Home visits by teachers were a common practice in the past, but more recently, teachers have limited their communication with parents to their own classrooms. From earlier days of schooling in the United States, when families had their children’s teachers over for Sunday dinner, to the 1970s, when teachers in many districts were required to have conferences with every parent, even if that meant catching them at home or on a tractor plowing the fields, teachers connected with families outside of their classrooms. By the 1990s, the situation had changed significantly. Parent conferences were still required, but teachers’ home visits were a rarity.

Why would this happen? What caused the change? Has anything been lost because teachers no longer visit their students and parents in their homes?

Many articles in education journals emphasize the importance of parent involvement in children’s education and teacher–parent partnerships. However, they rarely mention that teachers should make home visits to strengthen connections with parents. Instead, the suggested settings for launching parent programs are the classroom, school, or a “neutral” location.

According to Anne Lewis, author of “Helping Young Urban Parents Educate Themselves and Their Children,” an ERIC/CUE Digest, the literature on parent involvement describes parent–school communications as formal, one-way transactions, from the school to the parent. She notes that “parents complain that their most personal communication with schools usually only occurs because of a problem or crisis” (Lewis, 1992).

Perhaps home visits are returning, however. In addition to traditional strategies for involving parents, such as “open houses, fund-raising fairs, parent conferences, volunteers, intergenerational literacy programs, and advisory and policy councils,” Lewis adds new ideas, including “parent centers, family support programs, such as home visits and parenting workshops, and school and community organization partnerships with universities, businesses, civic groups and such” (Lewis, 1992).

What do you think? Is it time to revive the practice of requiring teachers to make home visits?

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**Yes, teachers should be required to make home visits.**

Home visits can be informative, helpful, and a good way to connect with parents. A thirty-year veteran third-grade teacher in Azusa, California, Joseph Rocha, explained that his twice-a-year home visits are invaluable. For years, in August before the school year begins and in December, at the middle of the school year, he has made it a practice to visit each of his students’ homes. In the summer he tells the parents how pleased he is that their child will be in his class and explains his goals for the coming school year. In December he returns to update them and learn about their interests and concerns. “It’s time consuming,” he admits, “but it is well worth the effort.”

Home visits can help teachers better understand their students. One Los Angeles teacher, concerned about a child’s inattentiveness, made a home visit that, she says, turned out to be an “eye opener. They didn’t have a door. Somehow the door had been removed and they just had a blanket up.” The teacher then understood the cause of the student’s problem. “I realized he probably couldn’t sleep because there was this traffic going by. And he didn’t have a bed, he was on a pallet. Those kinds of things are important to know.” She returned from the visit feeling a connection with the family and closer to the child.

Making such connections is the most important reason for home visits. However, teachers must conduct them in the right spirit. They should not appear to be inspecting the home, checking up on family members’ activities, or judging the parents. Instead, they should genuinely respect parents and family members and seek to learn from them if the visits are to be beneficial. In an article on “Forging Partnerships between Mexican American Parents and the Schools,” Nancy Feyl Chavkin and Dora Lara Gonzalez (1995) caution:

There is a big difference between the rhetoric of partnerships and the activity of partnerships. Educators must truly believe and act on the belief that parents are their children’s...
first teacher and the only teacher that remains with a child for a long period of time.

In an often-cited article entitled “School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share,” Joyce Epstein (1995) recommends that home visits be conducted “at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle, and high school.” She also recommends holding “neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.”

No, teachers should not be required to make home visits.

Requiring teachers to make home visits would be a mistake for several reasons. First, if teachers are less sensitive and respectful, such visits would be counterproductive. Also, teachers who prefer not to visit in their students’ homes but do so because they are required to may show their discomfort or conduct their visits in a perfunctory manner, thus defeating the purpose of such visits.

Secondly, depending on the neighborhood, the teacher’s familiarity with it, and the teacher’s professional experience, home visits could actually be dangerous for the teacher. An inexperienced teacher visiting in an unfamiliar, violence-prone neighborhood at the wrong time would be taking a risk making home visits.

Third, depending on the teacher’s experience and sensitivity, home visits could embarrass or even anger parents. If parents felt they were being judged as inadequate or believed that the teacher was investigating them, the home visit would be a failure.

Finally, teachers do not need to make home visits in order to connect with parents. They can make parents feel welcome and valued through phone calls, personal notes, afterschool visits, and meetings in their classrooms. There is no need to impose on parents at home.

It is one thing for teachers to make home visits at the invitation of parents and quite another to be required to. Because of all these potential problems, administrators should not require teachers to make home visits.

Where do you stand on this issue?

1. Are you in favor of teachers making home visits? Why or why not?
2. What have your home visit experiences been as a student or parent? How would you feel as a novice teacher about making home visits?
3. How could an inexperienced teacher learn about making home visits?
4. How could teachers protect their safety in making home visits into dangerous neighborhoods?
5. What other means can you recommend for better understanding a student’s home situation? For connecting with parents?

Recommended Sources