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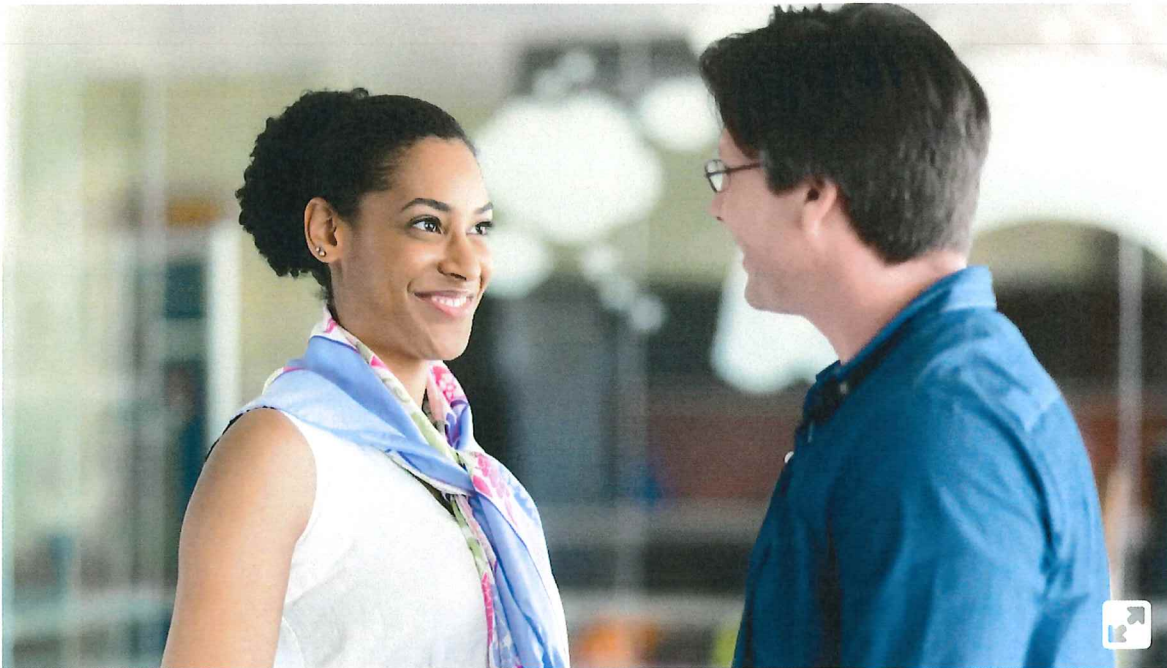
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**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT****Home Visits 101**

Home visits can be a valuable tool for increasing parents' involvement in their kids' education. Here's how you can get started.

**By** *Cristina Santamaria Graff*

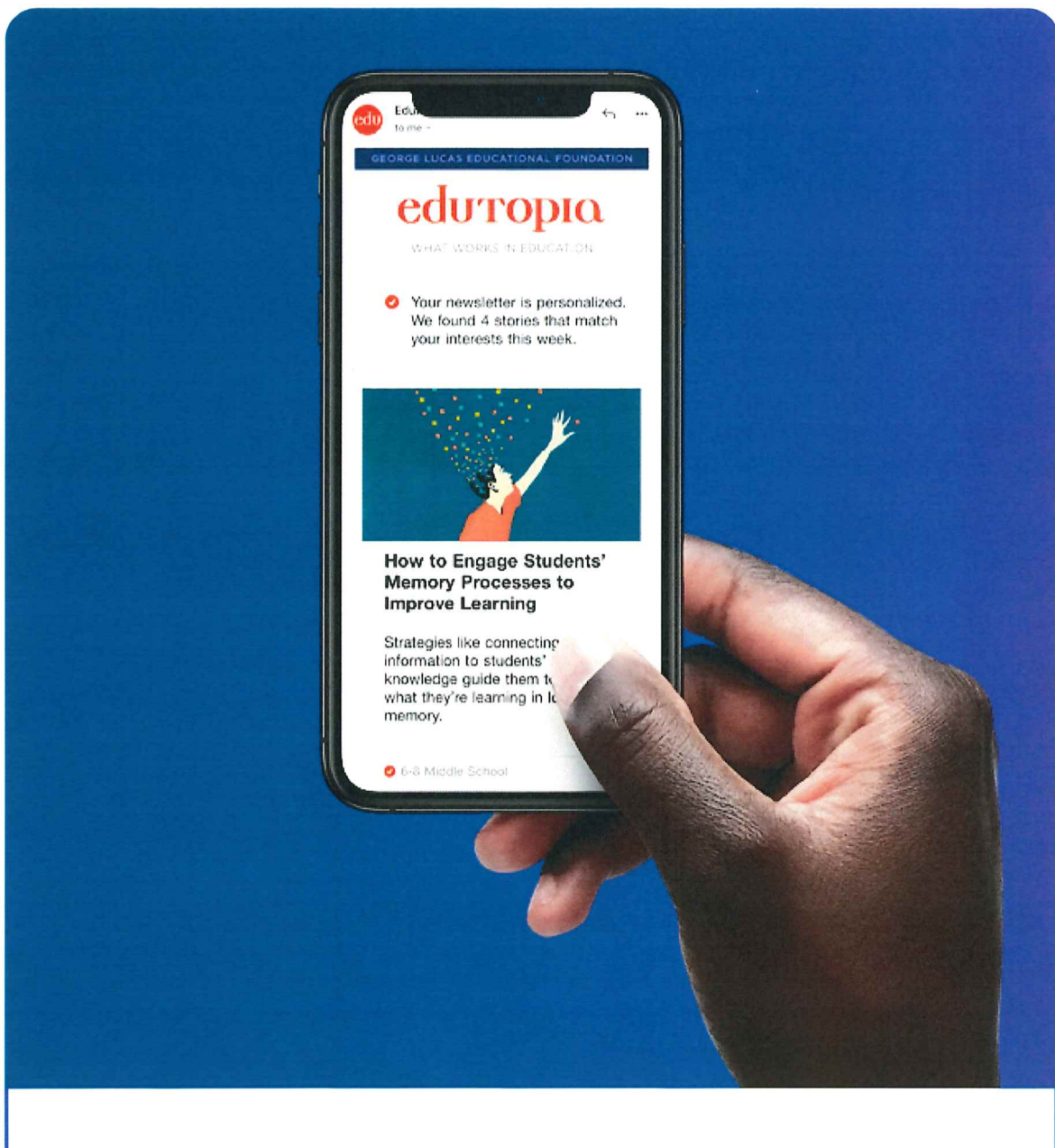
January 19, 2017



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Teachers often find themselves wondering why their efforts at organizing opportunities for parents to become more involved in classroom activities do not pan out. They send written reminders home with their students, make phone calls, email, and text. When their repeated attempts to communicate with parents are left unanswered, many teachers become discouraged and begin making negative assumptions about parents' involvement.

Home visits can establish positive contact and communication with families. They are not a replacement for parent-teacher conferences, but are a process through which teachers demonstrate their support for students' families by visiting the home environment or an alternative location where the family feels at home and comfortable. Home visits should originate from a sincere desire to assist and work with families (see examples of *two teachers' best and worst home visits* (<http://www.nea.org/home/34090.htm>)). Home visits promote proactive interactions through which teachers provide authentic support while recognizing families' strengths.



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For teachers interested in conducting home visits, here is some guidance for getting stated.

### DO YOUR RESEARCH

Teachers may be reticent to implement home visits because of the time commitment and effort involved. There are *many testimonials* (<http://www.pthvp.org/>) from teachers and families about successful home visits, but without systemic school and district support, a teacher's ability to carve out time during the school day to conduct home visits is limited.

For those who are determined, being well-informed about the *benefits and rewards* (<http://www.projectappleseed.org/teacher-home-visits>) as well as the *challenges*

(<http://www.pthvp.org/what-we-do/results/ii-case-studies/>) of home visits is important. Once teachers commit to making home visits, they can take steps to research, plan for, implement, and document the process.

### KNOW YOUR FAMILIES

One consideration is learning about students' families, their communities and neighborhoods, languages and/or cultural differences, and work schedules. Being *culturally responsive*

(<https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0>)

when conducting home visits communicates respect while demonstrating genuine interest in families' rich heritages.

Investigating how *others have conducted home visits* (<http://www.nea.org/tools/16935.htm>) is important if you want to create a process that is doable, realistic, and beneficial to students and their families.

## PLAN STRATEGICALLY

Teachers who regularly conduct home visits advise establishing contact with parents before the school year begins. Some *home visit models* (<http://www.pthvp.org/what-we-do/pthv-model/>) emphasize the *benefits of teachers pairing up* (<http://archive.jsonline.com/news/education/78193777.html>), traveling together to students' homes, and introducing themselves to parents during the summer. The first visit should focus on building a relationship, extending support, and actively listening to parents' concerns and insights. For transparency and safety, the home visit schedule (including location, time, and date) should be provided to school staff.

## BE FLEXIBLE

Parents may not always feel comfortable meeting in the home. Alternative locations such as a local library, a quiet café, or even a fast-food restaurant may be appropriate venues for family-centered visits. *Being flexible* ([blog/home-visits-reaching-beyond-classroom-jill-thomas](http://blog/home-visits-reaching-beyond-classroom-jill-thomas)) may also mean meeting on weekends, before schools begins, or at the end of the school day. Home visits planned in advance allow teachers to pair up strategically to coordinate visits when they have students who are siblings or who live in the same neighborhood.

## FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

A teacher who enters the home with a nonjudgmental attitude views the home through the eyes of the family living there and sees the family's strengths. A *culturally responsive approach* (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/making-your-first-ell-home-visit-guide-classroom-teachers>) and *appropriate, equity-minded language* ([https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/SUMOFUS\\_PROGRESSIVE-STYLEGUIDE.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/SUMOFUS_PROGRESSIVE-STYLEGUIDE.pdf)) convey trust and respect. And if the teacher has concerns about the student, they can use the *sandwich feedback technique* (<http://www.rightattitudes.com/2008/02/20/sandwich-feedback-technique/>) to voice concerns sandwiched between strengths-based praise that is concrete and genuine.

## CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Actively listening to parents' insights, concerns, and ideas for their child demonstrates authentic interest and respect. On a first home visit, teachers *should not take notes* (<http://www.nea.org/home/32719.htm>) since the act of collecting information may arouse parents' distrust or suspicion. Rather, the teacher can *ask parents if they have questions* ([/blog/19-questions-for-parents-terry-heick](http://blog/19-questions-for-parents-terry-heick)) and take mental notes, and then, at a later time, create a voice memo or write out notes of what was discussed.

Before subsequent home visits, teachers can inform parents that they will take notes about concerns or ideas that arise from the discussion. These notes may build on other school-centered meetings and provide a *plan of action* ([https://www.bcps.org/parents/pdf/conference\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://www.bcps.org/parents/pdf/conference_action_plan.pdf)) upon which the teachers and parents can build.

## REPORT BACK

One way to remain accountable to students' families is to maintain, revisit, and keep current the plan of action generated jointly by the teacher and family. Finding out from parents which method of correspondence is most effective and then *checking in regularly* ([/blog/family-engagement-works-parent-teacher-home-visits-anne-obrien](http://blog/family-engagement-works-parent-teacher-home-visits-anne-obrien)) with them about mutually established goals for the child provides both teachers and parents an open, ongoing platform through which to communicate and interact.

Home visits are a great beginning to positive communication and relationships between teachers and their students' families. Establishing a strong foundation through home visits is only a first step—nurturing these relationships through consistent communication is critical to maintaining them.

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