

Executive Summary

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HOME WORKS! The Teacher Home Visit Program is a non-profit organization whose mission is to bring together teachers and families to partner in their children's education. HOME WORKS! trains teachers in low income, underperforming schools to serve as agents of change, who work to transform the way that families engage with schools and support their children's learning. Teachers and other school staff visit families in their homes twice over the course of the school year and host family engagement events in the school setting to foster positive, productive home-school connections. The program goals are to build trusting, quality relationships between parents and teachers and to promote the adoption of effective parenting practices that will help children succeed academically. The program targets increases in parent and teacher engagement as a mechanism to improving students' daily attendance, classroom behavior, and academic achievement.

HOME WORKS! funds evaluations of its programs to assess implementation quality and effectiveness. For the 2014–15 school year, the program contracted with an outside firm to conduct an implementation and outcome study that would assess the effectiveness of using teacher home visits as a tool to increase parental engagement in schools and to improve educational outcomes among children performing below grade level. The evaluation approach was guided by the following study questions:

- How many students and families were reached through HOME WORKS! The Teacher Home Visit Program? How many teachers and school staff were actively engaged in conducting home visits with their students?
- How successful was the program in reaching high need students at risk for school failure?
- How well was the program implemented with respect to fidelity to the program model (i.e., two home visits, two family dinners)? What were the most important implementation challenges and successes identified by parents, teachers, and school administrators?
- How did HOME WORKS! impact parental engagement and parenting practices in the home (e.g., expected roles, parenting efficacy, learning expectations, orientation toward school, parent-teacher relationships, etc.) that promote student learning and school success?
- How did HOME WORKS! impact academic performance, school attendance, and behavior of students who received home visits, as compared to non-participating students?

The present report summarizes results from the implementation portion of the study. The report documents the home visit process across districts and school buildings, assesses teacher and parent perceptions of the home visit experience, and identifies implementation strengths and challenges that may inform future program replication and evaluation efforts.

The HOME WORKS! Program Model

HOME WORKS! Teacher Home Visit Program is an adaptation of the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP)—a Sacramento-based teacher home visit training organization that trains teachers in districts across the U.S. to conduct home visits with families (The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, <http://www.pthvp.org>). The standard HOME WORKS! model involves two teacher home visits and two in-school family dinners to promote parent and family engagement in schools. The standard program model is typically implemented by classroom teachers in early childhood education and elementary school settings and includes each of the components described in exhibit E1. HOME WORKS! also has several model variations that share a core emphasis on establishing parent-teacher learning partnerships, but that differ with respect to program structure, components, and populations of focus. The present report focuses on the standard program model and the eleven schools that implemented the model during the 2014-15 school year.

Two Staff Trainings

School staff attend two staff trainings to build capacity to engage parents in the learning process. Training content focuses on relationship building, academic support, and cultural competence. School staff attend refresher training each subsequent year of their involvement.

Two Site Coordinators

Site coordinators are hired from within each school building to serve as liaisons between schools and the HOME WORKS! organization to support and facilitate program implementation.

Two Family Dinners

Schools host two Family Dinners on each school campus to communicate to parents that their involvement is welcomed, valued, and expected, and to educate parents on how to support student learning.

Two Person Teams

Teams of two school faculty or staff members conduct home visits with families. Teams include a lead visitor who must be knowledgeable about the student's academic performance (e.g., a classroom teacher or special education instructor), and second visitor who is any staff person employed by the school.

Two Teacher Home Visits

The first home visit is used to build positive relationships and to open lines of communication between teachers and families. The second visit is intended to educate parents about school expectations and parental roles in supporting children's academic success, to review students' academic progress and set goals for future achievement, and to give parents information and resources they can use to help support their child academically.

School, Teacher, and Family Participation in HOME WORKS!

Schools implementing the HOME WORKS! model commit to a five-year implementation timeline, and must agree to engage at least 50% of their classroom teachers in home visits to receive funding support. This minimum expectation was recently lowered to require that only 25% of teachers participate beginning in the 2015-16 school year. Teachers and other school staff are expected to attend two trainings and to conduct visits with families in two-person teams over the course of the school year. The HOME WORKS! organization provides training, implementation support, and compensation to schools covering up to 50% of the extra service pay earned by teachers, depending on the total number of visits completed.

Teacher home visits were widely implemented across schools, grade levels, and classrooms, reaching 1,824 families of disadvantaged students enrolled in low income, Title I schools.

In 2014–15 the HOME WORKS! standard model was implemented in nine elementary schools and two early childhood centers across four Missouri school districts, serving children ranging in age from preschool to grade six. The participating districts included a mix of large urban, suburban, and small rural school systems located across central Missouri and the greater St. Louis area. All participating schools received Title I funding and served high concentrations of economically disadvantaged families, as indicated by the high percentage of children who were eligible for the federal Free Reduced Lunch Program. During the 2014–15 school year, these schools conducted 2,819 home visits with 1,824 families and their children, accounting for nearly half of all students enrolled (47%) across the eleven school sites.

Teacher and classroom participation rates and rates of family engagement within classrooms varied across school settings, impacting the number of students and families reached through the program. Three key factors influencing program reach included: teacher involvement and motivation, the approach to selecting students for visits, and the level of success recruiting and engaging families.

School staff participation in the teacher home visit program was voluntary. In all, there were 231 teachers and other school staff who actively participated in the teacher home visit program during the 2014–15 school year. Teachers accounted for over half of all participating staff (60%) and were the most common participant type, followed by special education instructors (10%), learning specialists (10%), teacher assistants (6%) and school counselors (3%).

Across all schools, there were 130 active HOME WORKS! classrooms whose lead teachers were formally trained and committed to conducting visits with families. This number represents about 73% of total classrooms in schools, and a potential pool of 2,746 student participants. The percentage of active classrooms ranged from about one-third of classrooms participating in one school (34%) to school-wide participation in four others (100%).

According to teacher surveys, the leading reasons that motivated teachers to participate in the program were the potential benefits for their students (94%), the anticipated impacts on teacher effectiveness (80%), and the encouragement of the school administration (76%).

Teachers used different strategies to identify and recruit families to participate in home visits. Notably, the 2014-15 study year was marked by a mid-year change that transitioned the program from universal implementation, where the goal was to engage all families within a classroom, to a more indicated approach, whereby teachers identified students for participation based on need or parent request. This shift in strategy acknowledged that teachers could not realistically reach all families in their classrooms, and instead, embraced a more targeted approach that prioritized students who were most at risk for academic challenges.

Teachers were instructed by the program to visit a minimum of 50% of students in their classrooms; however, the actual number of families visited was left to the teacher's discretion, and was often dependent on teacher time constraints and the success of outreach efforts to engage families in the home visit process. As a result, across active HOME WORKS! classrooms, there was considerable variation in the number and percentage of students whose families participated in the program. These percentages ranged anywhere from 30% to 90% of students in classrooms on average. For classroom teachers, the minimum number of visits completed ranged from a low of 1 home visit to a high of 59 visits, with an overall average of 18.9 visits per teacher. Interestingly, higher rates of teacher participation at the school level (i.e., more teachers agreed to participate in the program) did not necessarily translate into higher rates of student participation within classrooms. Overall, the amount of variation observed across schools and classrooms meant that few schools were similar with respect to implementation, despite adopting the same standard model. This variation has important implications for model replication. This also raises important questions for future evaluation work regarding who is most likely to benefit from the home visit experience, and what constitutes the optimal number of student and family participants within a school or classroom to maximize program benefits.

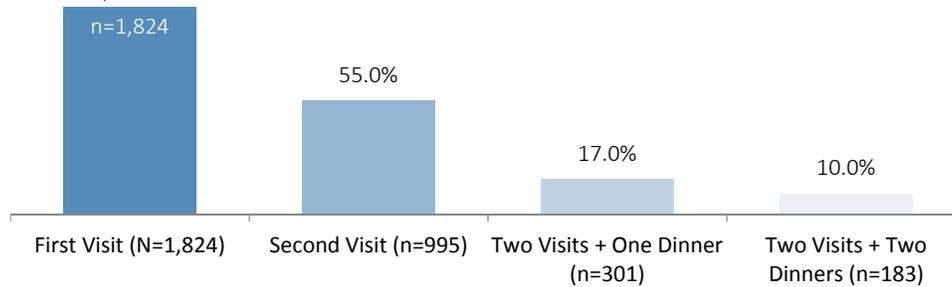
Fidelity to the Program Model

Another important focus of the implementation study was to assess implementation fidelity, or the extent to which the program “as implemented” conformed to the program “as planned”. Fidelity is important because stronger fidelity to the program model increases confidence that changes in outcomes can be attributed to program strategies. There were various elements of the HOME WORKS! intervention that defined fidelity to the model, such as the number of completed visits, participation at family dinners, and the location, length, and timing of visits.

Schools implemented all of the required HOME WORKS! model components, although strength of implementation and timing varied across schools, with many schools struggling to deliver the full intervention model to families (i.e., participation in first and second visits, and attendance at two family dinners).

Exhibit E2 documents the number and percentage of students and families who participated in different program components and highlights the challenge that schools encountered implementing the full intervention. Specifically, of the 1,824 families who participated in home visits, nearly half (45%) failed to receive a second visit, missing the academic component of the intervention. Seventeen percent of families participated in two visits and attended one family dinner; ten participated in two visits and attended both dinners, receiving the full “dose” of the program intervention.

Exhibit E2. Students who received second visits, two visits and attended one dinner, two visits and attended two dinners as a percent of those who received a first visit



Source: HOME WORKS! Teacher Online Log, 2014–15

The fidelity assessment also documented the percentage of completed first and second home visits that conformed to model criteria related to length, timing, and duration of visits and participation of the student. Exhibit E3 shows that, overall, schools were very successful ensuring that students were present during home visits, that visits were conducted in the homes of participating families, and that first visits lasted at least 30 minutes in duration. Schools were less successful implementing visits during the scheduled window within the school year, with 84% of first visits and 86% of second visits being completed on time. These percentages varied across schools. Teachers also struggled to extend second visits to the full 45-minute duration, with many staff indicating on teacher surveys that 45 minutes was unnecessarily long and imposed too much on family schedules. In response, HOME WORKS! has since reduced the 45-minute minimum requirement for second visits to 30 minutes beginning in 2015-16.

Exhibit E3. Percent of the first and second visits conducted with fidelity to the program model

Fidelity Measure	First Visit		Second Visit	
	Percent within target	Range across schools	Percent within target	Range across schools
Student presence: Students must be present at the teacher home visit	93%	78-97%	96%	86-100%
Timing of visits: First visits should be completed before Nov 1 and second visits should be completed from Jan to March	84%	57-93%	86%	10-99%
Length of visits: First visits should last at least 30 minutes and second visits should last 45 minutes	98%	87-100%	74%	49-100%
Location of visits: First and second visits should be conducted in the home	89%	73-99%	89%	71-98%

Source: HOME WORKS! Teacher Online Log, 2014–15

The fidelity assessment also provided important feedback related to the strength and timing of visit implementation. Importantly, it revealed that half of students and families received the academic component of the intervention through second visits. For one-third (35%) of those who received second visits, visits were scheduled within the last three months of the school year, limiting opportunities to meaningfully impact school behaviors and school outcomes. These findings suggest the need to explore reasons that implementation failed to occur as planned, and to potentially modify training and monitoring, or other aspects of the intervention design to ensure that students benefit from all core model components.

Parent Perceptions of the Teacher Home Visit Experience

The implementation study also attempted to capture parent perspectives on the home visit experience through parent surveys. Surveys were administered to parents of students in HOME WORKS! classrooms who did and did not participate in home visits. The survey measured a number of key constructs, including parents' perceptions of barriers that prevented them from becoming more involved in their children's learning, orientations toward teachers and schools, beliefs about their own roles and capacities to support their children's learning, and activities that they engaged in at home to help promote their children's school success.

The greatest perceived barriers that prevented families from becoming more engaged in their children's learning were related to time and scheduling constraints.

The most significant barriers identified by families that prevented them from participating more actively in their children's education were conflicts with work or home schedules (38%), having younger children to care for at home (31%), and not having enough time to devote to educational activities (30%). Parents reported being less impeded by personal barriers, such as not feeling comfortable at school, not feeling confident in their own ability to help, or not knowing how to become more involved.

More than 80% of families who received teacher home visits believed that their participation had improved their relationships with their child's teacher, had taught them ways to support their children's learning at home, and had helped them to become more involved in their children's school life.

When asked to evaluate the benefits of the teacher home visit program for their family and child, parent responses were overwhelmingly positive. Parents were given a series of statements and were asked to indicate how true each statement was for them. Survey items were rated on a five-point Likert scale with response options that ranged from "very true" to "not true at all". For all items, the majority of parents who received home visits saw a benefit from their participation in a number of different areas. More specifically:

- Ninety-one percent (91%) felt it was 'true' or 'very true' that home visits had improved their relationship with their child's teachers.
- Ninety percent (90%) believed that home visits taught them ways to support their children's learning at home.
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) felt that home visits made them feel more positively about their child's school future.
- Eighty-four percent (84%) felt visits helped them become more involved in their children's school life.
- Eighty-three percent (83%) felt more confident in their ability to help their children succeed.
- Eighty-three percent (83%) felt that home visits helped them feel more connected to their child's school.

Parents also had opportunities in open-ended questions to share their personal feelings about the benefits of the teacher home visit experience. In their responses, parents emphasized the value of establishing a relationship with their child's teacher, having opportunities for one-on-one parent-teacher interactions, being able to observe positive exchanges between their children and their children's teachers, and sharing information with teachers about their child's strengths, needs, and home life.

Teacher Perceptions of the Teacher Home Visit Experience

Teacher surveys and home visit logs were used to capture feedback from teachers and other school staff about their home visit experiences, including the beliefs they held about the involvement of families in the learning process, the challenges they encountered in making home visits, and their assessments of the HOME WORKS! program's management and operations. The survey and teacher logs also captured teacher reports of the influence of home visits on instructional practices and the outcomes they observed among students and families reached.

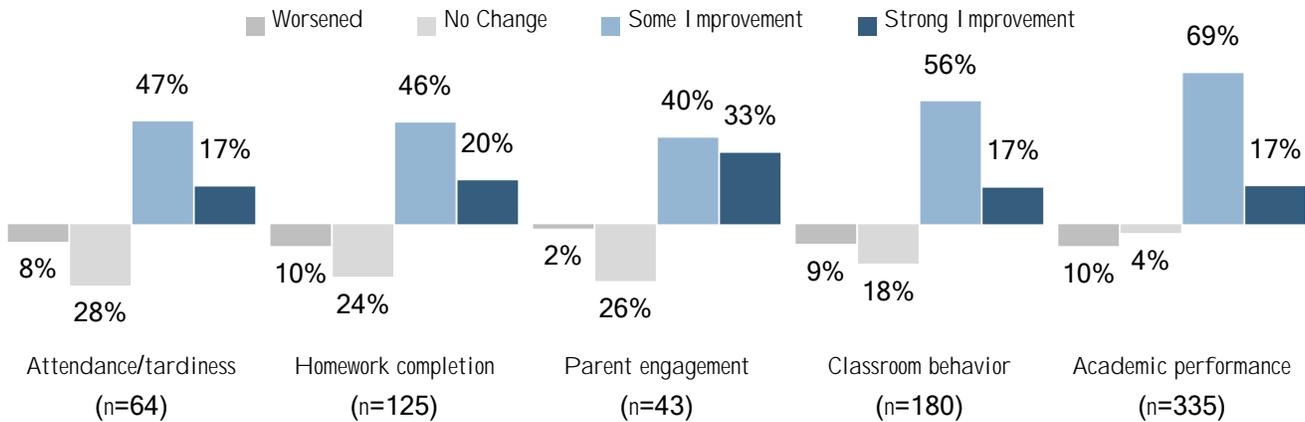
The greatest challenges to participation identified by teachers were related to time and resource demands, and insufficient compensation for their time and effort.

Most teachers were positive about their participation in teacher home visits, although participants did perceive significant challenges to implementation, including challenges related to excessive time commitments, difficulties scheduling visits with families and coordinating visits with partners, difficulty convincing families to participate in the home visit process, and burden associated with reporting requirements. Teachers held favorable impressions of the amount of support and training they received through the HOME WORKS! organization to help them accomplish program objectives, but often felt that compensation was not adequate given the time and resource demands of participation.

Teachers reported positive impacts on the quality of their relationships with families as a result of the home visit experience and perceived improvements in student performance over the course of the school year.

Overall, teachers felt positively about their experiences conducting home visits and about the impact of home visits on their relationships with families. More specifically, on teacher logs completed after each home visit, teachers indicated that for more than 80% of the families they visited, home visits had ‘very much’ improved the quality of their relationships.

Exhibit E4. Teacher ratings of improvement in need areas among participating students



Source: HOME WORKS! Teacher and School Staff Survey, 2014–15

Some of the most compelling evidence of the effectiveness of home visits in addressing student needs was captured on items on teacher logs completed at the conclusion of the second home visit. For each student and family, teachers were asked to rate the degree of improvement observed in areas of need targeted by the program, including academic achievement, attendance, homework completion, classroom behavior, and parent communication and engagement. Teachers were only required to rate students who were experiencing challenges in each area and who had documented needs for improvement. For all students who received a second home visit, below grade level academic performance was the most common need identified, although academic needs were only noted for about one-third of all students (34%). Classroom behavior (20%) and issues with homework completion (15%) were the second and third most commonly identified needs, respectively, followed by attendance issues (7%) and need for improved parent engagement and communication (4%).

For students who were performing below grade level academically, teachers reported ‘some improvement’ or ‘strong improvement’ in academic performance among 86% of students who received home visits. Teachers also noted improvements among 73% of students exhibiting behavioral issues in the classroom, 66% of those who had trouble completing homework assignments, and 64% of those who had issues with tardiness or attendance. Teachers also reported increases in family engagement among 73% of families who they had identified as being disconnected from the school setting.

Summary

The HOME WORKS! implementation study assessed the delivery of the standard teacher home visit model across 11 preschools and elementary schools during the 2014–15 school year. The implementation study was the first evaluation effort to be informed by teacher logs documenting real-time information about the timing, quality, and content of teacher home visits, which could be used to assess the strength of home visit implementation across school settings. The implementation study was the first part of a two-part study that will explore the outcomes of the program on participants’ academic behaviors and performance, as compared to students in matched school settings that did not implement home visits this school year. This work lays the foundation for a more rigorous research study that will test the model’s effectiveness in promoting academic outcomes for students enrolled in high need, underperforming school systems.

Overall, findings from the implementation study offered evidence to suggest that HOME WORKS! The Teacher Home Visit Program successfully strengthened parent-school connections in participating schools by helping teachers more meaningfully engage with the families of their students, and helping families feel more connected to the learning environment. The evaluation also uncovered a considerable amount of variation in how programs

were implemented across school settings, and how well programs were implemented with respect to fidelity to the program model. These findings have helped to identify issues related to training, program monitoring, and accountability that are now being addressed as part of larger continuous quality improvement effort initiated during the 2015-16 school year.