

# Virtual Home Visits

## ACTION Zone, Aurora Public Schools

### Aurora, CO



The model used by the Zone within the Aurora Public Schools system focuses on addressing family and community needs through community partnerships, 2-generation supports, and family advocacy initiatives. In response to the pandemic, staff needed to quickly and deeply understand what students and families were experiencing. The leaders and the staff in the Zone also wanted to ensure they maintained relationships and trust with families during this time and be able to inform community partners of needs as they arose. The ACTION Zone team needed a way to gather this information through a streamlined but relationship-centered approach and thus developed a Virtual Home Visit (VHV) program.

The design and development of the VHV program was spearheaded by the members of the Office of Autonomous Schools (OAS) team, including five school-based Community School Coordinators. District and school staff collaborated with the mental health team, counselors, nurses, teachers, and Community Health Navigators with the Community School Coordinators taking the lead role as trainers of other staff on implementing the program. Because educators were stretched thin by the new demands, schools relied on classified staff, such as paraprofessionals, attendance liaisons and campus monitors to be the primary conductors of the VHVs.

OAS staff conducted a Virtual Home Visit training for Community School Coordinators, who then trained the staff at their individual school sites to reach out to families by phone or virtual platform. The “dialers” conducting the calls received scripts and support centered around relationship and trust building as well as a database to capture the information that they gathered. The data collected included a social-emotional check-in as well as questions about basic needs that a family could use support with. These databases then served as the basis for an accompanying referral system, which other school, district, and community partners staff were able to access in order to get families the resources they needed as quickly as possible. The dialers conducted two rounds of outreach throughout April and May and, over the course of this two month period, made 3,668 connections resulting in 232 applications for rental assistance, 687 referrals to Community School Coordinators and 170 referrals to Community Health Navigators at Children’s Hospital.

The data collected through the trackers was invaluable for understanding the unique needs in each community. Beyond the referrals themselves, the data helped inform a variety of initiatives in the community, including food distribution system for undocumented families, digital literacy support for families, and a surge in funder support that enabled the procurement of hotspots and computers as well as the hiring of multi-lingual community navigators to support immigrant families. Another auxiliary but significant impact of the program was the mindset shift that was experienced by the dialers themselves. Many of these staff members had limited experience interacting with families prior to the VHV program and shared a shift in their understanding of the roles of families in school.

ACTION Zone’s Director of Community Schools, Family Advocacy & Community Engagement believes that the foundations of the program itself could be applied to any school or geography with some analysis of need.