



ENGAGEMENT AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT: OBSERVATION GUIDE FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF HOME VISITORS

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DOCUMENT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	4
Overview of the Home Visit	5
Research Supporting Home Visits.....	6
Purpose of the Home Visitor Observation Tool	6
Procedure for Conducting a Home Visit	7
Before the Visit.....	7
During the Visit	7
After the Visit.....	8
References.....	9
Home Observation Form.....	11
Instructions.....	11
Procedure for Scoring via Observation	11

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INTRODUCTION

Despite Title I schools receiving additional funding and being required to engage students' families via outreach efforts, little difference exists in how parents from Title I and non-Title I schools participate in and receive information from their schools. Moreover, little difference exists in how satisfied parents are with their school's communication efforts or in parents' attendance at in-person events (2023). Home visits are an effective strategy for bridging these gaps in communication and building relationships between families and their schools across various demographics.

The purpose of this guide is four-fold:

1. To give an overview of home visits
2. To describe the role of the home visit in family engagement efforts
3. To explain how to conduct a home visit
4. To provide a tool for educators to improve home visits

OVERVIEW OF THE HOME VISIT

Home visits are a way of meeting students and families at a location that shifts power dynamics so that families can feel more at ease, empowered, and are better able to access information and resources. Through home visits, schools and school districts can engage with families and foster a positive school-home relationship.

Home visits are voluntary, pre-scheduled interactions between professionals and families that are held off campus. It is up to the direction of an LEA or community organizations to define the perimeters of who can be a home visitor.

While these visits are coined “home” visits, families can request an alternative meeting location such as a local park, restaurant, coffee shop, etc. Home visits are held off-campus to create a sense of equal partnership between teachers and parents, and to create a space where families are more likely to feel comfortable communicating their needs, experiences, and hopes and dreams of their child.

The purpose of home visits is to:

- Strengthen the relationship between families and schools
- Gain insight into potential barriers to attendance, homework completion, etc.
- Humanize each other
- Establish a pathway for communication and collaboration
- Gain insights into family strengths to build on for student success

Home visits offer eight main benefits:

- Improved family-school relationships
- Increased student attendance
- Increased student achievement
- Increased student engagement
- Increased feelings of belonging
- Increased access to resources for families
- Increased expectations of accountability
- Greater gratitude and appreciation

(Adapted from Stemler, S. E., et al., 2022).

RESEARCH SUPPORTING HOME VISITS

A 2012 review of thirty-two home visit models found that home visits positively correlated with positive effects on child development, including reductions in child maltreatment (Avellar & Supplee, 2013). More specific to education is the research created and compiled by the Parent Teacher Home Visit (PTHV) program.

Research examining home visits through the PTHV approach found that, on average, schools that systematically implemented PTHV experienced a decreased rate of student chronic absenteeism and increased rates of student English Language Arts (ELA) and math proficiency (Sheldon, 2018). These benefits extended to all students, including those whose families did not directly participate in a home visit, if the students attended a school that implemented home visits with at least ten percent of students' families (Sheldon et al., 2018).

PURPOSE OF THE HOME VISITOR OBSERVATION TOOL

The tool provided at the end of this document is intended to be used by supervisors of home visitors during a home visit so that home visitors can improve their engagement and communication strategies. This tool will serve as a tool for professional learning and to assess for improvement. This tool intends to provide non-punitive feedback to home visitors. This tool should be embedded into a system for improvement of their facilitation of home visits. Through usage of this tool, home visitors will be able to receive feedback on the following indicators:

- Engagement in structured conversations to achieve a common goal
- Managing difficult conversations to build on positive relationships
- Preparation pre-home visit

PROCEDURE FOR CONDUCTING A HOME VISIT

Home visits provide a larger window for engagement as opposed to the snapshot of families that LEAs typically get when families visit on campus. Home visitor observers should conduct observations 120 minutes (about 2 hours) before finalizing evaluation scores. The observation period should be gathered over the course of multiple visits.

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Make it clear to families that these visits are voluntary.
- Ensure families are notified that this visit intends to build relationships between schools and families and strives to better understand what schools can do to best support their student(s).
 - Emphasize that this visit is not in response to a negative consequence or action.
- Notify families that the visit will take approximately 30 minutes.
- Notify the family that there is no obligation for them to provide food or anything else during the visit.
 - Allowing us the opportunity to spend time with them off campus is more than sufficient, and we are grateful for the opportunity.
- Notify families that the visit does not have to happen at their actual place of residence (e.g., library, soccer game, etc.).
- Schedule the visit before attending.
- Confirm the address with the family.
- Identify who you will be partnering with to attend the visit.
- Send a reminder the day before the visit.
- Send a reminder on the day of (e.g., We are looking forward to seeing you today at 4:00 p.m. at (location address and name)!)

DURING THE VISIT

- Home visitors should emphasize shifting conversation to a positive perspective.

- This could include reframing parent comments to strengths.
- Home visitors may be offered food during a home visit.
 - If a home visitor wishes to decline, they should do so in a respectful manner. A tip would be to let the family know that you have just eaten but would be happy to take some home.
- Observers should present themselves to the family being visited and explain that their role in the meeting is to observe the home visitor to improve their skill set with facilitating visits.
 - During the visit, the observer will take notes and score the home visit.
 - After completing 120 minutes (about 2 hours) of observation time, the averages will be compiled for a final score.

AFTER THE VISIT

- It is important the home visitor(s) follow up on action items from the home visit.
 - Consistency, transparent, and follow through are essential to establishing a positive relationship between the home and school.
- Ongoing communication between home visits is essential to strengthening the relationship between the home and school.
 - In addition to general communication, ensure to check in with families on an individual basis when possible.

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HOME OBSERVATION FORM

On the following pages you will find the Home Visit Observation Form. This form should be used as part of continuous improvement of family engagement initiatives and the ongoing professional learning of Family and Community Engagement professionals.

INSTRUCTIONS

Print two copies, one for the home visitor and one for the observer. During the visit, the observer will take notes and score the home visit (see Procedure for Scoring via Observation below). Following the visit, the home visitor should reflect and add notes to their own copy. After completing 120 minutes (about 2 hours) of observation time, the averages will be compiled for a final score. Once this has been done, a meeting to discuss the visit(s), compare notes, offer feedback, and establish goals should be scheduled between the observer and the home visitor(s).

PROCEDURE FOR SCORING VIA OBSERVATION

RATINGS

Scores should be representative of the observations of the home visits and be backed by notes taken. The circumstances of the visits should be considered and reflected in the score.

NA, Not Applicable: This score is available for when the environment or situation did not allow the opportunity for indicator to be facilitated or observed.

No Indicator Seen: This rating is applicable for situations where multiple opportunities were available, but the home visitor did not engage in or facilitated poorly this practice.

Beginning: This rating is applicable for situations where multiple opportunities were available, but the facilitation from the home visitor was inconsistent or varied across the indicators.

Growing: This rating is applicable for situations where multiple opportunities were available, and the facilitation from the home visitor was consistent across two indicators.

Thriving: This rating is applicable for situations where multiple opportunities were available, and the facilitation from the home visitor was consistent across all indicators.

Home Visit Observation Form

Name of Home Visitor: _____ Name of Observer: _____

Date & Time of Home Visit: _____

Pre-Visit Preparation					
	NA	None	Beginning	Growing	Thriving
The home visitor ensured that the visit was accessible to families by utilizing their input and when and where to schedule the visit.					
Families received a reminder the day before and the day of the visit.					
Expectations and roles of the visit were shared prior to the visit.					
The address of where the visit would be held was confirmed prior to the visit.					
The home visitor has engaged in a pre-visit meeting and brought resources to address barriers, needs, or concerns.					
Notes:					

Structured Conversations					
	NA	None	Beginning	Growing	Thriving
The home visitor clearly restated the purpose of the home visit.					
The home visitor redirected the conversation to maintain the integrity of the home visit's intention.					
The home visitors explained and highlighted the family's role, duties, and expectations in their student's education.					
The home visitor used a strengths-based approach to set goals.					
The home visitor asked open-ended questions to gather information.					
Notes:					

Managing Difficult Conversation					
	NA	None	Beginning	Growing	Thriving
The home visitor utilized a holistic approach to address the needs or concerns of the family.					
The home visitor helped to identify structures, strengths, or networks existing in the family's community that can support the family's needs.					
The home visitor pivots the conversation to focus on strengths and celebrations.					
The home visitor addressed questions, concerns, or personal disclosures with sensitivity that aligns with policy guidelines.					
Notes:					