

Family and Community Collaboration Spotlight: Meeting Families Where They Are

Key Strategies

Districts can meet families where they are and support student outcomes by:

- **Visiting families** in person or virtually
- **Proactively working with caregivers** to identify their student's needs and goals
- **Providing sufficient supports for teachers** by offering professional development, time, and resources for home visits

An essential element of authentic family and community collaboration is including all families in decision making and ensuring all voices are heard. This requires strategies for collaborating with families who have been historically excluded. One strategy is home visits. Visiting a family's home gives educators a unique opportunity to learn about the student's needs and goals and discuss the family's expectations. For home visits to take place and be effective, districts must provide educators with sufficient support, professional development, and time to conduct them. Many districts are finding that home visits are worth the planning and resources they require. By demonstrating how much educators respect and value family perspectives, home visits provide families an opportunity to take an active role in their children's education, leading to improved student outcomes.

Strategies in Action

District of Columbia Public Schools

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) uses this strategy, developed by the Flamboyant Foundation, across their diverse school district of about 50,000 students in the nation's capital. DCPS home visits take place both during the summer and during the school year. The district sends teams of two teachers to every student's home to get to know the family and child. The visits, which usually last around 30 minutes, encourage teachers and families to share information and provide them both with the opportunity to learn more about the student. Educators learn such things as the language families speak at home, family stories, and the student's access to books and other resources, while families learn about the school year's focus, key learning objectives, and ways they can help their child thrive.

"Teachers and families both share their hopes, dreams, and expectations for the student."

- DCPS.DC.gov

While emphasizing the importance of ongoing communication with families throughout the year (via phone calls, emails, and in-person conversations), DCPS has seen some successes using home visits. The district reported that home visits have increased trust between their schools and families, created enduring relationships between teachers and families, and reduced truancy rates. Research showed that the DCPS home visits also reduced the likelihood of a student having a disciplinary incident later in that school year (McKie et al. 2021). It is important to note that DCPS prioritized professional development and training on home visits for teachers and staff and provided sufficient time for teachers to conduct the visits.

COVID-19 forced DCPS to suspend in-person home visits and conduct them virtually instead. While adapting to the virtual format posed challenges, the district remained committed to maintaining strong connections with families. Teachers and staff continue to engage with families through video conferences and phone calls, offering support, resources, and updates on their students' progress. A virtual format like the one used by DCPS is a great alternative for districts that cover large areas or have limited budgets. By meeting families where they are — in person or virtually — districts can build stronger relationships and better understand the unique needs of their students.



Photo courtesy of [Upsplash](#)

About the Connected & Engaged Initiative

This initiative investigates common barriers to achieving authentic partnerships between school districts and families and offers research-based strategies to address those challenges. This initiative aims to support school districts, community-based organizations and caregivers as they consider their own challenges and work to nurture and promote a connected and engaged school community.

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