchewan's education system, and the considerable successes it has achieved, have been grounded in a tradition of community-based participation and leadership. Locally elected boards of education ensure local input and control. Today, boards of education and schools across the province are using a variety of approaches to enhance partnerships among parents, community members and Aboriginal peoples. (Saskatchewan Learning, 1999, p. 3)*

This quote may be aspirational, but it serves to illustrate that, at least for the last 25 years in this province, the issue of parent and community engagement has been identified as a key component of student achievement and well-being.

Initiatives such as Aboriginal Control of education, for example, was in part a response to the Federal Government's move to integrate Aboriginal children from residential schools into provincially run public schools. In 1972 the Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) released its influential policy statement, *Indian Control of Indian Education*. In the same year the Métis community of Île à la Crosse created its own school and school board which remains a stand-alone public school division to this day. Local control can also be seen in the grass-roots Community School initiatives of the mid to late 1970s as well as in parent driven initiatives to start independent and affiliated schools and now completely integrated schools such as the Saskatoon French School which emphasized parental roles in staffing, curricula, and governance. After years of community development work by the Saskatchewan Native Women's Association, Joe Duquette High School opened in 1980 as the Saskatoon Native Survival School. A unique tripartite agreement with the Catholic School Division and the province's Ministry of Education empowered the Parent Council to represent the local Native Community and to negotiate contracts and participate in all aspects of the development of the school (Haig-Brown et al, 1997, p.76).

One of the main principles of such parent engagement is that *the family is the first and continuing educator of the child*. Other such related values include:

*All families and schools want the best for their children.*

*All children have the right to the opportunity to reach their full potential.*

*The diversity of families is valued and is used as a resource for building partnerships and communities.* (from Family/School Partnerships Framework: A guide for schools and families p.4.) <<http://www.family-school.org.au/s/family-school-partnerships/>>

It has been more than 40 years since eleven schools in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina were the first to be designated Community Schools with enhanced funding to make better connections with local communities and particularly with the First Nations and Métis students in these cities.

In negotiations between the Regina Community Schools Committee and the Regina Public Board and the Ministry of Education in the 1970's, the community working group insisted that parents must be actively involved in staffing decisions because:

***If staff chosen ...cannot relate to the people of the area, the program will not succeed. If the staff cannot even get in to the homes to meet the parents [and other family members] there is little they can do to actually involve the community in the school (p. 3).***

In addition to the province's two universities, primary partners in Saskatchewan's provincial education system – the Teachers' Federation, the School Boards Association, and the Ministry of Education – have all contributed to the research and development of policy and best practice

which demonstrate the benefits of family and community engagement in the education of children. (See Appendices D and E)

The scope of parent connections to schools has been well-documented, taking many forms on a continuum ranging from involvement and participation to active engagement: from accompanying a class on a field-trip or helping to fundraise for some new equipment for the school to visiting a child’s classroom and sharing a skill or new knowledge right up to being engaged in school governance and the hiring of staff and making decisions about curriculum (Saskatchewan Learning, Policy Framework, 1999, p. 13).

In the last decade, the topic of **home visits** in particular has become a growing field of inquiry, research, study, and teaching in this province. At the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Education, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certificate course ECUR 485, *Parent Engagement in the Early Years*, requires students to engage in home visits with families in order to experience the building of relational trust and to reflect on the impact it can have on integrating this new knowledge into the classroom curriculum. Three graduate courses, ECUR 822, *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*, ECUR 823, *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning*, and ECUR 805, *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement*, extend and link this practical and experiential understanding to broader theories and practices of parent engagement.

As part of this historical emphasis in Saskatchewan on parent and community partnerships and engagement, two initiatives specifically identified the family home as a space where the school and the family can connect and champion the importance of building home-school relationships through home visits. The first initiative is the role played by Aboriginal Elders and school-community (outreach or liaison) workers. The second is the role played by Prekindergarten teachers. Over the years, Elders and community outreach workers and early learning educators have supported and linked the home environment to the school. In both fields, this has been an articulated goal with clearly identified values and belief systems in support of children’s education.

Because this particular pilot project focuses on the impact of relational home visits, it is important to understand how these precursor initiatives prepared and defined the Saskatchewan context. It makes sense to understand relational home visits as an extension of the concept of the parents and the family as key elements and co-educators of a child’s learning and education. If nothing else, it is helpful to see this pilot project as an extension of the knowledge gained through the many years of home visits made in Prek education and in the work of school/community outreach workers.

#### **a) Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> Elders & Community Liaison Workers**

In 1997-98, IMEAC (the Indian and Métis Education Advisory Committee to the Ministry of

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Aboriginal” is used in this section in reference to the language used during this time period, also used in the documents referenced. The term “Indigenous” is more commonly used today.



Education) (2001) recommended expanded roles for “Aboriginal elders and community liaison/resource people to assist students and their families” (p. 4). The resulting work in school divisions and the subsequent Ministry publication (2001) supporting and documenting this initiative is more than 20 years old, but the role of home visits is clearly identified as one of the keys to supporting student success. A few examples from this document illustrate this.

The Ministry’s 2001 document identified Elders and community workers as providing positive role models for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and school staff and noted their ability to promote diversity and address racism. But this work was happening, not just in the schools; it happened in family homes and in the community.

*An Aboriginal community worker who knows the community and is respected in the community can help the school enhance its relationship with Aboriginal families. **This can be accomplished by conducting home visits, coordinating meetings between staff and families, and organizing school/community cultural activities such as pow-wows, traditional ceremonies and feasts that involve families.... By working closely with families and the school, the community worker can encourage parents and extended family members to become more involved in their child’s education, both in school and at home** (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 13).*

The current pilot project is premised on such understandings that occurred before the 2004 amalgamation of 71 school divisions into 12 new ones and the current configuration of 27 school divisions.

- At the Cando School (Biggar School Division), the role of the Aboriginal Counsellor included “**encouraging parent and community involvement**” (p. 15).
- In Prince Albert, the role of a Cultural Advisor included “*arranging for appropriate Elders and resource people to visit schools, **families and community**” (p. 15).*
- The “Grandmother’s Program” in Meadow Lake School Division hired individuals who fit the profile of a family member (“*like a grandmother who should not mind getting hugs!*”) helping to meet day to day needs of students; coordinating a “welcome wagon” program for the school; “**conducting home visits and phoning homes to offer assistance and counselling and advising students and their families. “The [home] visits should be kept light and positive; the grandmothers are not social workers**” (p. 36).
- At Wagner Elementary School in Nipawin, an Aboriginal Outreach Worker helped students and families become more involved in school. “*She **conducts home visits and provides personal counselling to students**” (p. 16).*
- At the Prince Arthur School in Moose Jaw, in the initial year of the program, “**the Elder in residence was involved in a lot of home visits**” and in social activities to encourage parents to feel welcome at the school. The following year she did not conduct as many home visits “*because many parents are now involved*” (p. 37).

- In Saskatoon, the Aboriginal outreach program was for three elementary schools where it was important to *“be aware of community politics and sensitivities”*. **But “the most valuable aspect of outreach [was making] the contacts with families”** (p. 37).
- With a school culture and environment that were becoming more welcoming and respectful at Princess Alexandra school, for example, the staff members went out of their way to involve parents and community members, including **“stop[ping] by a new family’s home to welcome them and begin building the relationship”** (Amendt & Bousquet, 2006, p. 23). One of the teachers there commented, *“It is important to “meet [families] on their terms where they feel safe. By going to their home, rather than having them come to you.”* Another added, *“...parents are invited to engage in the school, but as the school we are also invited to engage in that family’s life* (Pushor & Ruitenber, 2005, p. 41).
- In North Central Regina, from schools like Seven Stones Community School and Kitchener Community School, teachers, teacher associates, community coordinators, and school counsellors **would go out to do home visits and would discuss the parents' "hopes and dreams" for their children** in addition to finding out what supports were needed by the family.

Learning of this pilot project, a colleague recalled fondly her internship at St John’s Community School in Saskatoon in 1979. She was paired with a “Sister Ursula and helped coordinate visits to the home of the families of the students.” She recalled, “I had to do an audio-visual presentation at the school assembly about the visits which were intended to encourage student self-worth and self-esteem and to break-down barriers between staff and students.”

Stephen, a middle-years teacher at this project’s participating school in Biggar remembered “doing home visits to prepare for report card day,” more than a decade ago in his first year of teaching in the Métis community of Beauval in north-west Saskatchewan. A “green outsider from Toronto” with a new teaching degree and little experience and scant knowledge of the people of the area, he was “quite nervous to knock on the doors of his students’ homes.” But both he and his wife remember being quickly welcomed warmly into the community and the home visits were part of that.

All of these examples illustrate the legacy of home visits in Saskatchewan on which the current pilot project is built.

## **b) Family Engagement in Prekindergarten**

In collaboration with school divisions, the Ministry of Education introduced the Prekindergarten program in the province’s 27 community schools in 1996-97. In 2017, there were 316 ministry funded programs across the province. The ministry provides funding, program and policy guidelines and consultative support. School divisions hire staff, select children and operate the program (Prekindergarten Essentials, 2017).

Prekindergarten programs are an important element of the community school model in Saskatchewan, providing holistic education for children living in vulnerable circumstances and/or who have a developmental delay. Peggy Adamack, who opened one of the first Prekindergarten in the province in 1996, at Kitchener Community School in Regina, and who also consulted on many foundational government documents, remembered the initial informal meetings with families and, where there were more children than spaces, the community school council helped to decide based on need (Recorded conversation, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022).

To accompany the newly opened Prekindergarten program in 1996, Saskatchewan Learning (now Saskatchewan Ministry of Education) created *Better Beginnings, Better Futures: Effective Policy and Guidelines for Prekindergarten in Saskatchewan Community Schools*, which was subsequently revised in 2004 and 2008. This document lays out the framework and program components needed to run a successful Prekindergarten. Within the document community partnerships and parent and family engagement are listed as “central to the operation of an effective Prekindergarten and to the children’s learning” with **home visiting/liaison being listed as “characteristics of effective parent and family engagement”** (2004, pp. 12-14; 2008, pp.14-15).

The document goes on to explain that **home visits are an important way to build trust between home and school and are also included as one of the roles of teachers and education assistants/teacher associates** (2004, pp. 48-49; 2008, pp. 53-54).

A supplemental resource to the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* document was created for school administrators in 2009. Family engagement is again emphasized within this document with **home visits highlighted as an important way to build relationships**. Administrators are provided with information on scheduling and implementing home visits as well as guidelines for safety precautions (pp. 13-14 & pp. 17-18).

In 2008, the *Play and Exploration Guide* was created (reprinted in 2013 and 2021) with the aim to “promote high quality, age appropriate, play based learning experiences for three-, four- and five-year old children in a variety of settings” **including Prekindergarten but also home and childcare settings as well** (p. 1). The guide promotes strong positive relationships through partnering with children, parents and community (p. 5) and, although it does not specifically mention home visits, the document does note building mutual trust involves the sharing of knowledge and power between educators and parents (p. 50). In 2008, *Leading for Change* was created to guide school administrators in their support of Prekindergarten educators who were shifting their teaching practice to implement the *Play and Exploration Guide*. This document does not specifically speak to home visits, however, it does provide ideas and suggestions to aid administrators in their support of Prekindergarten teachers and family engagement initiatives.

As a complement to both the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* (2008) and *Play and Exploration* (2008), the *Family Engagement in Prekindergarten* document was created in 2012. Here **home visits are described as an important way for educators to learn family knowledge and share information between home and school. Educators are encouraged to do three home visits**

**per year per child, with the first visit being a chance to get to know the family and the second and third visits a chance to share student progress and celebrate their growth (pp.17-19).**

Most recently, in *Prekindergarten Essentials: Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines* (2017), family engagement is once again highlighted and **home visits are listed as one of the roles and responsibilities of both the teacher and the teacher associate** (pp. 23-24).

Melanie Lynchuk, an early years teacher with Saskatoon Public Schools, began home visits in 2011 when she taught Grade 2 at Dr. John G Egnatoff School. She stated,

*The reason I wanted to do them in Grade 2 was because prior to that I taught Kindergarten and I had strong connections to my students and their families. [But] by Grade 2 it kind of falls off a bit* (Recorded conversation, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

She also spoke about the importance of home visits being about establishing relationships with families and about **“building the families up.”** The benefits are not only to students and families, **home visits also benefit teachers**, as Melanie explains,

*I feel like I have never been so fulfilled as a person being able to connect to all of these families, because I come to work and I ... I see these families that I really care about and love and I see their kids every day and I hear stories about how they are doing* (Recorded conversation, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

There are also a handful of other teachers who have taken on home visits in Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. Kirsten Kobylak, a member of the Home Visit Advisory Committee began home visits in 2015 when she was teaching Grade 1 at Willowgrove School in Saskatoon. She explained,

*It just opens up a whole new way of communicating and a level of confidence and understanding so we don't need to be afraid to talk to families and they don't need to be afraid to come into a school* (Recorded conversation, January, 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

The provincial government has a long history of supporting Prekindergarten programs, and their family engagement and home visit initiatives. Prekindergarten teachers have many valuable lived experiences from visiting with families, either in their homes, at the park, in near-by restaurants, and/or in the classroom.

Home visits have evolved over time within Prekindergarten programs, however it is important to note that **designated time continues to be provided for educators for home visits** to build home-school partnerships in this important way, although some school divisions are considering reducing or abandoning home visits for PreK staff because of budget constraints.

## REPORTED IMPACT ON PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Across the five divisions, school and division staff reported that the home visits were resonating with a diverse group of parents in a positive way.

From a principal:

*The parents I have talked to who volunteered have been very positive about the impact it [home visit] has had on their children and on their relationship with the teachers.*

A teacher noted,

*The parents wanted us to know that [they think] we do a good job at school and that they are doing a good job at home.*

From another principal:

*Our families do like the hopes and dreams project when it comes to their child. They say they want their kids to graduate and succeed and they say ‘thank-you for caring about my child, please keep talking to us, and reaching out’.*

Several teachers spoke about the very practical information the visits provided for refugee/newcomer families. For example, one family worried about preparation for post-secondary options. Such conversations might not have taken place if not for the home visit because they would never have had such an opportunity to engage.

A principal and teacher shared:

*One of the families have a child with autism. When we asked the parents about hopes and dreams, they said they hoped there was a path for him to independence so that he can live on his own. As a school, we are doing what we can to support that path and journey.*

At another house:

*A grandmother said that no one had ever asked about the hopes and dreams for their children and she was so impressed.*

*One parent was sure his child must be in trouble at school so he was quite nervous at first. But when we asked about his hopes and dreams for his son, it became easy and natural to have a real conversation.*

Many teachers noted that parents have missed being in the schools and helping in the classrooms. They are also missing special events such as talent shows, school plays, and multi-cultural evenings. These “meet-ups” or home visits helped to bridge that gap. At one urban school, when the call went out for families to volunteer to be part of the home visit pilot, more than 40 requests were quickly received. This seemed to indicate a hunger for connection. Capacity issues dictated that only 20 families could be engaged so the principal made the decision to “go for diversity” and to consciously include single parents, multi-children families, blended families, First Nations and Métis families, and families with children with special needs. About half of the families who participated were new to Canada or to the school.

A family with many children and many struggles who volunteered said to a visiting teacher: “We are grateful you came to our home.” “Such a comment from a parent,” noted the teacher, “shines a light on why we do this.”

### **a) Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation**

An Indigenous teacher at an urban school shared the following insights:

*It’s awesome to hear teachers having great experiences with EAL families. I have been focusing on Indigenous families. Relationships between Indigenous people and school are tough. It is scary to have some teacher [they think is] coming to see if they are fit to raise their child. This is a good opportunity to take a minute to remember history and to show that we are changing and re-building relationships. My dad’s relationship with school was strained. It is unique that we now get an opportunity to rebuild relationships in a spirit of reconciliation. [Whether] you are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, it means a lot to build a relationship with someone who is Indigenous.*

Another teacher agreed:

*I appreciate this perspective. My experience was that asking parents to have two representatives from the school visit their home was a factor in creating reluctance and I believe it had much to do with the history between parents/caregivers and their past experiences in the education system.*

In Île à la Crosse, a teacher associate who is doing home visits then talks to the other teachers about the students they teach. She likes connecting one on one, especially with the grandparents. She is able to speak Michif with them and using their language makes a strong connection. She has been active in engaging parents through being a member of the School Community Council. Here the home visits were tied to stay at school initiatives that started in the summer and continued with land-based learning during the Autumn.

Another voice:

*Yes, we do have hesitancy. I remember my own father – the last home visit he had was from a priest many years ago. We are trying to change it; we are 100% Aboriginal but it is still a tough battle.*

From two teachers:

*One mother on the phone sounded quite guarded and unwelcoming, but when she saw us face to face [other Indigenous people], she made us feel so welcome and is now more trusting. Since that visit she beaded poppies and then gave them to us.*

These teachers and teacher associates remind the rest of the pilot project participants that, given the negative effects of Residential Schools and the impact on inter-generational trauma, it isn't, in every instance, a simple matter to drop in for a family home visit and have a cup of tea. Even when you know the families, a home visit can seem, to some, like the school is overstepping its boundaries and intruding into private space. There are still too many "triggers" and memories of intrusions by child protection officers, social workers, priests, RCMP, and other representatives of authority with power to disrupt a family. Relational home visits may offer a way to re-build trust and begin to "heal" this trauma. They may also provide a way for teachers and other school staff to "un-learn" their preconceived notions of what Indigenous families are all about.

**Participant Profiles: Teachers Emily Perreault and Marissa Poitras\*\***

Emily and Marissa are teachers at Rosemont Community School in Regina. Emily is an arts education teacher. A member of Cowessess First Nation, she grew up and attended school in Moose Jaw before completing her Faculty of Education B.Ed. at the University of Regina. She has been working at Rosemont School for 5 years and was eager to participate in the home visit initiative. Marissa is an Indigenous studies teacher who is a member of the Muscowpetung First Nation. All her public schooling was in the Regina Public School system. She is a SUNTEP graduate with a B.Ed. from the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Marissa participated in the home visit pilot in the term before Christmas 2021. She comes from an extended family that includes many educators and is currently on maternity leave caring for her seven month old child, Madi.

Home visits caused both young women to reflect on the lack of connection between their homes, ancestry and culture on the one hand and the school environments they experienced growing up on the other.

Emily notes,

*I saw, felt, and heard how my teachers could not or did not want to connect with me; I often felt that this must be because of my skin colour. I always felt like I walked on the outside of both worlds, I was too brown for the white people and not Native enough for the Indigenous community.*

Marissa remembers,

*I can recall the anxiety I would feel every time we would have parent teacher interviews, meet the teacher nights, Christmas concerts, and any time my teachers would need to talk to my parents. Even though I was a good student, I think from early on I associated my parents and teachers talking with it being for negative reasons or because I was in trouble. I didn't trust the relationship between my teachers and my parents because there wasn't a relationship.*

For Marissa and Emily, participating in this home visit project brought new relevance and resonance to the sad truth of the history of schooling for Indigenous students and their families. Emily tracked the steps for individuals from Indian residential, industrial, and day schools leading to mainstreaming in ill-prepared public schools in provincial school divisions. Despite decades of integration, biases and prejudices and racism still exist and create a lack of trust. Emily notes, “Negative feelings and fears of schools are still there and affecting the students (the children/grandchildren) they send to us. “Meeting with parents on their own terms can begin to break down some of these walls and barriers”, adds Marissa. “Even seeing an Indigenous staff member come to meet with them eased some of their anxiety.” Some we even able to share some of their own experiences of schooling.

With an increased comfort level and the establishing of trust, “parents, and other family members caring for the children,” became more “open to sharing their child's vulnerabilities without judgement.” In turn, we also saw the pride the children expressed when they saw us back at the school: “You came to see us!” they would proclaim.

Marissa and Emily recommend the need for the training for teachers who do home visits to include “professional development on anti-racist education” and the importance of “truly listening to hear and giving time for family members to answer” so that the fear of being judged or criticized can fade. This is really important “for families to be able to reach out for help and not be worried about being punished or put down for it.”

Both Emily and Marissa understand that home visits may not be for every teacher or every school or every family, but from their engagement they think there is real value in beginning to “break down the barriers that the western education system has built around us. This is a small part of reconciliation.” They conclude that with Parent Teacher Home Visits “schools can become what they are meant to be: a safe place where families can reach out if they have questions, concerns or need assistance.”

*\*\*This profile of these two participants in the home visit pilot project developed through conversations with the researcher and on the presentation they gave on “Relational Home Visits and Reconciliation: Case Studies” to the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) Congress & National Trustees’ Gathering on Indigenous Education in Saskatoon on July 7, 2022.*

## **b) Concerns of and for Newcomers**

*When a storm hit, we had to reschedule because the translator was unable to make it to the visit. It was difficult to find another time.*

A common thread through the home visits were the stories that families were so relieved and excited to tell:

*The visit gave them a platform to tell about their journey to Canada.*

Several teacher participants talked about the needs of EAL (English as an Additional Language) families who are not yet comfortable with English, in home visits but also in the classroom with students new to Canada. It was common for newcomers during home visits to focus on academics and to praise their children’s progress in speaking English. They were also interested



in what is being taught in schools and the expectations that schools have of students. Teachers were able to talk about the importance of the social growth of the children learning to play and collaborate and share with others.

In schools where there are a growing number of newcomers, translators were necessary in some home visits but were not always available or available only by phone which can be quite awkward. One teacher expected that a second home visit would lead to parents asking more questions about:

*Content and what we are teaching their kids. I now have more questions about how to better communicate with parents about this. What tools will make this communication with families and our students more effective?*

A teacher concluded:

*I have really enjoyed getting to know the families and their cultural and family stories.*

### **Participant Profile: Lee Beckmann**

Lee has been a teacher for 9 years and is currently working at Dr. George Ferguson School in Regina as an arts ed. and special ed. teacher with middle years students in grades 4 to 8. He has an undergraduate degree from the U of S and a B.Ed. in Arts Education from the University of Regina. He describes himself as “not neuro-typical” and “like a big kid” who loves to have fun in and out of school. He is a long-time fan of movies and an aficionado of Horror Film and Sci Fi and Martial Arts genres, something he regularly talks about on podcasts (RankNReview and Sketchers). A shared love of film and video games provided a way for Lee to connect with one father on a home visit who had proven to be somewhat “combative” in the past.

Lee’s school has a high population of students from around the world who are new to Canada, including refugees from Syria. It is obvious that Lee is passionate about his job and committed to his students and their well-being. He is also aware of his own white privilege and the benefits he enjoyed growing up in an educated middle-class multi-cultural and multi-racial blended family and his own previous experiences teaching in South Korea and in South Africa.

He says he volunteered for this pilot home visit program after hearing about it from his principal at a staff meeting. He saw it as a way to “connect with the local community”. The fact that there was some financial compensation for this work, over and above regular responsibilities, Lee interpreted as a welcome sign of respect for the considerable workload teachers already have. His partner for home visits was Amy Schultz, an experienced EAL teacher at George Ferguson School.

Lee talked about a young Syrian girl whom he first met at another school when she was placed in grade 2 after she first came to Canada, deeply traumatized by her experiences of war and upheaval, displacement and re-location. She is now in grade 7 at George Ferguson school and a “star” student, engaged, funny, and it “was a joy” for Lee through this program to meet her family and see “how motivated they are to be great parents despite the challenging circumstances of their lives”.

Lee and Amy’s second visits happened during the “freedom” protests and blockades which shut down Ottawa for more than two weeks in March 2022. Another Syrian family were at a loss to understand

what the Canadian protesters were against; to them the anti-vax stance seemed “trivial”. They compared their own experiences in Syria of family members and neighbours being detained in the middle of the night or “disappeared” if there was any indication that they were against the ruling Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, and the civil war and the support of the Assad regime by President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

The mother talked about how they are free here to practice their faith without being persecuted. She took pride in showing Lee and Amy the family prayer rugs. This woman has aspirations to open a restaurant and she has agreed to come and speak about the importance of peace at the school’s Remembrance Day assembly in November.

This engagement with the families meant a lot to Lee. He came to better understand his students as children who had triggers such as loud noises which can cause them to be on edge or shut down remembering bombing in “the old country”. Lee’s own practice has been modified; he now understands why his booming voice and boisterous manner can be threatening for some students and has learned to “tone it down” out of respect for them. He has also purposefully found alternative ways to communicate with EAL learners. He referred to the “I do, we do, you do” guided instruction that can be quite effective. Arts Education offers students many alternative ways to express themselves beyond the English language and the printed word. After home visits and getting to know something of the families and what drives and motivates the children has helped Lee to deepen and improve his connection and effectiveness with them.

Perhaps even more significantly, he found that the visits became an opportunity and safe space for the parents themselves to tell their stories of hardship and perseverance: A way to express their own truth and reconcile themselves with the past and look forward to the future. It provided the families with a voice and to be listened to and be heard. In this intimate forum the family showed appreciation by showering the teachers with “so much delicious food”, reflecting respect and building trust and giving thanks. Lee says too that “teaching is very much a social act”. Parent teacher home visits acknowledge and celebrate that, and break down barriers to narrow the gap between home and school.

Home visits start by asking the parents about the hopes and dreams they have for their children. Lee’s hopes and dreams include a serious expansion of resources for English as an Additional Language for parents as well as their children. Orientation to communication software applications (like Edsby) for EAL families is just one example of a “real” EAL school and enriched environment for language acquisition that Lee envisions and would like to be a part of.

### **c) Voices of the Parents and Children: “Relational Congruency” in two communities in rural Saskatchewan**

In Sun West School Division, the home-school coordinators at the two schools in the pilot project organized informal pizza and ice cream gatherings in the school yard at the end of May to thank families who had participated in the pilot project. Here was an opportunity to hear first-hand from parents and their children of the value they placed on home visits. In the last few years the staff and administration of Westberry Elementary School in Kindersley have built

a strong culture of parent engagement. In the Prek to 12 school in Biggar it was obvious that a strong philosophy of inclusion, openness and hospitality is encouraged. It is also the only school in the pilot project known to directly involve the School Community Council (SCC) by inviting families to participate in the home visits through a letter sent out from the principal and the SCC.

Briefly, what was learned from both of these Sun West communities:

(\*please note that the names of the parents and children quoted have been changed to respect their privacy)

1. Volunteering to participate in home visits was "a natural", as one parent put it, for those who look for any opportunity to do what is best to support their children. It is about trying to be "a good parent" said one.
2. The distance between home and school is narrow because of an already established shared sense of community. "On Saturday my teacher came to our garage sale" bragged one little person in Kindergarten. Vicki Moore, the then acting director of Sun West noted that "one of the teachers doing home visits here was once a student of mine when I taught school in Kindersley." "My mother was an EA at this school for many years," said one father. A sense of community already exists and home visits are another relational complement to this.
3. The prior knowledge and positive experience of home visits in Prek years oriented, familiarized and "prepared" parents to appreciate the benefits of having more home visits now that their children are older and in higher grades. They were already "on side" and fans of the process.
4. The lack of physical contact between parents and the school for 2 years because of COVID, made these volunteers eager to participate. Teaching and parenting are both very interactive and "in your face" activities and "we missed a lot of that social interaction because of COVID" said one family.
5. The children, particularly those in upper elementary grades, were excited and proud to play "show and tell" for their teacher right in their own homes. It made them feel "special" and "important" and it was "so cool."

In more detail what follows are some family portraits of participants in the PHTV pilot project in Biggar and Kindersley:

Sara and Joseph and their son Mark illustrate just how small the degrees of separation are in a rural community. Joseph went to this school; the family live right across the street in what used to be his parents' house. His mother was an EA at the school for many years. They go to the same church as some of the teachers and Sara's mother is on the school board. There is already a strong sense of being part of a tight knit community here and home visits "fit nicely into it." When the letter came they volunteered because they wanted to "help the teacher out."

For Steph and Mike, and their daughter Samantha it was simply a matter of being good parents. Steph said, "It's just so important to get to know the teacher and to help them to know your child." "We volunteered for the sake of our child and what is best for her" added Mike.

Mom Kristen, with 2 girls, raved about the positive experience she had of home visits when her one daughter was in preK and so she wanted the same for her girls again. Her youngest suffers from anxiety and she wanted to “be on the same page about that with her child’s teacher.” Plus it is “neat for the kids”, she added. When “the kid” is aware that the parent and the teacher know each other, “there is less room for miscommunication.”

Alma came with her son Jeremy who was deep into games on his phone while eating his pizza. Alma and her husband, who works in agriculture, are originally from the Philippines and came to Canada 10 years ago. Alma has 3 children and two of them were part of the home visit pilot: her youngest in Kindergarten and Jeremy who is grade 6. Alma wanted to meet both teachers because COVID has been a barrier and “communication is always good.”

Brad arrived after work for the pizza with his 2 girls, Alexa and Janice, before heading to their soccer practice. Brad is a single parent with strongly held views about schooling and family. His stepmother, now retired, was a long-time educational assistant in this school in the classroom of the teacher who was on the home visit to his residence. Brad volunteered because he thinks this is an excellent program and “this should be mandatory for the sake of all children so that teachers can see the environment their students are growing up in.”

Kathy and David came with their child Charlene. “We just think that it is good to be involved in the life of the school as much as we can for the sake of our kids,” said Kathy. She also knew the teacher and had established rapport and trust with her when their older daughter was in Prek so that gap between home and school “was already narrowed.”

Casey and Ella and their child Candace who is in grade 6 live on a farm. Candace was thrilled to have her teacher come to the farm so she could show off her 3 horses and her donkey: “I was excited for the teacher to get to know me more.” Casey coaches hockey and the principal’s son is on his team. This is a typical norm of the inter-connection that extends through the school and across a smaller community in rural Saskatchewan.

Maria has two children, daughter Allia in grade 3 and Ian in grade 6. Maria participated in the project because “any help I can get with Ian is great.” (Ian is a bright, high energy kid and small for his age). Ian thought it was “so cool” to have his teacher visit. He showed her his books, his Lego, his own couch, and played his keyboard for her. Following the home visits, Maria feels she has a “stronger connection” with both of her children’s teachers and with the school as a whole.

Robert and Allison have 2 children; Kyle, their son, is in grade 4 with a teacher who is also the vice-principal of the school. Bob thought home visits were “a great idea.” “It seems less formal” than a parent/teacher conference at the school and it was arranged to suit the parents’ availability and seemed to “have a better give and take to the conversation.” Allison is a member of the school’s SCC and is convinced that “a disconnect between the home and the school is a major factor in student failure. When parents and teachers talk, they can build a relationship that can benefit the child.”

Zenia came to Canada from Ukraine with her husband in 2015. They have two children: Rueben in grade 4 and Azaria in grade 6. Azaria said she was “cringing” when she heard that her teacher would come and visit. She was “embarrassed but excited and then it was okay.” Brother Rueben thought it was “cool” and liked to show the teacher his “stuff”, including his drawings. His teacher even took a turn on his hover board after he showed her how to balance on it. He also liked getting a book as a present from his teacher. Zenia, the mother, was a teacher in Ukraine and likes the idea of connecting with her children’s teachers so that “everybody gets to know everybody better. It just makes sense, you know?”

Melissa who is in grade 6 has one parent who is a teacher and another who works in the community daycare served on the local School Community Council (SCC). During the home visit, Melissa shared her “obsession” (her word) for certain video games and in turn her teacher introduced her to a new game that she really likes. Both mother and father wish that parent teacher home visits had been part of the experience of their older child, James, who they described as having “learning challenges.” The opportunity to speak candidly “in a relaxed and laid-back atmosphere would have benefited his teacher and James and us.”

Leanne, another active member of the SCC and an early childhood daycare worker explained that she had parent teacher home visits when each of her two children went to Prekindergarten. As a result, she was “more than happy” to participate in this pilot project. She explained, “It is important to build that parent-teacher connection face to face to help the “whole child” develop, not just academically but socially and emotionally as well.”

#### **d) Hospitality and Reciprocity**

*One family wanted to make supper for us. They weren’t ready for us to leave and said “Don’t wait for the next [scheduled] home visit, just come back.”*

Around the world, hospitality is “giving more than you know you have” and in many cultures “the poorest ...would borrow heavily, if need be, in order to offer a feast to his guests” (Still, 2010, p. 3).

*...but refusing food the family prepared made me feel really anxious.*

*This one family had prepared a lot of food and then invited us to stay for supper and then invited us back for Christmas!*

*We visited with a Filipino family who had food to share- and we said no thanks. But the educational assistant who accompanied me had been reading about Filipino culture and the importance of offering food and that we should respect such cultural differences. So we ate a lot!*

*The problem with using the local coffee shop is that you have to purchase food and beverages which can be awkward.*

A superintendent commented, *“We tried to stay away from coming with gifts but it is hard because the school staff are met with food, coffee, cookies.”* The parents and children are excited to play host and welcome these guests from the school into their home.

A principal added,

*Yes, particularly with EAL families there was lots of offers of hospitality, lots of tea or coffee. We did not take any gifts with us the first time, but our school division has provided money to buy books which we will bring the next time we visit.*

Another principal explained that when visitors are invited into the school they always give them a gift, a small token like a school key chain or mug – nothing of significant value:

*For the home visits our teacher went into the home with a keychain but she also asked what the family needs - do you need books or other school supplies? We will know what to bring with us for the next visit.*

A member of the Advisory Committee who grew up in northern Saskatchewan reminded us that it is very common to bring small gifts when you go visiting:

*It is just something that we do, the way it is in the North. And when we bring in anyone to the school we gift them with something. But parents are so grateful to have you visit whether you bring gifts or not.*

The training for home visits provided in September by the PTHV team based in Sacramento, California had advised against teachers bringing gifts to the family because it has the potential of creating a power differential and making the family feel beholden to their guests. This proved not to be the case for home visits here in Saskatchewan. From Indigenous traditions, from white settler customs, as well as from immigrant newcomers to Canada from around the world, the giving and receiving of food and tokens of thanks and appreciation were symbols of the gracious reciprocity inherent in the hospitality of relational home visits. A narrow concept of inclusion implies an existing structure or system into which everyone can fit. Hospitality, in contrast, acknowledges that reciprocity by definition will modify or change the existing space and practice (Ruitenberg, 2011). Inclusion of a variety of many different kinds of students and families necessitates new ways of seeing and doing things in schools and in the community. Home visits offer one such broadening and deepening concept of hospitable inclusion.

## REPORTED IMPACT ON TEACHERS AND THEIR WORK

One teacher enthused:

*This was really uplifting. It allowed me to reconnect in ways I didn't realize I was missing: ways to help kids connect back to school. My role has changed this year [not assigned to one class]. It was hard for me to build trust with them during COVID. It has been really positive learning about their interests but now I feel in a slump because we are on hold due to COVID. Families are asking when we can resume.*

Another noted:

*It is huge to hear that this project was mentioned in the [speech from the throne in the] legislature. It is a morale boost for teachers and affirms what I have experienced for the past 11 years.*

A vice-principal remarked:

*During the pandemic, we have lost chances to connect with families and so the visits have been a real morale booster for staff being able to re-connect. It also gives staff a chance to talk amongst themselves about the well-being of students.*

From a principal:

*The information coming back to other teachers has been so positive....if we do this again we will have more participation.*

From various teachers:

*I was blown away by the love the family expressed for their children. I had no idea. I found the loving hopes the parents had for their children really inspiring and rejuvenating.*

*It has helped me connect better with my co-workers... sometimes I am hesitant to knock on a teacher's door. Now when I have some students who are on the border and who are missing, I can knock on the door and say, "Hey, where is Peter?" The teachers are not feeling so isolated in helping students to succeed.*

One home visit involved a family with a young child with high physical and cognitive needs. The teachers were left with immense respect for the family members and how they love and cope and work so hard to meet the complex needs of this child. As a result of the visit, the relationship between the home and the school has reached a higher level of trust and respect.

A teacher and teacher associate noted:

*It is wonderful to learn about kids' likes and interests and to bring those into the classroom.*

Examples mentioned by various participants included puppets, Lego in the early years, and yoga, dance, music, art and hockey in some higher elementary grades. Another teacher added that parents used home visits to highlight strengths and talents of their children. Often these are non-academic skills and not as visible as sports. Children's interests and hobbies made a strong connection point and the students were excited to bring these interests into the classroom:

*The students were able to shine: their enthusiasm spilled over for days after the home visit and they were excited to share their home visit experience with their classmates.*

In one school, there was a young fellow originally from Africa who was keen to take his guests on the grand tour of his entire house, "including a stop at the litter box where the cat goes to the bathroom." In "the people's bathroom," the shower curtain was embossed with a map of the world so the boy brought the teacher and teacher associate there to show them the country where he was originally from and how far away it was from where he now lived. The mother explained that when she moved to Canada he went to boarding school for two years when he was four years old to learn English before joining her in Saskatchewan. He proudly wore his traditional Ghanaian clothing to school on picture day and to show to teachers and other students.

In another school in the same division:

*On our first visit we were blown away. We learned that this very quiet shy student who was new to the school was a very capable and talented musician who plays piano, guitar, ukulele, sings, and speaks French as well as Tagalog and English. Her family is from the Philippines and her mother hopes that, like her, her daughter will find something she is passionate about and will love to do. The visit was amazing. The next day at school the girl stopped and started chatting with me; she sought me out. I was able to introduce her to the choir teacher who is getting her involved. She is now playing piano at Mass and other assemblies. I was nervous because I don't teach her directly but if we hadn't done a home visit I would have never known her. I learned that I am more approachable than I thought I was. It also showed me how much I missed supporting kids in their sports and music activities [before COVID]. This connection with this girl and her family gave me the boost I needed.*

A member of the Advisory Committee with many years of home visit experience explained that after a relationship is built in the home, it becomes easier to invite families into the classroom. Once there, families can, for example, teach about their culture, cook with the class, and introduce games from their own background to the students.

*From each home visit, we could bring something back to the classroom based on the children's interests that were shared, bringing in something that was a part of them.*



Parents, too, reach a new comfort level and are willing to participate as a result of the home visit. Several parents, for example, volunteered to come and teach some arts and crafts. As relationships grew, one principal saw how students were more willing to share thoughts and feelings with the classroom teacher. The journaling exercise, “What I wish my teacher knew,” prompted some students to open up about their feelings because the home visit *“had allowed them to feel safer and more comfortable at school being themselves.”*

*I know the child in different ways now. I’ve looked at family photo albums. I’ve tried the food that they eat at home. This has changed the way I plan and do report cards. The comments I make are a better [a more accurate] reflection of the child because I know them better.*

Another teacher added:

*The visits are an opportunity to build trust and increase comfort levels. It creates the chance to build community between and among families as well.*

A principal concluded that it doesn’t have to be a classroom teacher who makes the visit. It can be any member of the school team: *“For a child to have one significant connection to an adult in the building is huge. The more we connect the better off we all are.”* A student said to her, *“Remember when you were in my house?”* That child now has a sense of belonging that will help her succeed at school.

In February 2022 a teacher added:

*Thank-you for adapting the project [in light of the pandemic] so we could do virtual home visits. I have grown as a teacher because of my experience with the relational home visits.*

## IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

There is no denying that the COVID pandemic played a major role in modifying the relational home-visit pilot project. For most Saskatchewan schools, the start of school in September proved not to be a return to normal. By October, many schools in the study were on outbreak status because of the high number of infections and so the pilot program stalled. When the same schools re-opened in November, Saskatchewan experienced some extreme and early winter weather which prevented some of the home visits to occur indoors.

As one teacher commented,

*We bumped up against several issues rolling out the program. The high rates of COVID infections in our community in the fall created a great deal of hesitancy on the part of staff and families to volunteer for a home visit project.*

There were a few comments that because of COVID teachers were already “exhausted” as the school year started and people were “leery” about home visits in a pandemic.

Another noted:

*Once the cold weather hit, I had trouble getting parents on board. I also had comments from parents about not being allowed in the school [because of COVID] so why would you come to my home?*

Many alternative sites were arranged; they included libraries, the local hockey arena, back yards, parks, the track behind the school, a walk home from the school, and a local restaurant. Some parents with little ones, however, found it more convenient to meet in the home.

*We wore our masks.*

*I had arranged to meet a family in the park but no one showed up.*

*Time-lines were tight and we had some tired teachers but overall it was worthwhile.*

One teacher and teacher associate met a mother and her daughter in a space at the back of the public library. The little girl was thrilled to be able to sign out five books.

Meeting a family at the hockey rink wasn't ideal because of the noise,  
*...but the boy was keen to have us there watching him practice and asked the next day at school when we were going to come again to see him play. Backyard visits were good because the adults could talk while the kids could run around and play and we could see them in their home environment.*

A superintendent mused:

*We have lots of positive experiences but, as good as it was, it is disappointing where we are now. We know we have families/teachers who want to keep going. We won't get in a second face to face visit. I don't feel as a division we got to fully experience the pilot. We had a rocky start and then got shut down due to COVID. I would love to have training in the spring and start right in September.*

At another school, a family reached out on a media platform to say, “I am not involved [in the project] but I'm so grateful to be a part of school division that is so forward thinking.” They linked the home visits to a way to improve mental health in the community during the pandemic.

By the week before the 2022 February break, the mood in schools had definitely darkened according to principals and division leaders who used words like “stressful, tense, exhausted, and anxious” to describe school climate. Even those who spoke of resilience, anticipation and gratitude also mentioned uncertainty, worry, and being “on a line.” Scheduling visits became a problem because of COVID in some of the participating homes and affected some of the

participating school staff.

Given the rise of the Omicron variant in December and January, the SSBA and the Home Visit Advisory Committee recommended for safety's sake that second visits be conducted virtually. However, more than half of the 30 school staff who responded to a survey reported being able to do face-to-face family visits. And only 35% of them reported being able to connect to families virtually. Phone and/or Video call Platforms used included Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, and Facebook messenger.

Teachers and Principals reported that many parents were uncomfortable using technology for the visits. Students are “disconnected.” It seemed “artificial and awkward” to them. One of the school division leaders reported:

*There are high COVID cases in our community. Some students have not attended school since Christmas. Some families do not want a virtual visit and some don't have the technology to support a virtual meeting.*

Another added:

*Families and staff are not as eager to participate. Virtual is not as natural or organic.*

If face-to-face contact was possible, it was preferred by both the teacher and the parent:

*COVID, weather, and time worked against virtual visits. I chat outside with the mother of one of my families every school day because she brings her daughter to school.*

At one school, the participating parents were invited into the school for a second visit:

*I thought families [after two years] were happy to finally get to enter the school and see their child's classroom. It certainly brought them joy. The students were so excited to share their “stuff” at school.*

Whether virtual or face-to-face, the second visit tended to focus on the academic progress of the family's child or children. Because of this, as one teacher expressed it, the condensed time lines for the project limited its effectiveness:

*I would love if this timeline had been extended so that second visits could happen in May or June...I feel like we just had our first visit. I hope this program continues as we get back to “normal.”*

## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

### a) Communication and Leadership

In every organization, effective communication is the key to success. One teacher learned from her families that her regular communication by e-mail to parents was greatly appreciated. This came as a shock to her because such e-mails tend to be one way and parents don't usually respond, but she learned they do value the communication none-the-less.

From comments by teachers in this study, however, the same can't be said, for example, about report cards which seem to have outlived their usefulness given that parents have on-going access to their child's progress thanks to various secure communication platforms like Edsby and SeeSaw that are employed now by school divisions for up-to-date and on-going student progress reports.

Teachers and division leaders reported that when this project was mentioned during the Fall Legislature's speech from the throne, some individuals on social media interpreted this as meaning that the province was mandating home visits as a new parent engagement initiative for all schools.

*A lot of people believe that this is something we are making people do - we need to make it clear that this is voluntary.*

Stating that relational home visits are not mandatory, either for parents or teachers, is clearly important. Building relations is, among other things, about respecting differences. Some participants reported confusion between "legislation" and the "legislature." Still others mentioned hearing that some parents thought the visits were about the surveillance of families by the school.

*I was shocked by such a paranoid feeling about teachers coming into family homes. That was certainly not my experience. The families who volunteered for this project welcomed us with open arms.*

Such misinformation, while relatively minor, became magnified through social media. This points to the need for clear messaging and coherent communication about the purpose and intended outcomes of relational home visits with all school staff, parents, and the public in general, not just those directly participating.

Even within a school, there can be questions that need to be answered. The principal of a K-12 school discovered that senior students were wondering about and questioning the purpose of the visits. They said things like "that's a social worker's job." The principal quickly realized:

*We needed to increase awareness of the project and so we had a conversation with students to clarify things.... our SCC (School Community Council) was very helpful.*

By February 2022, principals and division leaders across the five participating school divisions were reporting that the relational home visits were the topic of discussion in various venues including: school staff meetings, at an SCC meeting, at an administrative council, and at a School Board meeting. Eighty percent of this same group reported that if current pandemic conditions continue to improve, there is an appetite among school staff to continue with a home visit project. Although not asked this same question directly, teachers who participated in the February survey generally agreed.

A teacher noted the raised expectations of some parents:

*I was really excited that all of my families wanted a second visit. They felt more comfortable and willing to share this time. Some questioned why we weren't going to be doing this in the Fall.*

***Participant Profile: school-based PTHV coordinators: Pam Sawatzky and Jessica Wall***

Jessica Wall and Pam Sawatzky each have more than 5 years of teaching experience in the Sun West School Division. With undergraduate degrees in education, they both later went on to complete their Masters of Education degrees at the University of Saskatchewan where they focussed on parent engagement and worked with Dr. Debbie Pushor. Jessica is also currently working with Dr. Pushor to create podcasts about the philosophy and pedagogy of parent engagement. Pam, with two of her colleagues in 2018-2019, conducted a McDowell Foundation research project entitled *Promising Practices for Meaningful Family Engagement* which is available on the STF website.

Sun West's then superintendent Vicki Moore invited these two women to become division leads for the PTHV pilot project because of their academic and professional experience of home visits. Vicki was able to fund both these consultant positions through the second year of the safe schools initiative in response to Covid-19 and the Ministry of Education's interim plan. In the past school year Jessica's duties included being the PTHV project co-ordinator for Biggar Central K-12 School, and Pam Sawatzky's responsibilities included the role of PTHV project co-ordinator for Westberry Elementary School in Kindersley.

Jessica has incorporated home visiting into her teaching practice. She explained that her home visits are not as structured as Prekindergarten visits and she does not always visit all of her families every year, but she has an open invitation to any family who is interested in such interaction. She has built strong relationships with families, partly because she teaches in a small community where many families take her up on the invitation for a home visit. Jessica explained that these visits don't always happen in the home; she may attend ball games or hockey games and interact with families in those settings.

Pam's teaching career has been within the early years, teaching Prekindergarten, Kindergarten and grade 3. She will be returning to the classroom next year to teach Kindergarten. She sees home visits as an essential element because, "you're changing from a hierarchical structure to a more equitable structure; you're not the one that's holding all the cards and making all the decisions. It's privileging family knowledge and honouring that and knowing that we're only along for the ride for a year, so it's almost as though the visit itself is just the tip of the ice berg". Pam emphasized that she really feels that a year is not enough time to "create a culture in a school" and so she is hopeful that the home visit project will continue.

It is illuminating to understand the work Jessica and Pam did to help support and encourage teachers, administration, and families during the home visit pilot project. They created binders for each staff member which included information they needed to stay organized- with room to put in parent phone numbers and their own reflections. They conducted in-service training for staff who were not able to attend the initial zoom training sessions provided by the project in early September. They purchased gifts of children’s books for families and specialty coffee and treats for teachers, “just to let them know that we really appreciate their time and involvement”. Jessica and Pam also helped with organizing the year end celebrations for staff and families who were part of the project in the two communities.

Both co-ordinators see their work as contributing to the success of home visits so that principals and/or vice-principals and school teachers and other staff do not become over-whelmed by all the logistics and details of this pilot project. Jessica and Pam are strong advocates for parent teacher home visits and they would love to see this work continue in the coming years.

### **b) Elements of Promising Practice for Relational Home Visits**

In addition to the need for effective communication discussed above in section a), what has this parent teacher home visit pilot project revealed about what constitutes effectiveness when introducing a new model of parent engagement? From what I have observed and heard, there are several key factors that influence success in adopting a new practice such as relational home visits.

1. There needs to be a commitment to a promising practice at every level of the educational enterprise. This includes senior administration at the school division level, school-based administrators, and of course teachers and others who are actually meeting with the families. In addition, leadership is strengthened when the Division School Board members and the local School Community Council members are aware and engaged in the initiative and can speak to the value of exploring a new way of doing things. For a number of reasons related to compressed time-lines and COVID, Boards and SCCs were under-utilized in this pilot project.

2. Knowing who to invite to be engaged is an example of the kind of effective leadership required if a pilot project is to be a success, given the complexity of change and change management in any school or school division. The director of one school division noted, from his perspective, that because this was a pilot project with many variables and unknowns, it was important to engage and “lead with the best” individuals, as he put it, in the Division. Another superintendent noted that in a pilot it was important not to over-extend in extraordinary times and “to draw on the personalities of school administrators who could lead this kind of engagement with families.” Another pointed out that a team approach was crucial at the school level in order to engage more than just class-room teachers and to include teacher associates and educational assistants and learning counsellors. Another school did not move forward with home visits because too many teachers on staff were new to the school or to new teaching assignments and it would be “unfair”, said the principal, to “overload them with a brand new initiative.”

*We have 10 new teachers and other teachers who have switched grades. I was nervous for them to take this project on.*

In geographically large divisions, the delegation of responsibility to division “leads” (see the participant profiles above) was important in enhancing support for and communication about the pilot project. All of these comments point to what can be referred to as effective leadership strategies and promising practice.

3. Those engaged need to have a philosophical stance or an attitude that expresses itself in the saying “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” In their professional practice, teachers and school administrators are not driven by theory; they are pragmatic and always looking for something “that works.” ‘If it works, let’s do it!’ Hoyle and Wallace (2005) describe this as **“knowing how to do things differently emerges from doing things differently”** (p.23). In other words we learning by doing, not by being told what to do.

4. Being realistic but optimistic is consistent with the provisional action research model: we learn by trying something and reflecting and then modifying our practice in light of what we have learned by doing. This is a stance that looks for small and incremental but meaningful improvements in practice. Effective leadership understands home visits not as a “be all and end all,” but as a practice consistent with the knowledge that successful outcomes for students are enhanced when there are positive relationships between the home and the school. In short, professional knowledge is not discovered; it is constructed through trial and error, circumstance, and context. Home visits exemplify a call for openness, not perfection, and for doing the best that one can.

5. Adopting a new practice is a challenge for leaders because change is complex and because outcomes are ambiguous and not assured. It therefore requires flexibility and a leadership style and a team of participants ready to adapt to evolving circumstances. Running this pilot during the COVID pandemic illustrated the need for this adaptive dimension. Reaction to any innovative project can range from enthusiasm to cynicism to apathy or to passive and even open resistance. Maintaining a positive attitude in light of challenges and not wasting energy placating nay-sayers is another form of effective leadership.

6. The volunteer aspect of this parent teacher home visit pilot was crucial to making this promising provisional practice meaningful. This “invitation to participate” started right from the SSBA reaching out to directors of various school divisions. In turn directors asked superintendents to invite specific schools to participate based on their knowledge of the school culture and of their administrators who, in turn, were able to encourage school staff to become engaged. It also helped that from the initial proposal writers, to the members of the advisory committee, through to division and school administrators and practicing teachers, the field was populated by educators who can be referred to as cheerleaders, converts, believers, or champions of the parent teacher home visit model. Importantly, these stances were grounded in expertise, knowledge, research and experience. (See in this report the participant profiles of 3 teachers, 2 division leads, and 3 advisory committee members). In addition, asking for volunteer families and volunteer school staff to engage in this process, attracted individuals who were looking for/ wanting to/ try to make these relational connections. Certainly two years without other face-to-face forms of parent-teacher engagement because of the

restrictions necessitated by the COVID pandemic did much to create this readiness to engage. Volunteerism also reduced the likelihood of negative outcomes because those who might resist participating did not need to be engaged. This is a valuable lesson moving forward.

7. Finally, effective leadership in the context of managing change has to be built on mutual trust and respect and personal and professional integrity; leaders must trust themselves and the participants. In trying something new with the goal of improving practice and outcomes, they must proceed cautiously and respectfully, not worry about failing, be open to critiques and suggestions, and work in the best interests of everyone engaged. This trust, respect, and integrity was exemplified in successfully rolling out this home visit pilot project.

These are the 7 qualities of promising practice that I have observed during the SSBA pilot project exploring relational parent teacher home visits.

### **c) Roles and Expectations**

A pilot project is like a “provisional try.” It is designed through action research to raise questions for reflection about how to proceed. The following comments from school staff and division co-ordinators speak to issues that deserve consideration.

*Trying to co-ordinate a time that worked for three to four people made scheduling a home visit very challenging. I do think it may have been more comfortable [less intimidating] for some families, and we may have had more participants, if there could have been not as many people involved.*

*Families after school and in the evenings are busy. It is tough taking up some of their time when they are so busy.*

*Having another person with us, we have more of a likelihood of making more connections. I was very happy to go as a pair for many reasons.*

Division leaders were already thinking about how best to engage other teachers and educational assistants and associates in the pilot as well as imagining what the scope of the project might look like in the future. One leader suggested the “**ride along**” opportunity of taking a new “recruit” to accompany someone who has already had home visit experience:

*Once a teacher has had the opportunity to see a home visit without being responsible for it, they may feel more confident to participate in the future.*

Several of the principals took the time to do some home visits themselves to show leadership and learn more about their community, although one noted that he certainly didn’t want to intimidate anyone with his presence: “*I was to go on one but I didn’t want them to think ‘why does the principal have to come to my house?’*” At his school, the school secretary had the opportunity to make a home visit; normally she would be only connecting to parents by phone. “*I am sure she would be interested in doing more.*”



The PTHV model, aligned with parent engagement research, places the classroom teacher at the centre of this home visit model. This is done to ensure that the relationship and knowledge gained during the visit transfers back to the classroom. Participants in this pilot saw no reason to limit the process to classroom teachers. Another idea for future considerations was to be more intentional about engaging Elders, school counsellors, and outreach/liaison officers in this work to accompany classroom teachers.

The pilot has shown just how helpful and appropriate it was to engage educational associates in relational home visits.

*The EA who came with me has many connections to community and she made connections to some of the little guys because her own little guys play video games so she connected over that.*

#### **d) Teacher Time and Work Intensification**

A division superintendent spoke about staff who were excited to participate in the pilot project but had to take a step back to balance their own family lives and well-being. Some staff members are at a stage in their life where home visits are easier; their own children may be older and they may have more time to volunteer: *“A teacher with young children of their own will only have so many hours, precious moments with them before bed-time.”*

A teacher added a comment about pressure and growing demand:

*I don't want teachers branded who never [volunteer to] do this and then the teacher feels pressure like they are disappointing the students and parents. The project has been so successful but I also worry that some students will not get a chance to be part of this.*

The question of compensation for the time school staff were spending doing home visits continued to be a concern for some. In this pilot project, funding was available so that school staff who volunteered to participate were compensated financially based on an hourly rate. This was not seen by some individual teachers or the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation as an appropriate approach for the long term. Teachers, school principals, division leaders, and senior administrators mentioned a variety of potentially useful approaches:

*Could these visits be considered and recognized in the same way as extra-curricular involvement or lunch-time supervision in local collective agreements?*

*Could these visits be part of a job description for a teacher so that their contact load could be reduced to reflect the home-visit “load”?*

*Could some of these home-visits occur during school hours? How would that impact on the families engaged? Would this penalize working parents?*

*Is this assigned time or unassigned time?*

A principal asked of teachers:

*What supports would you like to see so you can participate in the future? Are there creative ways within schools we can give them time for this work?*

Another principal mused:

*Asking teachers to participate was tough. How much am I asking of them in this COVID environment? We don't grow as professionals without trying new things, but mental wellness is always top of mind.*

One teacher understood the impact of home visits on work intensification but, like many of her colleagues, stressed the value of this approach to parent engagement:

*Whether you are able to do a little or a lot, even making a connection with one family and keeping the lines of communication open during the year I believe will make a difference for the children and parents in that family and could make the difference between success and failure.*

Another teacher had this to say:

*In a way, I consider this as extra curr[icular activity]. This year it is part of my PD [self-identified professional development plan]. In the past when we did these, all teachers did them with all students and we had half a day to do them.*

**(Note** that the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation representative on the Advisory Committee, Mr. Ian Krips, participated in the Zoom meetings where discussions occurred about the implication of home visits on Teacher Time and Work Load Intensification. The Advisory Committee invited Ian to submit the Federation's concerns in writing for inclusion in the interim report. The STF response, in its entirety, can be found in **Appendix C.**)

#### **f) Support for a Saskatchewan Home Visit Model**

In the midst of the COVID pandemic and its impact on schools across the province, the need for strong leadership and support for all aspects of teaching and learning became more crucial than ever. One division co-ordinator reported that the home visits had generated a lot of curiosity and interest with parents and teachers at other schools in the division asking, "How can we become involved?"

Another division leader confirmed there were a lot of positive comments. She has been asked by other teachers if this initiative will continue next year and she wonders the same thing. A school staff member felt that any kind of second visit, "virtual or whatever," would be better than no meeting at all. She fears that if there are delays that parents will lose interest. She wants to make sure we find a way to continue to connect.

From all the participants in this pilot project, from teachers and teacher associates and educational assistants as well as principals, division leaders, division superintendents, and the Advisory Committee itself, four main points have emerged from the conversations and surveys over the past six months:

1. The COVID pandemic constrained and thwarted the full implementation of the pilot program and as a result did not allow for a complete understanding or appreciation of the value of relational home visits across the school divisions, including its impact on curriculum and teacher practice. The pandemic also prevented a full critique of the model itself. Plans for many face-to-face project meetings were unrealistic during the 2020-21 school year. In addition, linking home visits to an analysis of their impact on such variables as student attendance, engagement, and academic success were not possible because COVID interrupted such tracking.
2. Despite such constraints, in the immediate and shorter term, there is an appetite for a further exploration in the coming school year. This suggests that an extension and or an addition to the pilot program be seriously considered and appropriately “embedded” in provisional practice with an emphasis that the value of such family visits is in not making them mandatory but are voluntary for everyone involved.
3. Thinking for the longer term and the sustainability of this home visit practice, there is broad agreement from the educational partners that there is educational value inherent in building and sustaining relationships between the school and the home. However, attention needs to be paid to the implication home visits have on parent time as well as on teacher time and/or the creation of work intensification. Through the bargaining process, provincial and local collective agreements with the STF and CUPE may provide a way to make room for this form of relationship building within the existing frameworks of K-12 education in Saskatchewan. Further pilot projects could be useful in generating more creative possibilities and promising practices.
4. From the initial parent-teacher home visit training provided, and through to the implementation and reflection phases of this pilot, a growing desire emerged for a **“made in Saskatchewan model” for relational home visits**. This may be attributed to two primary factors:
  - a) Many of those involved at all levels in this pilot were already, or have become in the past six months, strong advocates of relational home visits and have seen for themselves the positive effects they can have on educational outcomes for Saskatchewan school children and youth.
  - b) There is an acknowledgement that the school climate and culture of Saskatchewan is unique to each school division and ways of knowing and doing need to reflect this. Training for home visits, for example, might better reflect school divisions’ anti-racist education and truth and reconciliation efforts. Actively involving Elders and Indigenous outreach workers in home visits, as was the case 40 years ago, is another example. One participant offered this: *Wouldn’t it be amazing to bring in our Elders to the [home visits] training to try and re-build the trust with the families and the community?*

There may also be, as yet another example, a need to engage parents from the newcomer Immigrant population to act as community liaisons and interpreters to enhance the home visit experience in some neighbourhoods. Certainly, this pilot has shown that Saskatchewan's understanding of gifting as a symbol of hospitality can enhance the relational home visit model.

Identifying and enumerating the key elements of a made in Saskatchewan model of relational home visits could provide a useful next framework and objective for another iteration of this pilot project in the coming (and hopefully post-pandemic) 2022-2023 school year.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Action Research and Indigenous Methodologies

**Action Research Stance for the Parent Teacher Home Visit Saskatchewan Project. Presented and discussed with participants through a Zoom meeting September 2020.**

From an action research perspective, how can Parent Teacher Home Visits enhance parent-teacher engagement with the goal of improving student success in school, at home, and in the wider community?

**A research hypothesis** such as: “Enhanced parent-teacher engagement will improve the quality of the student experience of home and school, the parent’s experience of their child’s schooling, and improve the quality of the teacher’s and administrator’s experience of being an integral part of the process.”

Long-term are there enduring consequences for everyone involved? This question might be too big for a pilot, so a better question might be:

**“Does what we have learned from this project point to a broadening of the mandate for such visits? Should more school divisions become involved?”**

There are two sets of questions to frame and guide the research and documentation and the implementation of the project.

**(A) The first set relates to the question of “what is truth and validity in Action Research?” Indigenous Methodologies animate this space with concerns for justice, honesty, and the value of relationships.**

1. Is the research about engagement, dialogue, and building relationships?
2. Is it about seeking practical outcomes that work and are effective? (And modifying/adapting our practice in light of what we learn).
3. Do the outcomes have a clear purpose? If so, what is the hypothesis? (See above).

**(B) The second set of questions relate to the question, “How do we assess the quality of the engagement in action research in this pilot project?”**

1. First of all, this project has antecedents. There are American mentors/trainers from the United States who have travelled this road before since 1998 and this pilot can learn from their experience. In addition, Saskatchewan has its own history of parent engagement and of home visits over the past 40 years and the project can build on that experience. Finally, the Saskatchewan Home Visit Project Advisory Committee is composed of individuals with significant academic and practical knowledge of the value of home visits and are able to guide this implementation, documentation and research.
2. **Is the work explicit in developing a praxis of relational-participation?** In other words, will we listen carefully to what the research-participants (parents, teachers, students, and in school and division administrators) tell us about their experiences as part of this pilot? Indigenous Methodologies teach us that respect for “hearing their voices” is crucial.
3. **Is this project grounded in inclusivity, i.e. in a multiplicity of knowing? How can participants embrace ways of knowing beyond the “merely” academic?** How can the project be guided, for example, by Indigenous ways of knowing that explicitly draw on the power of authentic relationships and the inter-connectedness of all things?
4. **Finally, how can we ensure that this research is worthwhile? And to whom and why?** What outcomes and indicators (short-term and hopefully longer term) should be assessed to gauge the effectiveness, the value, the utility, of the Parent Teacher Home Visit Process?

To answer all of these questions, the project will be relying on you, the research participants: teachers and other school staff, parents/families, administrators in schools and division offices and at the Board level, and the students themselves, to engage, to document, to participate, to know, to learn, and to share, through this action research process.

In addition to the action research stance, and Indigenous Methodologies, the project is 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.” We will ask each group “researching into their own practice” to describe in what ways the visits with families has contributed to these goals, in terms of mental and emotional health and well-being, for example.

More broadly this research is consistent with and aligned to the four areas of focus of the Provincial Education Plan 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.

More specifically, the Plan from the Provincial Education Council speaks “in partnership with the education sector, to ensure that: students are learning what they need for their future; students feel safe and supported; and students feel that they belong, are valued and can be themselves” (p. 5). So, you can see how well the Parent Teacher Home Visit initiative fits with these goals and is a way to implement these goals at the grassroots level of relational parent/family engagement.

I am keen to be a participant and documenter in/of this project. It seems to me the time is right to explore this enhanced engagement project in the context of Saskatchewan in 2021-2022. (James McNinch, Ph.D. research consultant) September 2021.

## A. Participant Survey Questions

### 1. Training Evaluation Form Thursday, September 9, 2021

On-Line Training: Thursday, September 9, 2021

I am part of the \_\_\_\_\_ school division.

My primary role is (choose one):

classroom teacher, teacher associate, vp or principal community member, administrator, other \_\_\_\_\_

1. What information in the session did you find most valuable?
2. What would you suggest to make the session more useful?
3. Will you or your school be part of this pilot project this school year? Yes. No. Not Sure Yet
4. How would you rate this training overall? (1 being not helpful and 5 being very helpful)
5. Provide a few words to describe your feelings about this pilot project.
6. Why do you think you and your school were invited to participate in this pilot project?

### 2. On-line survey of 3 participant groups, October 30, 2021

**General Invitation:** The Saskatchewan School Boards Association is committed to research and to document the implementation of this Parent Teacher Home Visit initiative in this province. This can't be done without input from you, the participants. Your voice will be heard but the data will be presented in an anonymous and confidential way. Findings can then be shared with all the education partners in the province so that teachers, students, families, and whole communities might benefit. Your participation in this innovative pilot project is greatly appreciated. Thank-you for taking the time to answer the questions in this survey. Best wishes. James McNinch

#### Pre-visit survey of participating school staff

1. How well prepared do you feel to start your home visits? (5 pt. scale item: from very prepared, to not at all).

2. How are you feeling about your involvement in this initiative? (Scale 1-5 from very excited to quite anxious).
3. Where has your biggest support come from? The American PTHV Organization, Division personnel, school personnel, colleagues, parents/families/community, Other (identify)
4. In a few words, explain what motivated you to be involved in this process?
5. What do you hope will be some positive out-comes

For you?	
For students?	
For parents/families?	

6. In what ways, did the “1-2-3” approach to contacting families (i.e. “one straight-forward, one neutral, one challenging”) work, or not work, for you?
7. How many parent home visits in total are you planning to do with your partner(s) this Fall?
8. How were partner teams of two arranged for you? (short answer)
9. Given the on-going pandemic, where are you planning to conduct the visits: family homes/driveways/porches/backyards or other alternate sites? Where and why?
10. Will you keep notes/records in your home visit journal? (Scale: yes for sure, probably, maybe, hadn’t thought about this, not likely).
11. How will you use these notes as part of a process of personal reflection and debriefing with your partner?

### Pre-visit Survey for School Principals

1. Why do you think you and your school was invited to participate in this initiative?
2. What motivated you to agree to be involved?
3. What kind of communication strategies are you using at school and in the community to encourage participation by parents in this process?

Communication Strategy	Specifics
Social Media	
School newsletters/print materials	
Community sources e.g. newspaper, through community associations	
Signage	
Teacher communications	
Other	

4. Have you accessed any funding that has been made available to support this initiative? If so, what have you used it for?

From SSBA	
From your school division	
From your school budget	

5. In what ways are you and your teachers being supported by the school division administration?
6. In what ways has your school’s SCC played a part in this project? Describe.
7. How would you describe your knowledge in general of parent engagement? Scale item: from: This is all very new to me, I have some knowledge and experience, Our school



already does a good job of reaching out to the community, Our school has done home visits before.

8. What do you hope will be some positive out-comes from this pilot for the students, for the families, for school staff and the school as a whole?  
For you, For students, For parents/families
9. Has the continuing COVID pandemic shifted or changed this project in any way for your school?
10. At this early stage, what has been the reaction of other school staff who are not doing home visits this year? (Scale: Highly supportive, Curious to know more, Unsure of the purpose, Glad they aren't involved, Think this is another burden on teachers.)
11. What "indicators" are you thinking about monitoring/evaluating that might help document outcomes of this home visit program?

### **Pre-visit survey of School Division administrators (operational leads)**

1. Describe the process by which your school division was invited to participate in this pilot project.
2. What role did you play in encouraging particular schools and/or individuals to participate?
3. What kinds of supports have you been able to put into place to help ensure that school staff feel ready to do home visits?
4. How does the COVID pandemic present any shifts or changes to this pilot?
5. What reporting "indicators" are you thinking might help document some outcomes of this pilot home visit program?
6. How have members of your Division's School Board been engaged, involved and/ or apprised of this initiative?
7. What do you hope will be some positive out-comes from this pilot project for the students, for the families, for school staff, and the schools as a whole?
8. Thinking ahead, how might this Home Visit initiative influence future direction for parent engagement within your division's strategic plan in the context of the 4 pillars of the Province's Education Plan?

### **3. Survey Monkey A (open from Feb 14 to Feb 17, 2022) (30 respondents)**

#### **Invitation and Questions for school staff who volunteered for home visits:**

Hello hard-working school staff. Just one week now until you and your students get a well-deserved break. I am asking you to take 5-10 minutes from your busy schedule to complete 5 questions on Survey Monkey about the relational home visit pilot project before the end of the week. See the link below. As always, these answers will be confidential and anonymous. Your participation is greatly appreciated as we document your experiences and think about recommendations for the future. Thank-you so much for your input. Sincerely, James McNinch

1. Have you been able to do any face-to-face relational home visits in 2022? Y/N
2. Have you been able to connect with any families virtually? Y/N.
- 3a. If yes, what media or platform did you use?

- 3b. If no, what prevented a virtual visit from happening?
4. If yes, what is one take-away you gained from the second (virtual) visit?
5. Things you would like to add:

Thanks again for completing this survey!

#### **4. Survey Monkey B: (open from Feb 14 to Feb 17, 2022) (12 respondents)**

##### **Invitation and Questions for principals, division leaders, and division administrators:**

Hello. I have sent a 5 question survey to your staff who have been doing relational home visits. I would appreciate it if you encourage them to complete it.

I am also inviting you to complete a similar short survey that takes a broader look at the process and project so far. As always, these answers will be confidential and anonymous, both as they are received and as they are documented. Your participation is much appreciated as we prepare an interim report for the Ministry of Education and begin to think about recommendations for the future. Thank you so much for your input. Sincerely, James McNinch.

1. Please use a word or two to describe school climate these days.
  2. Has Covid made virtual visits any more or less difficult to accomplish? Y/N  
If yes, please describe how.
  3. Have home visits been a topic of any staff meetings or p.d. opportunities that you know of in the past 2 months? Y/N. If yes, please describe the context.
  4. Do you think there is an appetite among school staff to continue with this home visit project in the 2022-2023 school year? Y/ N. Why do you think so?
  5. Things you would like to add here.
- Thanks again for completing this survey.

#### **B. Action Research Zoom Conversations December 2021**

##### **1. With School Principals and Other Division Leads, Dec. 8, 2021 (20 participants)**

###### **Discussion Questions:**

How would you describe in general the buzz/feedback about the PTHV initiative in your division?

Can you share some anecdotes from teachers and/or parents that illustrate this unique pilot (in this CoVid era)?

Can you describe the impact of your involvement in relational home visits on your own professional practice?

##### **2. With Teachers and other School Staff, Dec. 9, 2021 (36 participants)**

Can you describe one of the more memorable "meet-ups" or home visits you have participated in? What made it a unique or special event?

What did you learn about yourself in that moment?

Can you share some of the hopes and dreams that parents shared with you

about their children?

Can you give examples of how being engaged in this project has or will impact your classroom practice?

**3. With Division Superintendents, December 10, 2021 (8 participants)**

**Discussion: Leadership and delegation (distribution of responsibilities) are keys to the implementation of any initiative.**

In the midst of all the busy/business of the school year, how do you perceive how this PTHV pilot is being taken up by your division?

Are there examples, both positive and negative, you can share about how the reality of the CoVid pandemic has impacted the roll-out of this initiative?

What insights and suggestions might you provide in terms of the "second visit" stage of this pilot in the New Year and into Spring?

## APPENDIX B

### Saskatchewan PTHV Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

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#### **Purpose of the Committee:**

The SSBA has received funding to implement a pilot Parent Teacher Home Visits Initiative in 2021/2022. 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 be comprised of 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 five participating school divisions and their staff who are engaged in this initiative (at the invitation of the participating school divisions). This may include:
  - meeting with participating school division staff to share high impact practices regarding home visits and/or authentic and meaningful parent engagement strategies;
  - 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.
- Support the alignment/reporting of this initiative with the Provincial Education Plan.
- Contribute 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](http://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.

#### **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	Consultant, Meadow Lake Tribal Council
Danette Exner	Principal, Regina Public Schools
Kirsten Kobylak	Teacher, Saskatoon Public Schools
Susan Nedelcov-Anderson	Ministry of Education Representative
Ian Krips	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.

**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 June, 2021 – June, 2022.

**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.

### **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 4-6 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

### **Record of Meetings:**

#### **Monday, September 13, 2021 at 4:00 pm (1 hour).**

The Advisory Committee debriefed the 2 training sessions that had occurred the previous week. Generally, the consensus was that the training was positive and received enthusiastically by the participants.

**Topics of discussion** included: ways to approach families, the goals of the visits, and practicalities of roles and responsibilities and the timing of the first visit. The importance of reflection and how the post-visit “new knowledge” may impact classroom practice and enhance and personalize the curriculum. It was agreed that the pilot project researcher would prepare two pre-visit surveys: one for the school staff involved in the visits and another for the principals and division leaders.

Three further zoom session facilitated by the Advisory Committee were planned and carried out:

**October 4, 2021 4-5 pm: Facilitated by Kirsten Kobylak, and intended to support getting started with home visits and to answer questions participants might have on the eve of their visits. (12 participants).**

**October 13, 2021 4-5 pm: Facilitated by Vicki Moore, and intended for principals and site and division co-ordinators. This session focussed on the kind of leadership and support required for the home visit process (15 participants).**

**October 19, 2021 4-5 pm: Facilitated by Melissa McFarlane and intended for all participants. The session focussed on adapting home visits to the reality of the COVID pandemic. (16 participants).**

**Tuesday, January 23, 2022 at 4:00 pm (1.5 hrs).** Topics of Discussion:

1. Concerns expressed by the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation regarding the long term implications and the sustainability of the PTHV model in the Saskatchewan context.
2. Emphasis on the embedded, but voluntary element of this practice.
3. Emphasis on its impact on classroom practice.
4. Impact on Newcomer Immigrant population
5. Issues of Anti-racism education and Truth and Reconciliation efforts need to be reflected in training and practice.

6. Desire for a made in Saskatchewan model of relational home visits.

**Participant Profiles: Genevieve Candelora, Adrienne Durocher, and Danette Exner. Three members of the PTHV Advisory Committee\*\*\***

Genevieve Candelora is the chair of the School Community Council (SCC) at pre-Cam Community School in La Ronge. She is the mother of eight year old Joel and Gianna, age five. Genevieve is currently working on her Masters of Education in Early Childhood Education through UBC. She has been working with KidsFirst Saskatchewan since she moved to the province 16 years ago. KidsFirst is a home visitation program for families prenatally to age 3. Over the years Genevieve has had a variety of roles: home visitor, supervisor, program facilitator, provincial trainer, and program manager. She began volunteering with Pre-Cam Community School's SCC when her eldest entered Prek. As a parent, Genevieve is now on the receiving end of any engagement initiatives used by her children's school and she has enjoyed hosting her children's Prek teacher into her home for visits. Genevieve believes strongly in this strategy for relationship building. To the volunteer school staff and parent participants, she offered "a parent perspective, a listening ear, to draw on my experience with in-home visitation, and ready to have supportive and reflective conversations about what is working, what opportunities exist, and what support is needed".

Adrienne Durocher is a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and grew up in the Métis community of Buffalo Narrows. For the past nine years she has been the Early Learning Coordinator with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and before that she taught in La Ronge for eight years. She is the mother of two young men and one teenage son. Adrienne's passion is education and she "strives to provide supports to help ensure the educational experience is both enriching and positive for students, parents and the teacher. During my children's education I was involved in Fast Families, a parent engagement program as well as a home visit program." These experiences formed the basis of the work she did in her Masters of Education on the topic of Parent Engagement working with Dr. Debbie Pushor at the University of Saskatchewan. Adrienne is currently part of an early year's team that created a Talk 2 Learn program that focuses on building relationships with families through home visits and parent engagement nights. She provides support and training to the early learning interventionists who lead this program in nine kindergarten classrooms in the Meadow Lake First Nations Schools. Adrienne welcomes the opportunity to support individuals volunteering for this PHTV pilot project.

Danette Exner is a principal with Regina Public Schools and has worked in administration for seven years. Prior to administration she worked as an Indigenous Education Consultant with Regina Schools and before that as a high school visual arts teacher. Danette "began to practice parent engagement in a more concentrated manner in 2018 by exploring how to involve parents in a more active rather than passive role in our schools, and how to adjust and change the language and approach in education to build more open relationships with parents". Danette identifies as a Métis woman and is a parent of three "amazing" children. As an Indigenous educator, she takes a critical look at the education system: "How we, as educators, interact with our Indigenous families specifically, but also promote anti-oppressive practices with all racially diverse families is important to me". In her role as both parent and educator Danette is able to offer insights into the shifts educators are making in the paradigm of parent engagement and how to support educators in this process.

\*\*\* (Note: These profiles have been extracted and edited from "Introduction to the PTHV Home Visit Advisory Committee" produced by the Advisory Committee to introduce themselves to the volunteer participants in the PTHV pilot project.)

## APPENDIX C

### STF response to issues of Teacher Time and Work Intensification



2317 Arlington Avenue, Saskatoon SK S7J 2H8

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February 24, 2022

**By Email Only to: Dr. James McNinch**

James McNinch, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus  
Faculty of Education  
University of Regina  
3737 Wascana Pkwy  
Regina, SK S4S 0A2  
[james.mcninch@uregina.ca](mailto:james.mcninch@uregina.ca)

Dear Dr. McNinch:

**Re: STF Contribution to Relational Home Visits Interim Report**

On behalf of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to contribute information regarding the legislative, regulatory, professional and collective agreement issues to be considered concerning relational home visits, as well as considerations regarding the use of teachers' private cell phones when both communicating with families and recording components of the visit via photos or other methods.

Saskatchewan teachers value strong relationships between school and home as evidenced by the multiple ways in which they engage with students and their families, the history of which you will detail in your report. Teachersview holistic, equitable and effective teaching practice as a deeply personal human endeavour that is enhanced by the cultivation of relationships grounded in mutual respect, acceptance and trust. These strong relationships are forged through formal and informal activities embedded within the practice of teachers.

It is no secret that the work lives of teachers are becoming increasingly intensified as additional responsibilities beyond teaching are added to their workloads. The information enclosed will provide insight on a range of serious issues that must be considered alongside the data collected from the pilot project. The pilot project, in its current form, contains elements that sit outside the legislated duties of teachers, the Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement, the STF Code of Collective Interests and privacy legislation in Saskatchewan.

Identifying sustainable, efficacious practices that strengthen relationships between teachers, students and their caregivers is a common goal we all share. It is important that the achievement of that goal not further intensify the work of teachers or create undue risk for teachers, students, caregivers and school divisions.



Sincerely,



Ian Krips  
Associate Executive Director, Educational

LeadershipIK/bmg

## **STF Submission to Relational Home Visits Pilot Project March Research Report**

### *Legislative, regulatory, professional, and collective agreement issues*

The Relational Home Visits Initiative in its current form will require analysis of the legislation, regulations, professional codes and collective agreements that govern the professional practice of teachers. Presently, the initiative assumes the voluntary participation can be offset through direct payment to teachers. While paying teachers for this extra time seems respectful and logical, in reality it introduces a host of concerns.

*The Education Act, 1995* is essentially silent regarding the relationships between students, their caregivers and the school. The duties of teachers within the Act in relationship to this topic only require that teachers design, deliver and report on the program of instruction for the students they are teaching.

Within the Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement (PCBA) the concept of teacher assigned time deals with the maximum amount of time assigned to teachers as directed and scheduled by boards of education. This maximum applies to all teachers and is currently set at 1,044 hours. Each school division develops their calendar alignment with these hours.

Clauses 16.2 and 16.3 define assigned teacher time:

- 16.2 Assigned teacher time consists of the total of assigned teacher time for direct **student** instruction and assigned teacher time not involving direct student instruction.
- 16.3 Assigned teacher time for direct student instruction will customarily take place during the school day as defined in *The Education Regulations, 2015*, but need not encompass the entire school day thus defined, and may extend beyond the school day.

Clause 16.1 articulates three categories into which a teacher's time falls:

- 16.1 A teacher's time falls within one of the following three categories:
  - (a) Assigned teacher time.
  - (b) Time spent carrying on the teacher's professional responsibilities as a teacher beyond their assigned teacher time.
  - (c) Voluntary time spent on extracurricular activities and similar matters of benefit to the educational system and students, but extending beyond what the teacher's professional activities require them to do.

It is important to note that professional responsibilities beyond assigned time are at the professional discretion of the teacher and typically do not involve participating in a program such as relational home visits. This time is typically used for planning, preparation of materials, professional collaboration, assessment and preparation of student reports. Teachers may use a portion of this time to contact parents and caregivers regarding student performance and progress via school division-approved communication channels. It would be an unreasonable expectation to include relational home visits within this time allocation.

Situating relational home visits within voluntary time essentially equates the visits with extracurricular programming. Paying teachers for what could be defined as extracurricular programming would set a significant precedent for all volunteer work carried out by teachers. This could lead to teachers requesting that all extracurricular contributions to the school be paid. The PCBA only allows for additional pay above the general salary of teachers for the following reasons:

1. Teaching night school or summer school.
2. If a teacher agrees to teach more than the number of days within a school year (not for additional hours within the school year).
3. Allowances for principals, vice-principals and assistant principals as set out in Article 4 of the PCBA.

The current PCBA makes no provision for paying teachers an hourly rate beyond their basic salary. Further, hourly pay beyond basic salary would not be deemed pensionable service.

Section 237 of *The Education Act, 1995* sets out the scope of bargaining authority of bargaining committees. Negotiated at the provincial level are salaries of teachers, pay for night school and summer school, pay for additional days beyond the school year, and allowances for principals, vice-principals and assistant principals. Negotiated at the local level between local associations and boards of education are leaves, salaries of substitute teachers, pay period and special allowances for teachers which typically include positions such as coordinators and consultants. Special allowances are defined as direct compensation for teachers appointed to a position of added responsibility as defined in the job description; conducting relational home visits would not be considered added responsibility. The salary and allowances received by teachers in Saskatchewan must be in accordance with the provisions of the provincial agreement, the local agreement and pension plan regulations.

Some local agreements have provisions for pay for non-professional activities such as mealtime supervision. These are typically remunerated through some combination of hourly pay and banked in-lieu time and are not deemed pensionable service.

It is important to note that Section 237(6) of *The Education Act, 1995* states: “No collective bargaining agreement is to contain terms regulating the selection of teachers, the courses of study, the program of studies or the professional methods and techniques employed by teachers.” Providing additional pay for one professional practice to the exclusion of others cannot be bargained at either the provincial or local level.

If relational home visits are to be deemed an embedded component of teacher professional practice, then this work must be situated within assigned teacher time and the general salary of teachers. Putting it anywhere else devalues relational home visits and simply increases the workload of teachers.

Paying teachers for home visits exposes the school division to a potential grievance in relation to the Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement and participating teachers to a collective interests complaint.

School divisions would be subject to a grievance for violating the terms and conditions of employment set out in *The Education Act, 1995* by expanding the duties of teachers beyond what is in the Act and for paying teachers an hourly rate beyond their basic salary as set out in the PCBA.

Teachers currently receiving remuneration for relational home visits are potentially exposing themselves to a Code of Collective Interests complaint. Specifically, teachers accepting payment for relational home visits may be contravening the following articles within the STF Code of Collective Interests:

A member of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation shall:

- 7.2.3 Undertake to perform as a condition of employment only those duties required by statute.

- 7.2.7 Respect the collective bargaining process as the appropriate means to determine all conditions of employment.
- 7.2.9 Adhere to all terms of applicable collective agreements.

Conduct contrary to the collective interests of teachers may include, in addition to a breach of the Code of Collective Interests, any of the following:

Pursuant to Section 37(1)(c) (Collective interests of teachers) of *The Teachers' Federation Act, 2006*:  
A member bargaining on his or her own behalf or acting, on matters affecting other members, in a manner inconsistent with the bylaws made pursuant to [Part VII of *The Teachers' Federation Act, 2006*].

Pursuant to STF Bylaw 7 (Collective Interests) Section 7.4.7:  
Notwithstanding 7.4.1, conduct contrary to the collective interests of teachers shall include:

- (2) Negotiating on one's own behalf for terms and conditions of employment.

By entering into an agreement to accept remuneration for the home visits, teachers have essentially negotiated their own individual increased pay outside the Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement and beyond what is required in *The Education Act, 1995*. School boards would be complicit in placing the teacher in a situation where a collective interests complaint might be filed.

#### *Use of personal cell phones*

The Relational Home Visits literature and training materials encourage the use of personal cell phones to communicate with families and to take photos of the visits. These two practices are problematic in relation to working condition expectations and the protection of privacy for both teachers and students.

The training materials seem to encourage communication to families via teachers' personal phone numbers. This gives the impression that teachers are available at all hours to communicate regarding their students. Clear parameters for appropriate communication between families and teachers are required to ensure that division-approved communication channels are used during reasonable hours. Further, many school divisions have online portals for communication with families. Only school division-approved devices, channels and methods of communication should be used for engagement with families and caregivers.

The following information is taken from <https://saskschoolsprivacy.com/central-administration/central-administration-summary/lafoipp-overview/> and outlines key responsibilities of school divisions and school division personnel in carrying out their duties.

#### Purposes of LAFOIP

*The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (LAFOIP) is a provincial statute that applies to all local authorities. A board of education (board) is defined as a local authority pursuant to section 2(f)(viii) of LAFOIP. Other local authorities include municipalities, public library, police, colleges and universities.

LAFOIP has two major goals:

- Freedom of information – to ensure that individuals have access to public documents and to personal information about themselves that is collected and held by a local authority such as a board.
- Protection of privacy – to ensure that personal information held by a local authority is protected and not used or released without permission or legal authority.

#### Definition of a Record

A record is defined in section 2(j) of LAFOIP as:

*“...a record of information in any form and includes information that is written, photographed, recorded or stored in any manner, but does not include computer programs or other mechanisms that produce records...”*

Therefore, any method of recording information will be covered by the provisions of LAFOIP including tape recordings, video tape, phone messages, DVDs and CDs, emails, text messages, web pages, sticky notes, handwritten memos, and so on.

LAFOIP does not apply to information that is not recorded, such as verbal information provided to the board. However LAFOIP will still apply if:

- the information is subsequently recorded; or
- there is a verbal disclosure of recorded information.

#### Possession or Control

All records produced in the course of employment belong to and are owned by the Board.

LAFOIP deals with all records and personal information in the possession or control of a board.

Even if a record is not in the possession of the board, it may still be under the board's control and therefore would be covered by the provision of LAFOIP.

For example, the board may hire a contractor to do testing of students. The contractor would have records in his or her possession for the purposes of the contract but all such records would still remain within the control of the board of education.

#### Privacy and Access Principles

There are four main principles that can help guide board personnel through the processes required to address protection of privacy in school divisions:

1. Collect only the information that is required for the purposes of the school division.
2. Ensure the appropriate storage and security of records – both physically and electronically.
3. Ensure the appropriate use, access and disclosure of records:
  - a. allow the use, access and disclosure of non-personal information when required to do; and
  - b. ensure that personal information is used, accessed or disclosed only when authorized by LAFOIP.
4. Keep records only for so long as they are required for the purposes of the school division and then dispose of them in an appropriate manner.

The encouragement for teachers to use their personal phones to both photograph and communicate with families creates tremendous risk for teachers. Having phone numbers and photos of families and minors on personal devices creates extreme risk for teachers should the families ever have concerns about the use, storage and disposal of those phone numbers and photos. These records, housed on personal cell phones, are property of the school board. The use of personal cell phones or other non-school division recording devices has the potential to violate all four privacy and access principles for the protection of privacy outlined above. As all the records collected on personal cell phones or other recording devices would remain under control of the board, accessing and monitoring those records would require teachers and other participating staff to give the employer access to and control of their personal devices. The training materials and program implementation should reinforce the sole use of school division-approved devices, channels and methods of communication.

## APPENDIX D

### Parent engagement and parent teacher home visits: A Review of the Literature\*

\*This literature review, as well as the list of selected references that follow in Appendix E, is the work of **Esther Maeers**, a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Esther also ably contributed to the section on the legacy of family engagement in Prekindergarten, as well as the profiles of the two division leads. Many thanks goes to Esther for these contributions to the current study.

#### Introduction

Parents are often viewed by educators through a deficit lens, in terms of their knowledge of teaching and learning (Ishimaru et al, 2016), and their own knowledge of parenting (Pushor, 2015a). Even the quality and sources of their knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) are often suspect or not valued in the culture of the school. Within schools, the place for parents has usually been confined to involvement activities based on the school's agenda, such as fundraising, chaperone opportunities, or classroom volunteering (Pushor, 2010, p. 9). Schools that do go beyond this type of parent involvement often fall into the category of random acts (Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010), where parent engagement is a sporadic endeavor. Moving beyond involvement and random acts to engage parents in teaching and learning has been found to reap many benefits for children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp, 2013; Jeynes, 2005), parents (Brown, 2007; Hong, 2011), and teachers (Markow & Martin, 2005, in Hong, 2019). For schools to move towards a more systematic approach to parent engagement, strategies that build reciprocal relationships between parents and teachers, such as parent teacher home visits, can be woven into educational practices and policy. This review will highlight the literature in the field of parent engagement and take a brief look into the practice, associated benefits, and challenges of parent teacher home visits.

#### Parent Involvement-Parent Engagement

Traditionally, schools have taken ownership of learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Pushor, 2001, 2012), when in fact parents have been engaged in their child's learning since birth, long before they entered the school system (Pushor, 2013). Pushor (2010) states that, the institution of "school" and the practices of the institution have a long-standing and storied history...[I]n the right to voice assumed by the educators and the absence of voice given to parents and family members, we see a hierarchical structure and a unidirectional agenda at play (p. 6-7).

However, “by inviting parents into a “web of caring” the education of the whole child, in its broadest sense, takes place” (Pushor, 2015, p.59). Such a shift can be conceptualized as a continuum moving from parent involvement to parent engagement. A parent or a school may be at any point along the continuum. As Goodall and Montgomery (2014) explain, As schools and parents move along the continuum, there is a move from information giving (on the part of schools) to a sharing of information between parents and schools. This is a move from the prioritization of the school’s needs and desires toward joint decisions between parents and schools...The continuum does not represent a transfer of all agency from schools to parents but rather a more equitable distribution of agency with regard to children’s learning, between parents and schools, to a change in the relationship among all three actors in the process. (p.402)

Amendt (2008) provides a Saskatchewan context to community engagement within schools and also proposes a continuum that shifts from informing parents, to involving them in a school’s chosen endeavors, to engaging parents and working as partners, to parent leadership within the school community. In order to move along this continuum from parent involvement to parent engagement, schools need to shift from a “school centric” approach (a term borrowed from Lawson, 2003, in Amendt & Pushor, 2018), in which schools set the agenda, to a “family centric” approach in which parents and educators work together in reciprocal relationships (Amendt & Pushor, 2018). Even Epstein, a pioneer in the field of parent involvement, has moved away from using the term, and has now adopted school, family, community “partnerships”, which is a move further along the continuum. She states that, In partnerships, educators, families, and community members work together to share information, guide students, solve problems, and celebrate successes. Partnerships recognize the shared responsibilities of home, school, and community for children’s learning and development. Students are central to successful partnerships. They are active learners in all three contexts- at home, at school, and in the community. (2010, p. 4) As Epstein points out, often parent responsibilities and roles are seen as separate from teacher’s responsibilities and roles when in fact they overlap and interact in many ways.

### **What is Parent Engagement?**

Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005) discuss the etymology of the word engagement: [It] ...comes from en, meaning “make”, and gage, hence meaning “pledge”- to make a pledge (Harper, 2001), to make a moral commitment (Sykes, 1976, p.343). The word engagement is further defined as “contact by fitting together; ...meshing of gears” (“Engagement”, n.d.). The implication is that a person “engaged” is an integral and essential part of a process, brought into the act because of care and commitment. (p. 12-13)

Hong (2011) explains that one of the problems with the traditional parent involvement approach is that the focus is on the activities as opposed to the process that parents are involved in (p. 19). Instead, Hong proposes an ecological model that centers on parents, promotes engagement, views parents as assets, broadens participation and works to transform families, schools, and communities (p.25). “Constantino (2003) consciously adopts

the word engagement, defining it as ‘the interaction between schools and families and the degree to which families are involved in the educational lives of their children’” (in Pushor 2007, p.5). Foundational to parent engagement philosophy and pedagogy is the understanding that parent voice and knowledge are integrated with teacher voice and knowledge, with shared responsibility and shared decision-making power, in the teaching and learning of children (Pushor, 2007). Goodall (2013) points out that it is important to distinguish between parent interactions with the school, which falls under parent involvement and instead focus on parent engagement with learning, which opens up how we view working with parents. Teachers have important knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, parents have unique knowledge of their child. As Pushor (2015) explains, this parent knowledge is relational, bodied, embodied, intuitive, intimate and uncertain. By “walking alongside”, educators can authentically engage with parents, creating reciprocal trusting relationships, in which parent knowledge and teacher knowledge are shared (Pushor, 2019). As Willis (2013) explains, Parents and teachers are two groups of people with ostensibly much in common. One area is their mutual concern about how to prepare the children in their care for future life and work against the backdrop of an increasingly complex and rapidly-changing world. (p. 2)

Parents and teachers are “natural allies” as Hong (2019) points out. They have similar goals and concerns in relation to children, however, beliefs and assumptions about parents and families have been the topic of many conversations in school staffrooms and in the media. Parents have been labeled uninterested, dysfunctional, bad, neglectful (Epstein, 2010) or hard to reach (Day, 2013) if and when they do not become involved in their child’s schooling. On the other hand, parents may be labeled as helicopter parents or overbearing/difficult parents if they are perceived as being too involved (Calarco, 2020). When educators take the time to learn with and from families then family stories, instead of stories about families, are told and new understandings emerge. Huber et al (2010) describe family stories as those lived and told experiences shaped by and shared across generations in families. In contrast, stories of family are composed around dominant cultural, institutional, and social narratives; they are stories often experienced or told to individuals or families when they are seen by members outside of the family to be living in ways that conflict with dominant narratives. (p. 80)

### **High Impact Strategies for Parent Engagement**

For schools moving towards partnerships with families, home visits can be seen as an important strategy in building trusting relationships between parents, families and teachers (Henderson et al, 2007). Goodall (2021) reminds us that “nothing exists without context” (p. 106) and that to engage parents we also need to understand the full context of their lives. Creating relationships between teachers and parents “paves the way for collaborative and collective action” (Hong, 2011, p.21). To collaborate with parents and families and ensure that education is holistic, teachers move away from defining students solely by their school experiences and understand that “schools are embedded within communities” and student’s lives are multidimensional (Hong, 2011, p. 24). Much of what impacts students’ lives and their learning can be described as “invisible engagement”, engagement that happens away from the school (Constantino, 2021, p.8-9). He states that, “children spend the vast majority of their

time out of school. It stands to reason that if we want to impact their learning lives, we must commit to understanding the community and culture from which they come” (2021, p.27).

Parent teacher home visits are intended to build relationships, learning about the “invisible engagement” happening and they are a space to share family stories, and to exchange parent and teacher knowledge. Home visits have been a part of early learning/early intervention programs such as Head Start for many years (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). These home visits have often been intended to educate parents in early literacy, nutrition and parenting skills that educators deem important for student success (Bierman et al, 2015; Bierman et al, 2017; Corr et al, 2018; Hancock & Cheatham, 2021). Home visits have also been used intentionally or otherwise as a way to assimilate a diversity of families into Eurocentric world views of parenting and schooling (Park & Paulick, 2021). These types of home visits reinforce the deficit lens through which parents are often viewed (Park & Paulick, 2021). A parent engagement philosophy, on the other hand, focuses on building reciprocal partnerships with parents, and are intended to be relational in nature and focus on sharing family stories, sharing parent and teacher knowledge, as well as hearing parents’ hopes and dreams for their child (Jocelyn, 2013). Park & Paulick (2021) found within their study, on what happens within home visits, where teachers tend understandably to first gain some knowledge of “surface level” family culture, such as food, language and holidays which is not surprising for a first visit of relative strangers. They argue that to gain a deeper understanding of family values, norms and worldviews, teachers need an orientation to a culturally sustaining pedagogy where they look first at their own beliefs and assumptions about families. Then, in conversations during relational home visits, they might gain a new understanding of families, which is vital to forming true reciprocal relationships (Park & Paulick, 2021).

### **Home Visit Successes and Challenges**

El Yaafouri-Kreuzer (2017) called home visits the missing link in her teaching practice. Through visiting the homes of her students, she was able to challenge her beliefs and assumptions about immigrant and refugee families and she was also able to work with families to build scaffolds to facilitate student success. Murphy also implemented the practice of home visits within his teaching practice and found that not only did he learn from and with families, but his teacher identity changed from one that had a “unidirectional and hierarchical school agenda” to one that had an “agenda in relationship with parents in reciprocally beneficial ways” (Pushor & Murphy, 2004, p. 234). Alongside the positive effects home visits have on teacher identity and their understandings of families, studies have shown that home visits contribute to a decrease in student chronic absenteeism, an increase in standardized test scores for math and English Language Arts, and improved graduation rates (Sheldon & Jung, 2018; Soule & Curtis, 2021). Sheldon & Jung’s (2018) study also showed that even families who were not involved in the home visit project but attended the same school, benefitted in positive ways. Another study conducted by Wright et al (2018) showed that home visits had a positive impact not only on student’s academics but on their classroom behavior as well. They also found that parents whose child received a home visit were found to be more involved in their child’s schooling than parents who had not received a teacher home visit (Wright et al,



2018, p.87).

Although there are many success stories within the home visit literature, some challenges have also been identified. Stetsen et al (2012) found that initially the teachers in their study had fears or felt uneasy about going on their first home visit. They reported feelings of being afraid of the unknown, intimidated about going into a new neighbourhood and at times they felt afraid for their own safety. Parents also reported feeling uneasy and even suspicious about why teachers were coming to visit their home. Teachers reported challenges with scheduling home visits with parents, and explained that at times they were worried that parents may be embarrassed about them coming and seeing where they live. Even though, within this study, challenges arose, all the teachers and parents concluded that home visits were worthwhile and helped them to create stronger relationships between parents and teachers and also between teachers and students (Stetsen et al (2012).

Kroeger & Mendez (2014) found within their study on family engagement, that it is important to approach home visits from a listener stand point, listening and learning from and with families. They included examples of teachers who used what they learned to inform their teaching, by adapting their classroom environment, resources and pedagogy. The researchers also noticed that many teachers did not make these adaptations and, as a result, important opportunities for teaching and learning connections were missed. Jamila Dugan, an American principal who has done “hundreds of home visits as part of a community organizing drive”, understands the fears that some may have about home visits “in high-poverty neighborhoods and communities of color...afraid of imposing on families in their private sphere”, but concludes:

More often than not, they wanted to host the visit and took pride in welcoming me to their home. I felt deeply honored and, more importantly, gained street-level data on the family and student: their cultural wealth, assets, homes, dreams, and fears (Safir and Dugan 2021, p.63).

### **In Closing**

Mapp et al (2017) remind us that home visits send “powerful signals that you are invested in building important relationships” but that “the home visits that we are suggesting are not designed to assess or evaluate ...families; rather, the aim is to build relationships of trust and respect with families, factors that are key to your eventual partnership with them” (p.48). The Parent Teacher Home Visit (PTHV) model, emphasizes that home visits are a space to discuss a family’s hopes and dreams and goals for their child which in turn can inform teaching practice and build important reciprocal relationships (<https://pthvp.org/pthv-model/#>). Within their implementation study of the Parent Teacher Home Visit (PTHV) project, Venkateswaran et al (2018) found that it is important that: **home visits remain optional for teachers and families, there is strong support from the school administration, the home visits do not become an enforcement in a top-down manner, a PTHV coordinator or liaison is appointed, and that ongoing meetings for teachers and support for parents are offered.**

Willis et al (2018) found within their research on school principals and parent engagement that in order to create space where teachers and parents work together as “natural allies” (Hong, 2011) with common goals, leaders must “[look] for ways to situate parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members/organizations more centrally to student learning” with a focus on “communicating a strong school vision; developing trusting, respectful relationships; and establishing a positive school culture for parent engagement” (p. 21). With these key recommendations as well as the information provided on the differences between parent involvement and parent engagement, relational home visits provide an opportunity to bridge gaps between home and school. Pushor (2007) explains that, while it is important to engage parents in the school landscape, it is equally important for educators to move comfortably in the worlds of families and communities, away from the school landscape. It is when these boundaries between school, home, and community become permeable and multidirectional that the creation of a shared world which supports and nurtures children is realized. (p.6)

## APPENDIX E

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