

Relationship Centered & Culturally Responsive Home Visits

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) launched their first parent-teacher home visit cohort in 2018, with 60 K-12 teachers, counselors, and school administrators. Since then, at least 10 additional trainings have been offered, with more than 500 educators participating in relationship-centered and culturally responsive home visits. This school year BVSD district staff trained and supported another 160 educators in conducting virtual or in-person visits. Home visits are a high-impact family partnering initiative that consistently strengthens relationships and enhances trust and communication between staff, students, and families.

To ensure that there was an effective and inspired implementation of this well-known strategy, the BVSD Director of Family Partnerships spent months researching home visit best practices and interviewing knowledgeable national leaders so that the training could be internally led, more financially sustainable, and catalyze high levels of interest in this new practice. During the past school year, the district more deeply embedded home visits into the culture of their school district by strategically partnering with specific cohorts and schools. For instance, they collaborated with the leaders of the early childhood department and trained every preschool and kindergarten teacher in the week before school started. They had time built into that same week to conduct many of their virtual home visits. They also trained the entire staff at one high school early in the school year and offered another training for all interested educators across the district at the end of the year. Guiding educators on how to make virtual home visits was a necessary and meaningful enhancement as it made this process more accessible for many of their educators and families.

Prior to engaging in home visits, all educators attend a two-and-a-half hour training that had three major elements: 1) the “why” behind home visits to ensure that they are enthusiastic and wholeheartedly understand the power of the practice; 2) a detailed look at the core elements of an effective home visit so that all participants feel well prepared and confident; 3) approximately an hour spent examining implicit bias and key elements of cultural responsiveness so that the educators are more thoughtful and effective in their visits and utilize each visit as an opportunity to develop their capacity as culturally responsive educators. All participants were encouraged to engage in at least five home visits per year, ideally at the beginning of the school year. At the end of each training, participants were asked to provide detailed feedback so that each iteration of the training is more engaging and impactful than the one before. Each educator also completed a reflection form that helped them cull more meaning and learning from each visit. Families are also asked for their feedback on the program.

The district’s advice to others wanting to replicate the home visit program is to: 1) Compensate participants for the professional development time if the best option is to hold the training outside of contract hours; 2) Get several school leaders on board to help the practice spread more quickly 3) Either invest the time to develop your own training or hire someone locally 4) Provide participants with ample resources to support their success (i.e. letter templates to be sent in advance of phone calls, tips, articles, etc.); 5) Start building momentum by identifying the most enthusiastic educators or schools. It can be difficult to find the time for participants to be trained and engage the entire staff at a given school.