



2009-2010 Evaluation Report

Teacher Home Visit Program (THVP)

Executive Summary – January 19, 2011

The Teacher Home Visit Program (THVP) is founded on the premise that student academic success and personal growth grow out of a trusting partnership between home and school. A stronger relationship between teachers and their students' families will lead to increased parental involvement in the academic success of their children at home, greater family participation in school activities, improved communication between teachers and parents/guardians, fewer student discipline referrals and absences and improved student academic performance.

To establish and solidify this partnership, pairs of teachers visit students' homes twice each academic year. The first visit focuses on relationship building and is a time when teachers can learn more about the students, the family, and the parents/guardians' dreams and expectations for their children. The parents/guardians in turn also have an opportunity to get to know the teachers, become more comfortable communicating with them, and to learn what to expect from the school. In the second visit, the teachers focus on the academic performance of the students—areas in which the students excel and areas that require attention. In addition, two "family events" are held each year at school with participating THVP families designed to foster the continued development of the school-home partnership.

In 2009-2010, the Teacher Home Visit Program was implemented in three school districts in the St. Louis metropolitan area including the Early Childhood Center and elementary, middle and high schools in the Maplewood/Richmond Heights School District (MRH), three elementary schools and one early childhood center in the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS), and the Valley Park School District (VP) Elementary School (See Table 1). In SLPS and MRH, all students in the early childhood centers and elementary schools were the focus of the visits. In MRH middle and high schools, only selected students considered to be at-risk were included in the program; and in VP, the only students who were visited were students from the City of St. Louis who came to VP through the largest and oldest voluntary desegregation program in the U.S.

A total of 1,276 teacher home visits were completed by teachers in all of the participating schools.

Table 1: Schools Participating in the THVP in 2009-2010

District	Early Childhood	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Valley Park		VP Elementary (grades K-5, students in voluntary desegregation program)		
Maplewood Richmond Heights	MRH Early Childhood Center (preK-1)	MRH Elementary (grades 2-5)	MRH Middle (grades 6-8)	MRH High (grades 9-12)
St. Louis Public Schools	Stix Early Childhood Center (PreK-2)	Buder Elementary (grades K-5) Dunbar Elementary (grades K-6) Henry Elementary (grades K-5)		

Home Visit Participation

- During the 2009-2010 school year, 421 families from MRH (about 60% of the families targeted) received visits from participating teachers. **More than twice the number of families was visited than in the previous school year.**
- Original projections were that 70 first visits and 70 second visits would be made by pairs of teachers from each participating school in the St. Louis Public Schools (a total of 560 home visits). **The projected number of visits was exceeded by 36%** (759 total visits).
- The number of home visits in Valley Park Elementary School decreased from 76 visits in 2008-2009 to 34 visits in 2009-2010 because of a change in administration and the need for the new principal to focus on her new responsibilities.

Evaluation of Program Impact

During the 2009-2010 school year, evaluators at the University of Missouri-St. Louis conducted a comprehensive process and outcome evaluation that included surveys of teachers, parents/guardians and students, teacher and student focus groups, analysis of school performance data and observation of THVP-sponsored family events. **Overall, the evaluation suggests that THVP is having a positive impact on families, students and teachers and that enthusiasm for the program is very high among all parties involved.** Detailed findings from each of the participating districts are described below.

“We were invited to stay for dinner at the home of one of our students whose behavior was an issue. This student was so proud to see his teachers eating the types of foods he ate and enjoying being in his house, enjoying the company of his family. It was written all over his face! After that evening he became a model student! We never had another problem with his behavior and he began to work much harder, academically. It was one of best experiences of my long teaching career.”

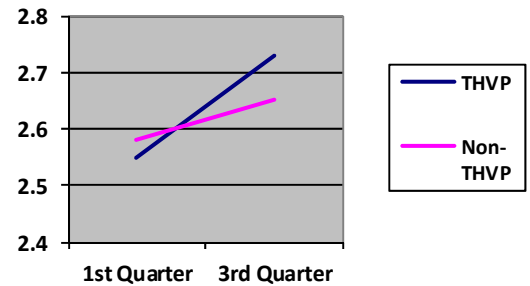
--SLPS elementary school teacher

Academic Impact

Evaluation of THVP indicates that the program shows promise as a means to improve academic performance.

- At SLPS, THVP student grades in math improved significantly more than the grades of non-THVP students.
- Most (85%) SLPS students who responded to the student survey said they tried harder in school after the home visits and 75% said they were trying harder on homework. A high percentage (69%) of students also believed they were doing better in school after the home visit.
- In general, SLPS parents/guardians who received home visits reported more contact with the schools and more frequent attendance at school events after their visits. They also felt there had been positive changes at home including establishment of rules about homework and limits on television viewing.
- A majority (51%) of SLPS teachers reported improvement in academic performance and behavior with at least some of their students.
- At MRH, analysis of 2nd – 5th grade student performance between Winter 2009 and Spring 2010 was measured with the Fountas and Pinnell standardized assessment. Data showed significant improvement among both THVP and non-THVP students with greater improvement among 5th grade THVP students compared to non-THVP 5th graders.
- Analysis of student performance measured by the AIMSweb (also a standardized test for grades 2-5) assessment of MRH elementary students showed that 2nd grade THVP students improved significantly more than non-THVP students.
- While there were significant improvements in mathematics at SLPS and standardized tests at MRH, there is still room for improvement. Differences between THVP- and non-THVP students at SLPS in reading and Acuity benchmark scores, a test measuring reading and math progress, were not significant.

1st and 3rd Quarter Math Grades



"I am a working mom so I frequently feel disconnected from my child's school experience. The home visit provided me with the opportunity to ask questions of the teachers in an uninterrupted setting."

- SLPS elementary school parent

Attendance

THVP also show promise as a means of improving school attendance, particularly among students on free or reduced lunch.

- There was significant improvement in attendance among MRH students on free or reduced lunch, with increased attendance among THVP students and decreased attendance among non-THVP students.
- When MRH students with poor attendance (defined as less than 90%) are examined, attendance among both THVP and non-THVP students improved, but there was greater improvement among THVP students. The strongest findings were found for those youth on free or reduced lunch. Among THVP students, average attendance increased by 5.4% while average attendance increased by only 1.9% among other students.

"In just three years, the Teacher Home Visit Program has become a critical component of MRH's success, and the results have been quite startling. At the end of the first semester of the 2010-2011 school year attendance is up 1.29% from the previous year's, and discipline throughout the district is down an amazing 45% from the year before. Parent attendance at our first open house in each of the schools was up by almost 20%, as well."

– MRH Superintendent

Parent, Student and Teacher Satisfaction

- Among VP students who participated in focus groups, all liked the program and would like to have another visit. They also were very enthusiastic about the family event held at their school.
- All teachers from VP who responded to the survey reported that visits had helped their relationship with the students. Almost all (98%) said that the program was valuable.
- A high percentage (84%) said that THVP helped their communication with the parents/guardians and around half believed that there was some academic improvement among the students after the visits. (51%).
- SLPS teachers were more likely to report improvement in communication with both the parents/guardians and the students after the home visits.
- Around three-fourths (74%) of parents at SLPS felt "very connected" to their child's school after their home visit compared to only 48% before the home visit.

"I liked her going to my house because she made me do better on learning subtraction and addition."

- Elementary school student

- Most MRH/THVP families reported being much more comfortable contacting their children's teachers after the home visit, they appreciated the opportunity to meet with the teachers, and believed that the visits helped their children feel less anxious about the start of school.

- MRH teachers reported in focus groups that the home visits helped them to understand their students better and to communicate more effectively with them. They also stated that communication with the families improved because of the visits. Teachers who took part in the focus groups were very committed to participating in the program.

Recommendations:

School Program Participation

- Mid-year review of THVP implementation at participating schools is recommended to determine whether the program should continue the following year. Criteria for this assessment should include teacher participation in THVP, home visit completion, adherence to the program model and participation in the third-party evaluation.
- Schools must follow design of the program and schedule family events *after* home visits have been completed in order to build upon the impact of the visits.
- It is important to help parents/guardians to know how they can help their children academically. Second visits are designed to focus on academics and thus it is recommended that the after the 2nd visit training has been strengthened, teachers be encouraged to complete 2nd visits.

1st and 2nd Visit Recommendations

- Some teachers from each district indicated that most parents/guardians appreciated having the visits prior to the start of school. Likewise, many parents/guardians commented that summer visits helped to diminish their apprehensions as well as those of their children. This increased their comfort level and reportedly that of their children. A difficulty with summer visits in SLPS is the fact that many students are not enrolled until the first day of school. Nevertheless, it is recommended that teachers continue to make as many visits as possible prior to the beginning of the school year.
- Because students participating in the THVP at VP live in the City of St. Louis (about 15-20 miles from VP) and thus travel for teachers to student homes is lengthy and challenging, teachers and administrators from VP stated that they would prefer to have the 2nd visit at school. This program change may achieve the goals of the 2nd visit provided that the teachers have one-on-one time with parents/guardians, but it would need to be explored further.

Overall Home Visit Training Recommendations

- There were some concerns about the trainings expressed by the teachers, particularly the 2nd visit training. To enhance these trainings, it is recommended that the use of staff development days or Saturdays for training be explored along with the possibility of conducting the 1st and 2nd visit trainings on the same day.
- Many teachers expressed the desire that trainings be held during the summer so that they could begin visits during the summer or as soon as the school year begins. It is recommended that trainings be scheduled earlier in the summer to accommodate the teachers and ensure the 1st home visits start at the beginning of the school year.

- The 2nd visit trainings should strongly emphasize the importance of frequent communication by teachers with *all* parents/guardians regarding students' academic achievement. About 40% of parents/guardians at SLPS "strongly agreed" that teachers contacted them more frequently about this matter after the home visits, but student achievement in the participating schools is still low.
- It is recommended that both trainings stress the need for teachers to increase communication with families about *positive behavior*. At MRH, only 17% of parents/guardians strongly agreed that the school contacted them when their child had done something well, while almost twice as many (30%) strongly agreed that the school contacted them when there were concerns about their child's behavior.
- The fact that transportation is available for parents/guardians to visit the schools should be emphasized during the trainings so that teachers in all districts will encourage parents/guardians to utilize this service if it is needed in order to spend some time seeing the school and the work that their child is doing.

2nd Visit Training Recommendations

- In the 2nd visit training, it is important to stress the need for teachers to keep parents/guardians informed of the curriculum so that they might be able to reinforce the lessons and assist their children. Only 13% of middle school and 20% of elementary parents/guardians at MRH reported that the school communicated with them about the subjects being taught in their child's classes.
- It is recommended that the 2nd training stress the importance of encouraging parents to closely monitor homework, especially with middle school parents/guardians. Only 62% of MRH middle school parents/guardians reported checking to see if their children had homework on a daily basis compared to 89% of elementary parents/guardians, and only 44% of middle school parents/guardians checked for completion in contrast to 91% of elementary school parents/guardians. It is recommended that the need for close monitoring of homework be stressed and reinforced with middle school parents/guardians.
- One of the primary goals of the THVP is to increase student academic performance. Only 26% of parents/guardians from MRH "strongly agreed" that the school contacted them when concerned about academic performance. It is recommended that the 2nd visit training stress the importance of increasing contact with parents/guardians both when there are concerns about student academics and to report student successes.