



St. Paul Federation of Teachers Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Project Evaluation

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**GOFF PEJSA
& ASSOCIATES, LLC**



Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	2
II.	Methodology.....	3
III.	Themes & Findings.....	5
IV.	Discussion & Recommendations	13

Introduction

In 2013-2014, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers partnered with a Twin Cities evaluation firm, Goff Pejsa & Associates, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of their Parent/Teacher Home Visiting program. The national Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Project based in Sacramento, California generously agreed to provide guidance and funding for this work. The purposes of the study were to:

- demonstrate the impact of the Teacher Home Visit Program on participating students and families;
- describe the program's impact on teacher attitudes and assumptions about students, families, and communities;
- explore the extent to which the program is being implemented as planned and intended;
- better understand the key factors for program success, from both staff and families' perspectives; and
- identify areas for improvement and celebration.

In close collaboration with leadership at both the St. Paul Federation of Teachers and the national Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Project, evaluators designed an evaluation plan that carefully balanced “the numbers” (quantitative) with an emphasis on stories and perspectives. To understand the experience of teachers in the program, we surveyed trained teachers, shadowed on home visits, observed training and debrief sessions, and reviewed existing documents and news stories about the program. Parents and families shared their perceptions of the program through individual, one-on-one interviews with external evaluators; teacher participant reports and previous news stories and documents were also used to triangulate interview data. Multiple meetings and discussions with program leadership and participants served to ground the project in history and round out the evaluators' understanding of context.

The remainder of this report will provide a description of the evaluation methodology and present the key findings in more detail. Themes that emerged across multiple methods are highlighted throughout this report; we would particularly like to draw attention to the following points:

- Improved or enhanced ***relationships and connections*** are the most common and consistent themes discussed and reported by teachers, families, and staff participating in the program. These relationships and connections are built between home visiting teachers and their parents, students, and colleagues. Since this is a key program intent, evident in program literature, training, and activities, this finding speaks to the strength of SPFT's program theory, design, and implementation.
- ***Parents welcome home visits*** and have positive feedback about the program. One powerful finding is that the ***students have positive feelings*** about having a teacher visit their home—excited, enthusiastic, ecstatic, and comfortable are just some of the words used to describe how students experience the visits.
- Participation in home visiting seems to have a positive impact on ***teacher job satisfaction and feelings of efficacy***. Teachers report that they feel energized by the program and have seen improvements in their classroom practice using the new connections forged through home visiting.

Each of these themes will be explored further in the pages to follow, along with additional findings that emerged throughout the study. Finally, we end with a discussion of what we have learned and recommend ways to move forward in further strengthening the program.

Methodology

This program evaluation employed a mixed methods approach, combining the power of numbers and words to tell SPFT's home visiting project story. The following table provides a brief overview of the methods used, their purpose, and brief description (including sample size and process).

Method	Purpose(s)	Brief Description
Literature & document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the history, current status, and stated goals and objectives of SPFT's program. To ground the study in current research, policy, and practice context for home visiting specifically and family engagement generally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed historical program documents and current training and marketing materials provided by staff Reviewed website language and news stories obtained through targeted internet searches and program language from websites Reviewed literature related to home visiting and family engagement policy, language, and programs
Home visit observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To observe trained teachers in practice and directly observe families' experience during a visit To directly observe to what extent the non-negotiables and stated program goals were evident in home visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed an observation protocol for observation of core components/non-negotiables Observed two home visits in winter 2014 Two evaluators debriefed visits, noting common themes *Note: The original evaluation plan called for more home visit observations, but the time of the year of this study and unavailability of visits to observe were barriers.
Participant teacher debriefing observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the process, purpose, and outcomes of debrief sessions To assess the extent to which these sessions are a necessary and/or value-added program component To gather data on teachers' perceptions of the program (including training and actual home visits) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed protocol for observation of core components/non-negotiables Attended and observed two, two-hour debriefing sessions in December 2013-January 2014. Observed over 50 participating teachers, two facilitators, and one guest speaker. Two evaluators took detailed notes using the protocol and debriefed after each visit to identify themes and areas for feedback/improvement.

Method	Purpose(s)	Brief Description
Training observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To directly observe the process of training, particularly how teachers were prepared for visits and how core program values and goals were communicated. • To observe/hear the attitudes and family engagement competencies of teachers pre-training and throughout training. • To provide a comparison point for teachers' growth (outcomes) post-training on visits and in debrief sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observed one training session to determine appropriate future evaluation points, core components, and unique aspects • Observed a total of 23 participant teachers and 2 trainers. • *Note: One additional training observation will be held during summer 2014.
Participant teacher surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine the extent to which participating teachers perceive program goals and non-negotiables as important and effective • To better understand how teachers experience the program—including training, debrief sessions, home visiting, and other supports. • To identify program strengths and areas for improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed survey based on early data from literature review, debrief observations, and client conversations • Distributed survey to 461 teachers and received 46 completed surveys. • Roughly 50% response rate from those teachers that made at least one home visit.
Interviews with families who have received visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To better understand how families experience and perceive home visits • To determine the extent to which families notice, understand, and/or value the program goals and non-negotiables • To identify program strengths and areas for improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed protocol for family interviews • Conducted 5 interviews via phone with parents • Sample included families from three different teachers and schools

Themes & Findings

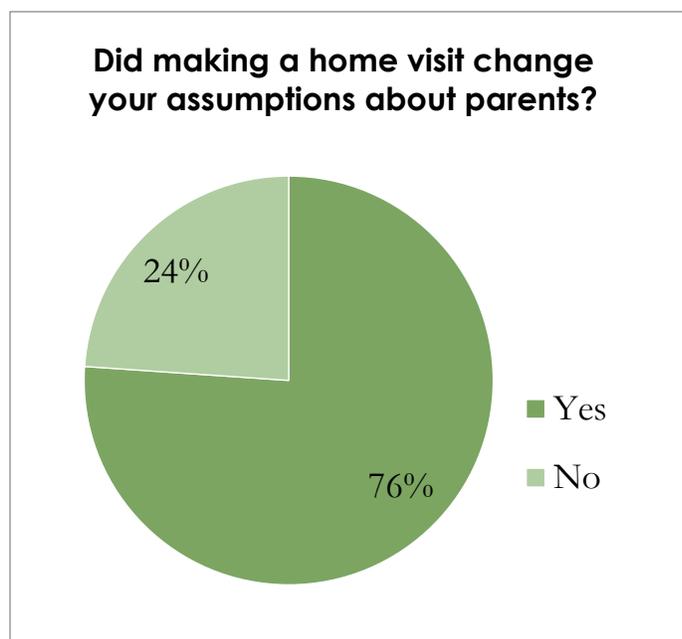
Since its modest beginnings, SPFT's home visiting program has grown significantly. What began three years ago with six trained teachers reaching 15 families has grown to include over 450 visits by over 80 teachers in the 2013-2014 school year. This year SPFT also negotiated successfully to include expansion of the program in the new teacher contracts, a significant win in a contentious negotiation year. Notably, there was a great deal of parent and family support for the home visiting program throughout the negotiation process. Amidst these visible successes, we sought to dig deeper into the program through our formal evaluation process. The following are the themes and findings that emerged from teacher surveys, parent interviews, and observations of key program activities.

Participant Teacher Surveys

Over half of this year's visiting teachers (N=85) responded to the survey (46 responses). This is considered an excellent response rate in the field of survey research and evaluation. The survey touched on many aspects of the home visiting experience; there were some important overarching findings that were also reflected in findings from interviews and observations. These include:

- Assumptions of teachers about families were changed for the majority (76%) of respondents.
- Making a home visit taught the great majority of teachers (93%) something about students that they didn't already know.
- Teachers who participated in visits saw non-negotiable elements of the program as very important.
- Building relationships and learning more about students' interests to improve and individualize instruction were seen as important benefits of the visits.

The first question on the survey asked teachers if making a home visit changed their assumption about parents. Of the 46 teachers who responded to this question, 76% reported that the visit did change their assumptions. Of those who responded that the visit did not change their assumptions, the majority went on to mention the impact that the visit had on building relationships with families and parents.



A follow up question asked teachers *how* their assumptions about parents changed. A few respondents mentioned that their assumptions had changed about what parents need or want from the school experience. The majority of teachers mentioned, however, that their assumptions about family dynamics and the reasons that parents did not attend school events were changed by the visit.

Over half of teachers who responded that their assumptions had changed wrote that after making home visits they felt that they had underestimated the other obligations such as multiple jobs and other children that

families were balancing with school.

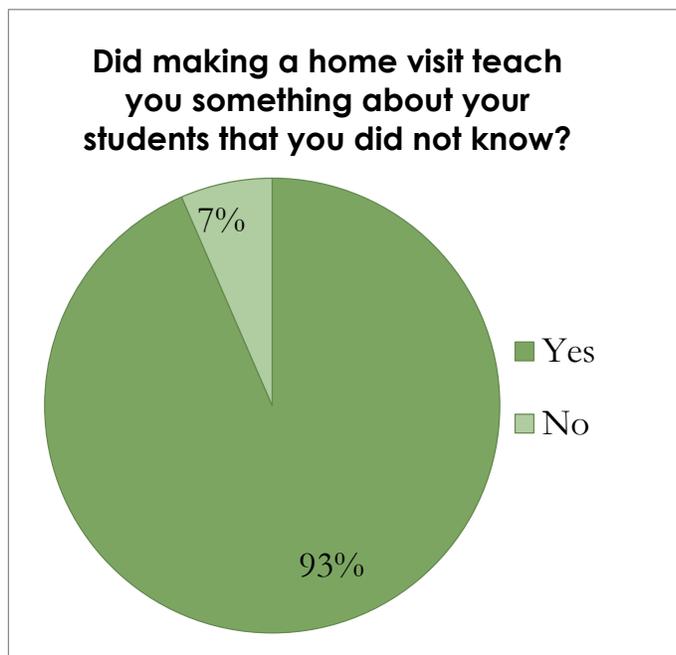
Some quotes that reflect the overall themes of these responses about changing assumptions were:

“I was impressed by how much parents care.”

“It helped me to see that parents struggle with things that I forget to think about every day.”

“I got to see the way in which families I had previously not talked to or seen at school events support their scholar's education from home. More than once, I met with parents who were assumed to be disinterested or non-supportive and found that they were working multiple jobs and going to school themselves to provide for their children and give an example of hard work ethic.”

The next section of the survey asked teachers how the home visit program impacted what they knew about their students and how this knowledge might help their instruction. The overwhelming majority of teachers indicated that they learned something new about their students through the home visit.



When asked how what they learned might help them to teach better, responses covered two broad areas. The first was that the visit deepened the relationship and trust between teacher and student. Some quotes that reflect these responses include:

“Sometimes, children were very different at home than at school. Children also felt closer to me after a home visit, so this changed our relationship for the better and made teaching challenges at school easier.”

“It taught me what their home life is like and how they communicate with their families. They have opened up to me more and trusted me more now that I have been in their homes and met their families.”

The other theme in these responses was that the visits provided teachers with new insights about students’ interests and needs in ways that could help them to individualize instruction to better meet student needs. Some examples that teachers provided were:

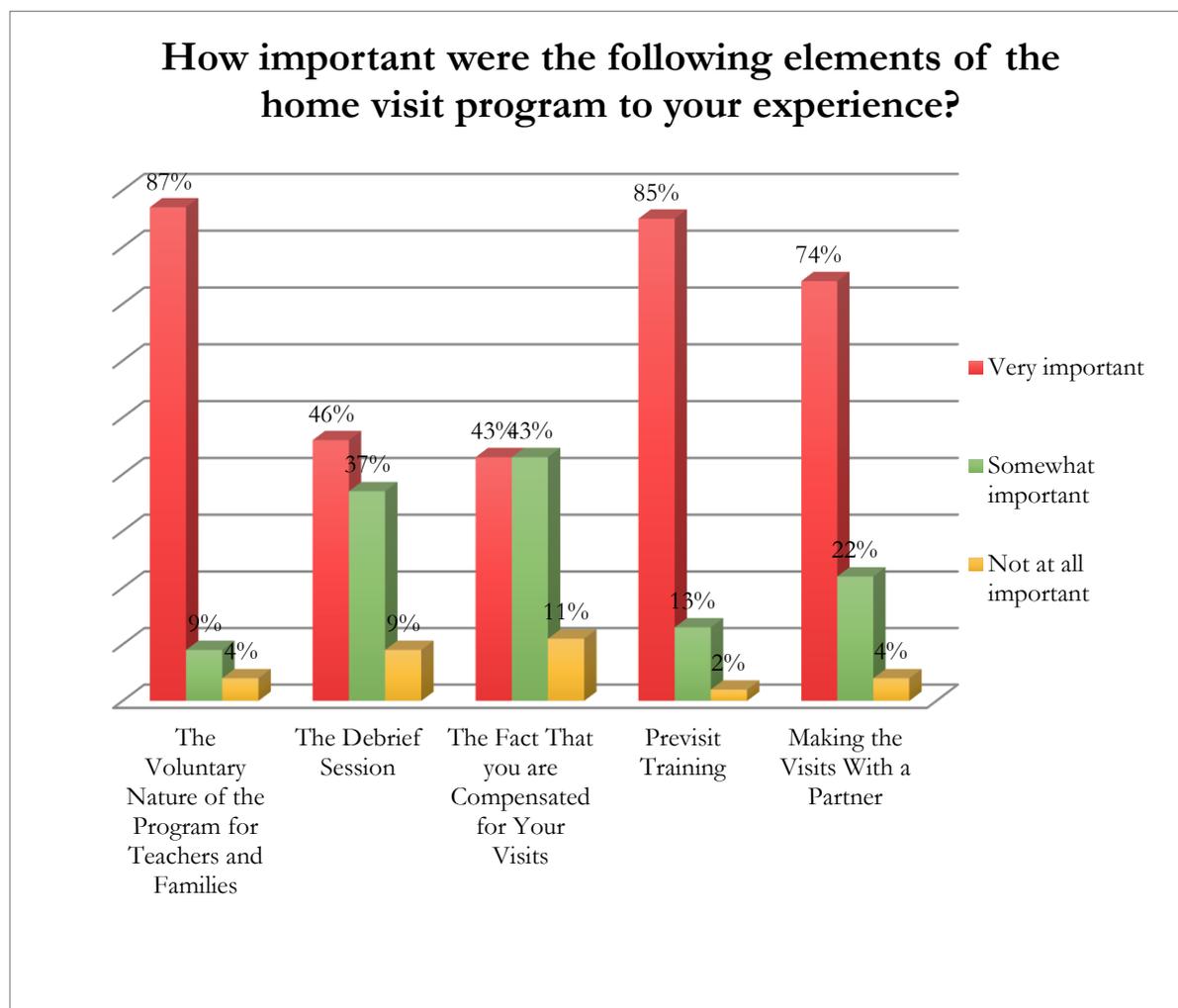
“I learned more about their interests. I am able to connect with these children on a different level. They love talking to me about their house and the things they showed me!”

“Seeing how they were raised by their parents at their home environment is very great benefit for us as an educator, we could identify what kind of support the students and their families need.”

“It gave me ideas of ways to help them in the classroom by connecting to their own interests.”

Perceptions of Elements of the Home Visits

Teachers were asked how important five different elements of the home visit program were to their experience. Again, 46 teachers offered responses to this question. In addition to the options of “very important, somewhat important, and not at all important” they were given the option to respond “not applicable.” It is interesting to note that three of the non-negotiable elements of the program that are unique to the PTHVP were ranked as very important by the majority of teachers: the voluntary nature of the program for teachers and families was seen to be very important by 87% of teachers, previsit training was seen as very important by 85%, and making the visits with a partner was seen as very important by 74% of respondents. The element of the program that was seen as not at all important by the most (11%) respondents was the fact that teachers are compensated for their time.



The next question on the survey asked teachers how the PTHVP impacts the relationship between families and teachers. A telling theme in every response to this question was that teachers provided examples of positive impacts in 100% of the responses. Some of the key themes that ran through the responses were around trust, **relationships, connection, and communication**. Many respondents wrote that they felt more comfortable contacting parents and that parents felt more comfortable reaching out to them individually after a visit. There was a perception by many teachers that connections were formed between teachers and families that to some extent demystified their respective roles in the students’ lives.

Some quotes that illustrate the responses to this question are:

"Families feel more connected to teachers as people - they also see themselves having more in common with teachers - rather than pushing teachers away"

"In most cases, I think that it brings the family and teacher closer together. I built new relationships with these families and children. They welcomed me into their home as if I was family. Each family said their child was so excited to have me at their house."

"I have seen more trust from the parents. I have parents that are more involved and feel more comfortable coming to school, calling school, and emailing me at school."

"Parents were more comfortable coming into school for field trips, family nights, conferences etc. We had a connection & have been invited to dinner or families brought food to me during conferences because "they know how busy I am & want to make sure I eat." So sweet! Kids felt special that we visited their home & wanted to know when we'd be back."



We become united, a team supporting each other both ways—families who may in another relationship be irritated by a phone call from school to help sort through a situation—offer 100% support and feel that they can ask the same...

Teacher
Feedback

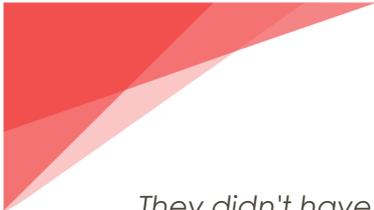
How Could SPFT Improve the Program?

Teachers who responded to the survey had some constructive suggestions for how SPFT could improve the home visit program for families and teachers. Some of the recommendations focused on how to expand the program to include more families and teachers including suggestions to work with families who are hesitant to participate and to help spread the word to teachers who might not know about the program. Multiple teachers mentioned that it would be helpful for them to get their class lists earlier in the summer to facilitate scheduling visits in advance of the school year. Fewer than half of respondents had suggestions and many respondents used this space to praise the organization and execution of the program in SPFT.

Parent/Family Interviews

The individual interviews with parents were an important source of information to confirm the importance of SPFT's goals from the family perspective. Perhaps more interesting were the themes that emerged in these conversations not specifically tied to the program's explicit framework. In terms of themes consistent with the program's messaging, we heard the following from parents:

- The visits were relaxed/the visit environment was relaxed
- There was an increased general comfort and relationship that extended into the school year
- Conversations were mostly or only about topics other than academics



They didn't have an agenda that I could see. It didn't seem like they were looking for anything in particular. It was just to chat. Really relaxed, really nice.

Usually with teachers you're going to them, and you're on their turf. This was on our turf.

Parent Interview

The most prominent interview theme discussed by every interviewee, however, was one that emerged unsolicited, and is not an explicitly articulated goal of the program. Each parent we spoke to made a point to talk about what the visits meant to their child. All discussed how much their children liked or loved receiving the home visit. Teachers also expressed this in debrief sessions and conversations, but it was powerful to hear it so strongly and consistently from the family perspective.

One parent described her child as “ecstatic,” and “beyond excited” about the prospect of the teacher visit. Other parents reported that the home visit was positive and welcomed by not only the child in that teacher’s class, but younger and older siblings in the household. The one parent who did not seem to see much benefit in the home visit for herself and her relationship with the teacher mentioned that her child loved it.

Two parents specifically discussed the visit’s role in reducing their children’s worry about attending school:

“I liked it for him, because he had already met her by the time he got there on the first day... He was more relaxed seeing her this way. She knew [student’s sister], but they’re so different. It’s not about me, whether they know me, because it’s about the child. Each child is a different world.”

“It was nice that she could know her teacher, made it feel really comfortable. For sure. There’s always a lot of anxiety, especially for little kids, going into a new class. To make that connection before school, it felt more relaxed going into the first day. She’s kind of a high anxiety kid, so this made her comfortable.”

In these findings, here are echoes of the training teachers receive in family engagement and the stated non-negotiable that the “visit focuses on relationship building and hopes and dreams.” The following are a sampling of comments from parents that illustrate these themes:

“I was at first a little weirded out. I didn’t know... I thought it was behavior problems or something, because that’s usually what it is... I thought they wanted to see how we were living, or see what the home situation was. But I didn’t feel pressured, or like they were just wanting to be nosy. It was a teacher wanting to know more about her students.”

“The personal relationship with the teacher is amazing. I really benefitted. We communicate all the time now, emailing, and she checks in with me like every Wednesday to tell me how he’s doing. That interview [home visit] had a lot to do with it.”

The visits also seemed to be particularly welcomed and/or useful to parents with kids who have experienced problems. Two families had experience with a diagnosis that had made school challenging for their children in the past. The visits gave them the comfort level, time, and privacy to discuss challenges and build a relationship to communicate throughout the year. These two parents also expressed relief in getting a call from school/a teacher that wasn't about a "problem" or their child being "in trouble." The concept of



Visiting teacher, school board member & student.

time/timing came up in other conversations as well. Parents described feeling rushed and uncomfortable taking up teachers' time for real conversations at conferences and open houses; the home visit experience was a contrast.

Four of the five parents interviewed also expressed the importance of visits that happened before the school year started. They felt this timing helped children feel more comfortable going in to the school year and gave them time to prepare their students for the new classroom, teacher, and expectations. Three parents also mentioned that they would welcome additional visits, either during or at the end of the year. Although the SPFT program encourages teachers to make a follow up visit, it seems from these interviews and data from other methods (observations and surveys) that this is not happening consistently.

In two cases, parents reported feeling unease, skepticism, and/or confusion about the purpose of the visits before teachers arrived. Not knowing or understanding what the visit was about caused some anxiety for one of these parents, because she was worried she was being "checked up on." The

other parent expressed discomfort in agreeing to a meeting in which there was no "agenda" that she was privy to. Although teacher training does include role playing the call to set up a visit appointment, perhaps some teachers need additional practice in clearly stating the visit's purpose and putting families' minds at ease.

Finally, SPFT's program leadership has been particularly interested throughout this evaluation in learning about how the home visits change teachers' assumptions about families and families' assumptions about teachers. When parents were asked if the visits changed their feelings or assumptions—about the teachers, school, or their child—none responded that they had. All of the parents interviewed felt positively about their school and teacher before the visit, and some already knew the teachers from older siblings. Even when the teacher was new to the family, parents reported not that their assumptions had changed, but that a relationship had been forged.

Observations

Throughout the evaluation period, evaluators had the opportunity to directly observe three major program components: 1) teacher training, led by SPFT home visiting trainers; 2) teacher debrief sessions, held each semester and required for stipend payment; and 3) home visits. Each observation was framed from the beginning with the program goals and non-negotiables we expected to see if program components were all in line with the program's intentions and messaging. The observations were, at the same time, left open-ended

so that additional themes, unintended consequences, surprises, and outliers entered into the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of meaning.

Training Observations

Saint Paul Federation of Teachers provides a four-hour training. Participation in this training is required for teachers to receive the stipend for participating in the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Program. One experienced home visitor and one parent conducted the training. The training opened with an overview of the research regarding parent engagement and the history of the program. However, the majority of the training time was spent on logistics and practical skills needed for a home visit including how to address barriers to communication and visits—including language barriers, assumptions and fears about personal safety, mandated reporting concerns, and an opportunity for teachers to express their own concerns. There were also multiple opportunities to roll play making the initial call to schedule the visit and different home visit scenarios.

Since one of the ways that teachers learn about the program is through their colleagues who bring them on a visit as a “second,” some participants in the training had already participated in a home visit. One of the interesting observations from this training was that those teachers who had served as a partner on a previous home visit were eager to share their experiences and suggestions with teachers who were learning about the program through the training and expressing concerns about logistics or barriers to visits.



Teachers participate in small group discussions.

When teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions or express concerns that they felt about making a home visit, the focus of the questions was on barriers that they were concerned about facing such as families being hostile or suspicious about a visit or seeing unsafe conditions in a home. These concerns were not mentioned by teachers in the debrief sessions required after participation. It is notable that it appears that some of teachers greatest concerns about home visiting might, in fact, be based on assumptions that are changed through the process of making a visit.

- Concerns raised during training (prior to experiencing visits) did not match what we heard about the program at debriefs from teachers who had made at least one visit.
- Teachers who have been on a visit as a “second” are a resource in these trainings for demystifying the experience.
- Teachers who participate in the training had largely positive feedback on the event evaluation forms that have been collected over the past three years.

Debrief Sessions

In contrast the training sessions, the debrief sessions offer a glimpse into the program from the perspective of teachers who have participated in visits. We hear in debriefs that the response to the program—from teachers, parents, and students—is overwhelmingly positive. Many of the fears teachers have about home visiting are not realized as they actually practice this family engagement strategy. As we will discuss further in

the recommendations section of this report, this finding may point toward a shift in providing more reassurance during training from teachers and parents who have participated in the program.

As the teacher survey responses suggest, the teacher debrief sessions (held twice per semester) seem to be important to participating teachers and a core component of the program. We know from research on efficacy and job satisfaction in teaching (and many other practice professions) that having time and space for purposeful reflection is a key component for a professional's success and growth. In teaching in particular, this time for and importance placed on reflective practice is often lost. SPFT's home visiting model builds in debriefing sessions as a required step for participants to receive payment; what we saw and heard, however, is that teachers value the debriefing events as more than the path to getting paid. It is a welcome opportunity to share experiences with other home visiting teachers, reflect, and problem-solve and improve practice for future visits.



Teachers' Top Ten Home Visiting Words & Phrases

1. *Relationship/partnership*
2. *Connected/connection*
3. *Fun*
4. *Awesome/love/wow/
favorite part of year*
5. *Beneficial*
6. *Positive*
7. *Respect/respectful*
8. *Eye-opening/enlightening*
9. *Necessary*
10. *Meaningful*

Words and phrases most used by
teachers to describe home visiting
during debrief sessions.

with both students and parents as well. Changes in type or tone of the relationship include: a change from confrontation to conversation; less fear in subsequent encounters, less defensiveness, and a feeling that culture was being recognized rather than criticized. The level of trust between parents and teachers increased, according to several teachers.

The debrief sessions consist of: sharing and discussion on the home visiting experience (including round-robin sharing, small group discussion, and large group discussion); a brief advanced/follow-up training (including guest speakers on specific family engagement topics); an opportunity to provide SPFT staff with feedback from families/communities; and a discussion of future programming and training needs. The content of the debriefing sessions provides essential feedback for SPFT program leaders about the program and the visit experiences.

During the two nights of observation, we heard similar themes repeated again and again by teachers as they reflected on their experiences. The most prominent theme weaved throughout the sessions was that of connection. Teachers report having a feeling of deeper connection with families, a connection that often lasts throughout the school year after just one visit. Teachers also report a deeper/different connection with students. They have a better idea of their interests, they know their families, and have a better sense of who they are as people outside the classroom. One teacher described it as feeling like she had an “inside joke” with the students she had visited in their homes.

Teachers in both debrief sessions discussed variations on the theme of changing relationships

One somewhat surprising theme that emerged from these conversations was how home visiting affected the teachers' job satisfaction. Teachers reported feeling energized by the process of home visiting, some reporting that it is their favorite part of the year or their job. In small and large group discussions, teachers talked about seeing the difference this program was making in their classrooms and in their connections to their students—and that this difference was making them want to do more. Teachers also feel a connection with their colleagues when they go on home visits together. In a profession that can often isolate teachers in their classrooms, the home visiting program gave them a shared experience and time to build relationships with their fellow teachers.

Discussion & Recommendations

Although each data collection method unearthed unique findings, certain key themes arose across the board to warrant special attention. The most notable common thread, regardless of information source (teachers, families, program leadership, or documents) or method (surveys, interviews, observations, or document review) was ***relationship and connection***. Parents described forging a new/different relationship with teachers, and teachers reported the same with students and families. Given that SPFT's written non-negotiables, training materials, and professed philosophy all stress the importance of building relationships, this is a key finding for the program. What the program intends and strives to achieve is, indeed, what we observed in practice.

We would also like to highlight two themes that emerged throughout the study that are positive, yet somewhat unexpected. First, there is evidence from every source that students benefit from and tend to enjoy the home visits. While it is too early to tell whether the program affects measurable student achievement numbers, there does appear to be an effect on students' positive regard for school and teachers. Future studies to elicit feedback directly from students and trace the positive relationships to educational data associated with long term school success (including attendance, discipline, and achievement scores) would provide deeper insight into this program's impacts.

Second, the participating teachers themselves report a feeling of job satisfaction, reenergizing for the profession, and deeper connections with colleagues. While this isn't a stated goal of the Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Project, it is a positive "side effect" that deserves attention and further thought. It is impossible to parse out how much of this can be attributed to the home visits themselves, the training provided, the time for reflection, the teacher partnering, additional compensation, some combination of these, or all of the above. The positive implications of this program for teacher retention and positive work environment are an interesting area for further exploration, however, and could provide additional avenues for program support and growth.

In terms of process, we have discussed the following observations and recommendations with SPFT program staff:

Debrief sessions: The requirement that teachers attend these sessions to receive pay and continue participation engages all teachers in the process of reflective practice, a key component for this model of teacher home visiting. A gifted facilitator makes this a rewarding, professionally beneficial, and fun time for teachers to gather and reflect, and both the icebreakers and the questions provide

an opportunity for SPFT to gather data from teachers about their experiences of home visiting. A mixture of small group and large group reflection and round-robin-style feedback allows for all voices in the room to be heard. We recommend capitalizing on these existing strengths by formalizing the debrief process. Tools for facilitators to more quickly and easily capture teachers' stories and experiences as they participate in debriefs would be a helpful way to collect data throughout the sessions and make other evaluation methods less necessary. We also recommend the development and use of a facilitation guide to ensure consistency between facilitators as the program grows.

Communication: Both parents and teachers expressed interest in having a better understanding of the program. In the case of parents, they wanted to know about the purpose of the initial visit. For teachers, both during debrief sessions and in the survey, they expressed an interest in better understanding the second visit. These findings indicate that it is important for administrators of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Program to be proactive about communicating the purposes of all aspects of the program to stakeholders—not only to parents and teachers but to administrators and community members as well. Having a full understanding of the intentions behind the home visits will help to encourage families to participate and could make the experience more transparent and comfortable for families and teachers.

Tracking the impact of visits on students: As the numbers of home visits and home visitors increases in Saint Paul Public Schools, understanding the impact of home visits on students' school behaviors might be of interest to program supporters and district administrators. In order to better understand the impact of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Program is having on students, the district should include the ability to note when a student or family has received a home visit in their Student Information System.