



52 NIGHT HERON - CHAPEL HILL, NC 27517 - P: 800-874-1100 - E: PHIL@LEARNINGFORLIVING.COM

Sounding Off On School Culture |
Parent/Teacher Home Visits Project
Guest: Jay Schenirer, Sacramento, CA Councilman and education consultant

Background: I want to give a lot of credit to the community organization group Area Congregations Together. They talked to the local school district, teachers union and school board because they wanted to develop a program to benefit young people by engaging their parents. This happened around 1997 when we had a lot of new families coming into the Sacramento-area from Laos, Cambodia, Southeast Asia, and south of the border. We wanted to engage those families by helping them figure out where their kids are in the education cycle and how they, as parents, could be helpful. We scheduled home-visits where a student's teachers made home visits to to meet with the parents and have a better understanding of the child's background and culture.

- 1) **There's a fundamental belief that "We all want our children to succeed."** I've never met a single parent who didn't. One of the best resources we have in our schools is parents! So the question we were presented with in regards to these families that were new to our culture and community is: how do we engage parents so they know that we care for their children and we want them to succeed – while recognizing these are institutions they may be unfamiliar with because of the countries they are from. We wanted them to know how the system works, who to call if they had questions, and share their hopes and dreams for their kids.
- 2) **Parent-teacher home visits are not only beneficial for the student and their family, but the teachers as well.** The kids love these home visits. They're so excited to see their teachers show up in their doorway. It was also very helpful for our teachers, too. We had a lot of cultures that were different from our teacher's backgrounds. It works both ways. It builds trust for parents to see who is caring for their child – day in, day out – in a place they feel comfortable... their own home.
- 3) **At the beginning, some of these teachers had reservations about doing it.** Some of them had to go into rougher areas of town. But when you talk to them after, they wouldn't trade it for anything. When they got to know the student, know their parents, and get those parents to be a resource in that child's education, it makes everyone's jobs a little easier. When teachers have a relationship with the family, it opens the lines of communication between them.
- 4) **We understand this takes extra time... but it's an investment.** It takes more time on the front-end by going to do these visits, but they make it up on the back-end because these kids will end up doing better in the classroom. The teachers who do it regularly talk glowingly about the experiences.
- 5) **Pay attention to social-emotional learning.** We need to consider the whole child. If you have a kid who isn't getting fed at home or has a health issue that's not being addressed, it doesn't matter how great the teacher is – that child is going to have a hard time staying focused.

Interested in doing parent/teacher home visits in your own school? Here's some tips:

- Visit <http://www.pthvp.org/> (Parent Teacher Home Visits website) as a resource. We give great tips and tricks for how to do this. We offer training and resources.
- Sit down with your school board or teachers union and ask them to call the NEA – who supports, at a national level, this program.
- Check and see if a PICO network is in your area, and reach out to them. www.piconetwork.org.