

Home Visits – Making an I'MPACT

By Matthew D. Moyer



About the Author: Matthew D. Moyer is in his 18th year as Principal of Rupert Elementary School, the same elementary school he attended as a child, in the Pottstown School District, Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Mr. Moyer started his career as a fifth-grade teacher in the Spring-Ford Area School District. He then spent three years as an assistant principal at Schuylkill Valley Elementary School in Leesport, Pennsylvania.

With over 20 years in administration, Mr. Moyer is also the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) 2020 National Distinguished Principal and Pennsylvania's 2020 National Distinguished Principal (elementary level). In addition to his job as principal, he is an author, national speaker, adjunct professor and a staff developer with Thom Stecher and Associates.

As principals, we know the importance of connecting with our families. Home school partnerships have a positive impact on students' motivation, behavior, academics and social emotional well-being. We constantly search for ways to connect with our families that will benefit our students. In my over 20 years in administration, we have tried numerous methods to connect with families. None of them are better than visiting students at their homes. This provides an opportunity to partner with a family on a different level. At my school, we use the home visits to recognize children and to reinforce positive behavior and work habits. We call these our **I'MPACT Awards**. Our **I'MPACT Team** works together to plan home visits to recognize our students.

What is an I'MPACT Award?

I'MPACT stands for **I'm Pottstown Action Community Team**. Each marking period, the teachers choose one child in each grade level to receive the **I'MPACT Award**. This award may be given for a variety of reasons: citizenship, completion of work, improvement in a specific area, following our *Believe and Achieve* expectations, academic growth or even improved attendance. The award includes a written certificate, balloons, a yard sign and an I'MPACT winner T-shirt. The teacher of each award recipient also writes an explanation of why this child is deserving of being the I'MPACT award recipient.

Who is on the I'MPACT Team?

The **I'MPACT Team** includes the principal, as well as classroom teachers, assistants, guidance counselors, teachers from a variety of areas, district staff and sometimes school board or community members.

How do we conduct I'MPACT Visits?

At our school, we visit one student from each grade level, kindergarten to fourth grade, each marking period to thank them for all the remarkable things they do at school. Following are the steps we follow for our **I'MPACT home visits**:

- ✓ We have a team, run by building staff, which directs the process. At the beginning, my involvement was greater than it is now. The staff values the visits and plans them; however, they come to me to make sure there are no schedule conflicts or any other issues. It has definitely become a teacher-led initiative. One reason it is successful is that we worked early on to get buy-in from everyone. Once this was achieved, some of our exceptional teacher leaders took over the effort. No one is required to attend the visits. We have some teachers who attend every visit, while others attend only when a child in their class is recognized. I publicly recognize staff members individually by name for volunteering their time to be a part of our visits. We value and respect their time and involvement.
- ✓ We plan the date and time for our visits weeks in advance to ensure staff members have time to attend. We have utilized a variety of different days and times. Over the last few years, we have settled on the early dismissal days we have at the end of each marking period. This has allowed us to complete our visits within the regular contracted school day. For my current staff, this works best. However, in the past, we selected a day after school that best suited everyone's schedule. It is important to work with your team to find a time that works for them, realizing that there is never a perfect time when everyone can attend.
- ✓ Each grade level selects one student winner. Teachers try to select a child who may not normally be recognized. Often, it is a child who has shown growth or improvement in a certain area. Our teachers work as a grade-level team to determine a winner. The team has the autonomy to select a winner whom they feel is most deserving. Typically, the teachers select a student from a different class each marking period.

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- ✓ Each teacher contacts the family a few weeks before our visit to let them know we are coming. **We ask the family to keep the visit a secret from their child.** The teachers explain the process and details to the family. Families make their plans at home for the event. Some invite grandparents and friends, while others prepare food and have invited us in for a few minutes.



Rupert Elementary School's I'MPACT Team make a "home visit" to a student in October 2022.

Sometimes we must be creative in order to meet unique family situations. We have made visits to daycare centers and even to a parent's place of employment. We are flexible with the families, and they work with us to help support their child.

- ✓ One of our teachers plans the route we will take for our visits. After the best route is identified, it is printed and shared with everyone in advance of the visits. Sometimes we adjust our route to meet a special need. For example, some families or staff may have a schedule conflict that requires us to visit a home first or last. We understand these circumstances arise and do everything possible to accommodate unique needs.
- ✓ We go as a team to each child's home. We have a few staff members who volunteer to drive. I know our town well, so I drive and take as many people as I can with me. Others who have knowledge of the streets also volunteer. We always have room for any and all staff volunteers. At one time, we utilized a district van that seated 15 people and borrowed from our high school, on the day of our visits. Over the past few years, we have preferred using three or four separate vehicles.

- ✓ When we arrive, I knock on the door and ask for the student to come out on the front porch. We make sure everyone is in place and we also make sure the whole neighborhood knows we are there. We bring noisemakers and everyone applauds and cheers for the student. The surprise and joy shown on the children's faces is amazing! Often, it takes time for them to process what is happening because they are surprised to see their teachers and principal at their home.

- ✓ As principal, I read a certificate about why the child was selected for this honor. This is a short, unique piece written by the teacher specifically for the child. Each is a masterpiece and something special the child and their family can keep forever.

- ✓ We give the child balloons, an "I'MPACT WINNER" T-shirt (ordered from a local vendor) and we put a sign in their yard so their achievement is visible to the entire

neighborhood. The yard signs are purchased from an online vendor and read: "I'MPACT Winner lives here!" They stay in the yard for as long as the family would like. We have seen them years after our visits, still proudly displayed in front of student homes.

- ✓ Finally, we take pictures, thank the family and move on to the next home. Our school has an "opt-out" policy for photos. This means, unless a family requests it, we are permitted to take photos and share them. We post our pictures on our school Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages. These pictures are posted on our web page as well. We also send them to the local newspapers, and occasionally they are posted on their social media pages or printed in the paper. Parents are excited to have their child featured, and often take their own photos or have us send our pictures to them.

- ✓ It takes about an hour to visit all the students and it makes a HUGE impact! These visits are the most fun we have during the entire marking period! While I cannot link this to any specific academic "outcomes," I can say that it does produce numerous "smiles per hour," and that can be measured!

Why do we make I'MPACT Visits?

It is abundantly clear that nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families working together. These forms of involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit, strategic actions to engage our schools with families, caregivers and other important adults in our children's lives.

We strive to find creative ways to recognize our students for their excellent work and achievements. We are hit with pies, duct taped to walls or asked to dress in silly costumes. We distribute lunches, tickets, coupons, prizes and

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so much more. But the absolute best way we have found to do this is by visiting our students at their homes to reward them! Visiting students at home to recognize them for their achievement at school is a powerful way to make an impact. It is also an excellent way to motivate students to continue their hard work and efforts at school. Although we

still use other awards, our home visits are by far the most unique and well received.

If you are not visiting students at home to acknowledge their good work at school, you are missing out on an amazing experience! For further information, please contact Mr. Moyer at mmoyer@pottstownk12.org

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Presenters:

Primary Facilitator/PIL Coursework Coordinator: Dr. Beth Haldeman

Co-Facilitators may include: Dr. Melissa Patschke, Dr. Nicholas Indeglio & Dr. Jonathan Ross

Dr. Haldeman, Dr. Patschke, Dr. Indeglio & Dr. Ross are PA Principals Association Board Members and Practicing Administrators.

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For more information, such as program requirements or to schedule an EdCamp in your district, please contact Dr. Beth Haldeman, EdCamp Facilitator, at Tabetha_Haldeman@cocalico.org

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