

MODULE TWO

Strategies for District and School Leaders to Increase Staff Understanding of Lowered Vaccination Rates and Their Impact on the Learning Organization

An Introduction to the Theme, Issue, or Problem of Practice

It is essential that all staff members understand the significance of declining vaccination rates upon student growth and development, health and well-being, and academic progress. This priority is an essential one for district and school leaders, especially in light of the emergence of this unanticipated issue resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures. Therefore, this module will concentrate upon a range of ideas for professional engagement and learning, including ideas for workshops, study groups, action research, and communities of practice working on identified problems related to lowered vaccination rates.

Essential Questions

- What can district and school leaders do to increase staff understanding of the implications of lowered vaccination rates?
- What do staff members need to know, be able to do, and understand about the implications of lowered vaccination rates upon student health, well-being, and academic performance?
- What are the implications of the issues raised here for professional learning?

Outcomes



Identify key priorities for staff understanding of the relationship between vaccination declines and their potential impact upon student growth and achievement.



Explain focus areas related to what all staff should know, be able to do, and understand about their potential role in addressing the issue of lowered vaccination rates.



Describe key professional development strategies and processes proven effective in addressing emerging problems of practice, including interactive information sessions, study groups, action research teams, and professional learning communities.



THE IMPLICATIONS OF DECLINING VACCINATION RATES FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS & DISTRICTS

Successful staff engagement around student vaccinations is a combination of advanced planning and the provision of multiple opportunities for administrators, healthcare professionals and educators/staff to discuss the benefits of vaccinations and why participation in a school-based vaccine clinic is worthwhile. Prior research on school-based vaccination clinics has found that teacher support and participation is directly linked to the success of these programs. So, how can a superintendent best incentivize participation and engagement?

First, discuss the opportunity to host a vaccination program in the district with staff the winter before. Research has found that extensive lead time in beginning the conversation with staff was quite helpful, ideally January or February before the next influenza season, when initiating a district vaccination program. Collect feedback from your staff about hosting a clinic and be ready to address concerns with the logistics when you bring this issue back up in the summer.

Over the summer, invite a group of health staff and administrators to connect in early July and discuss the project plan, possible clinic dates and educational materials that should be disseminated. Then in late July or early August, another meeting should be held at each school so that staff can ask questions about the clinic plan and receive information about what vaccines will be offered and the benefits to vaccinating students. This information should focus on the importance of vaccinating children and its potential impact on the school, particularly lower school absenteeism and less teacher sick leave.

Second, take steps to educate your staff about the benefits of having a well-vaccinated student population and the role vaccines play in keeping kids in school and healthy and ready to learn. Every teacher knows how time consuming it is to re-teach information due to student absence and multiple

studies have found that higher vaccination coverage rates are associated with decreases in absenteeism. Share information about the vaccination decline during the pandemic and the risks associated with having fewer students vaccinated in the classroom.

It is important that school staff members are educated about the vaccination program. Research shows that educators who are able to answer questions from parents and others about the program are more likely to emphasize the importance of vaccination and provide vaccination-related lessons to students. Informing and educating principals and teachers are important because they exert a strong influence on their students. "Any hint of apathy, adversity, or unenthusiastic support by an authority figure that indicated a low program priority would likely translate to lower vaccination rates in that school. Engendering the support of school officials and teachers can be aided by sending them frequent e-mails with meaningful information."

Videos like this one effectively outline what's at stake for educators as well: <http://preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/keep-flu-out-of-school/school-resources/communication-templates-tools-resources>





After-school teacher workshops have been used as a method of educating school staff. Remind teachers and that including disease prevention activities and assignments can be aligned with state or local education standards. Provide a document for teachers with key messages around vaccine prevention that they may communicate to students and their parents/guardians and their families.

Third, highlight the importance of this activity and incentivize staff to get behind the effort. Send an email to each school principal and his or her staff about the importance of this vaccination effort, rather than depending on intermediaries who might forget to relay the information or do so inaccurately or with less emphasis than was intended. Consider holding a competition between schools or within classes or grades in a school for the greatest percentage of returned parental consent forms. This includes both consent and refusal forms. Statistics from all schools in the district were posted where school principals, the superintendent, and teachers would see them. This healthy competition among school administrators may lead them to encourage teachers and parents to strongly support the program.

When resources are available, staff members who actively participate in the vaccination program could be provided with appropriate incentives. A simple note expressing appreciation may also be an effective reward. A Note of Caution: It may be necessary to consult with local union representatives if an incentive system has an impact on staff members' rights under a collective bargaining agreement.

Finally, the week before the school clinic occurs, each teacher and staff member at that school should be sent a reminder and talking points so they can inform others. For larger districts it would be wise to appoint a person who can take calls and emails from parents with questions and concerns about the vaccines offered, the vaccination process, clinic times and dates, and other concerns.

Practical Suggestions, Action Steps, & “Ready-to-Use” Resources

This module presents three resources that can be used by educational leaders and their staff to address professional development related to helping staff understand and address the implications of declining student vaccination rates. The module includes:

01

A synthesis of key professional development strategies and processes that can be used to help staff develop the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to address declining vaccination rates as a key problem or practice in their school or district

02

A professional development planning guide that maps out a year-long approach to engaging all staff members in exploring, discussing, and addressing the implications of declining student vaccination rates

03

An annotated list of potential resources for use by study groups and action research teams engaged in addressing declining vaccination rates as a problem of practice

Key Professional Development Strategies for Addressing Lowered Vaccination Rates as a School or District Problem of Practice

1. Formulate and Refine Your Problem of Practice:

- Engage staff in becoming familiar with statistics and inferences concerning the impact of lowered vaccination rates (at the national, regional, and district levels).
- Form a vaccination leadership team to collect staff, family, and community reactions to this data and its implications for student well-being and academic achievement.
- Disaggregate data to determine vaccination disparities and inequities among subgroups within your school district (e.g., race, ethnicity, community, age, socio-economic, gender, English Learners, students with disabilities, etc.).
- Formulate and publicize a clear statement of your problem of practice: i.e., a statement that articulates the relationship between lowered vaccination rates and potential or current student areas of underachievement.

2. Create Your Theory of Practice:

- Encourage your vaccination leadership team to ensure that all voices, perspectives, and relevant stakeholder groups (e.g., community leaders, social and health service agencies, parent/teacher associations, government leaders, etc.) have been incorporated into your articulated problem of practice.
- Use your problem of practice as a springboard for developing a district-wide theory of practice: If our district implements _____ to expand stakeholder awareness of the implications of lowered vaccination rates, then _____ will result.
- Encourage central office and school-based teams to respond to your identified theory of action and articulate its potential implications for their school or office.
- Use your theory of action to develop a project plan for professional development to address your identified problem of practice.

3. Identify Key Personnel to Lead Your Professional Development Initiatives:

- Identify key personnel who will be responsible for ensuring that your professional development project plan (PDPP) to address vaccination declines will be fully implemented during the academic year.
- Enlist these key personnel in fleshing out your PDPP, integrating a clear timeline with practical professional development activities and projected outcomes (including individuals responsible for facilitating each activity).
- Ensure that the roles, duties, and responsibilities of your key professional development leaders are clear and consistently implemented.

4. Implement Information and Discourse Workshops:

- For your first sequence of professional development activities, develop and implement interactive information and discourse workshops for staff, parents and families, and community members.
- Ensure that these workshops include a clear presentation of data related to vaccination declines and an analysis of the implications of this decline for student health, development, well-being, and academic progress.
- If possible, enlist a range of presenters representing relevant departments and offices within the district (e.g., health and human services, community and state health organizations, and local and state government representatives).
- Make these sessions as interactive as possible, including periodic opportunities for participants to react to the content being presented and pose questions related to that content.
- Throughout the workshop, encourage participants to work in small-groups or teams. Encourage them to provide a summary at the conclusion of the workshop highlighting insights and recommendations generated by their group/team.
- Use feedback generated during these information and discourse workshops to continue to build specific approaches to addressing vaccination declines.

5. Form Central Office and School-Based Study Groups:

- Expand your staff's awareness of the problem of practice related to vaccination declines in your district by encouraging them to form study groups.
- If possible, it will be useful to have study groups comprised of both school-based and central office representatives.
- Use resources included in this module as a starting point, asking participants to read and analyze the implications of the identified resources.
- Next, ask study groups to use the district's theory of action to formulate a set of actions to address the vaccination-related problem of practice.
- Publicize the recommendations and conclusions of each study group in district and school websites and related social media platforms.

6. Encourage Action Research Teams:

- A logical extension of study group activities is the development of action research teams.
- Introduce to study group members the concept of action research, i.e., practitioner-driven formulation of a hypothesis (in this case, for addressing one or more key aspects of vaccination declines) and developing a research protocol for determining its impact as it is implemented.
- Encourage action research teams to align their research work with performance targets articulated in their school improvement plan or district strategic plan.

- Support action research teams in publicizing their results so that other school and central office staff can benefit and learn from their work.

7. Engage Cross-Institutional Partnerships to Address Your Identified Problem of Practice:

- If feasible, use study group and/or action research approaches involving cross-institutional partners.
- Encourage members of the health, business, and government communities to provide feedback and input concerning possible solutions to the vaccination decline problem of practice.
- Strive to ensure the elimination or reduction of duplication of efforts and services: For example, how can we as a school district and community work with outside agencies to formulate a range of service-delivery systems (e.g., school- and community-based vaccination and health clinics)?

8. Develop an Evaluation Process to Determine the Level of Usage and Impact of Your Professional Development Initiatives:

- As you continue to implement your professional development project planning process, begin to determine how you will assess its impact upon your identified problem of practice.
- Ask yourselves: What are the performance targets and related measurement processes we will use to determine if our work has made a statistically significant difference in increasing student vaccination rates in our district?
- Integrate your evaluation metrics and processes into your district strategic plan and your various school improvement plans.
- Specifically, make certain that you address correlations between increased vaccination rates and access to health services and annual academic performance targets.

9. Integrate Your Professional Development Initiatives into Your District Strategic Planning and School Improvement Planning Efforts:

- Use this professional development process to showcase your efforts in improving student vaccination rates as part of your annual strategic plan.

A Professional Development Planning Guide

Directions: Use the following recommended action steps to begin formulating your planning process to address declining student vaccination rates as a problem of practice in your district:

1. **Initial Planning:** During January or February (prior to your implementation year), initiate a district-wide vaccination program. Collect feedback from your staff about potential solutions to the problem of declining vaccination rates (e.g., school or community vaccination clinics).
2. **Project Plan Development:** During the second semester of your implementation year, develop a comprehensive vaccination increase project plan, including long-range goals, performance targets and measures, staff responsible for leading key initiatives, and a clearly articulated timeline and communication plan.
3. **Summer Planning:** Invite a group of health staff and administrators to discuss your project plan, possible clinic dates, and educational materials that should be disseminated. Also, in late July or early August, conduct meetings at each school so that staff can ask questions and receive information about what vaccines will be offered and the benefits to vaccinating students.
4. **Ongoing Information and Discourse Workshops:** Continue to provide information and discussion session opportunities for staff, parents/families, and community members—showcasing the value of vaccinations and the relationship between vaccination declines and potential student health and academic issues. Disseminate information using a variety of platforms, including social media.
5. **Conduct After-School Sessions with Staff and Administrators:** Ensure consistency of message delivery and information shared by developing and disseminating materials, resources, and professional development agendas. Model strategies for staff to share this information with students, parents, families, and community groups.
6. **Explore Incentive Programs and Options:** In many districts that have successfully increase student vaccination rates, incentives and motivation starters have been used to encourage schools to increase student access to and completion of the vaccination process. Examples include holding competitions and related rewards for the greatest percentage of returned parental consent forms.
7. **Anticipate Emerging Contingencies and Issues:** As solutions to this problem of practice are implemented (e.g., starting a school- or community-based vaccination clinic), it would be wise to appoint a communications liaison responsible for taking calls and answering emails from parents with questions and concerns about the vaccines offered, the vaccination process, clinic or related service times and dates, and related concerns.
8. **Integrating Vaccination Increase Strategies and Action Steps into Your Strategic Planning Process:** As suggested in the previous resource, there is a range of strategies you can use to enhance staff understanding and skill related to this problem of practice. These should be showcased in your district strategic plan and your school improvement planning process. They can include information workshops, study groups, action research teams, and ongoing program evaluation.
9. **Showcasing Successful Programs and Practices:** Whenever possible, use your various communication and social media outlets (including your district website) to highlight successful programs, practices, and outstanding individuals and groups demonstrating success in increasing student vaccination rates.

Suggested Resources for Study Groups & Action Research Teams

Directions: The following suggested materials and resources are ideal starting points for school and central office-based study groups and action research teams investigating the problem of practice of declining student vaccination rates:

- <https://www.annfammed.org>
"Silent Consequences of COVID-19: Why It's Critical to Recover routine Vaccination Rates Through Equitable Vaccine Policies and Practices" (Ava Skolnik, Alexandra Bhatti, Anna Larson, Rachel Mitrovich) in Annals of Family Medicine
- <https://www.nfid.org>
"Issue Brief: the Impact of COVID-19 on U.S. Vaccination Rates—National Foundation for Infectious Diseases" (Blog Entry).
- <https://www.cdc.gov>
"Decline in Child Vaccination Coverage During the COVID-19 Pandemic—Michigan Care Improvement Registry, May 2016-May 2020" (C.A. Bramer, 2020)
- <https://vitalrecord.tamhsc.edu>
"Study Shows Sharp Decreases in Childhood Vaccination Rates in Texas During the Pandemic—Vital Record" (News from Texas A & M Health, May 19, 2021).
- <https://www.nih.gov>
"Decline in Measles Vaccination Is Causing a Preventable Global Resurgence of the Disease" (April 18, 2019, National Institutes of Health).
- <https://www.nytimes.com>
"The C.D.C. Urges Parents to Get Childhood Vaccinations up to Date Following a Steep Decline Last Year" (June 10, 2021, New York Times).
- <https://www.scientificamerican.com>
"Public Health: Vaccinations Have Sharply Declined Nationwide During the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Jim Daley, July 8, 2020, New York Times).
- <https://www.who.int>
"WHO and UNICEF Warn of a Decline in Vaccinations During COVID-19—NY1" (News Release, Geneva/New York, July 15, 2020).

End-of-Module Self-Reflection Questionnaire

Directions: As an educational leader, use this self-reflective questionnaire to explore the following essential question: To what extent are you including lowered vaccination rates as a focus for upcoming professional learning? Use the following rating scale to assess your current level of knowledge, skill, and understanding of lowered vaccination rates as a key problem of practice:

4= I have a clear understanding of this issue and am currently working to address it as a part of my district's approach to professional development.

3= I understand this issue and have started to work with my staff to investigate possible solutions and how we can integrate them into our professional development work.

2= I am beginning to understand the significance of this issue, but I have not worked with staff to address it.

1= I am just becoming aware of this issue as a problem of practice, and I need to do much more work in understanding and addressing it.

- _____ 1. I can explain the relationship between lowered student vaccination rates and issues involving their health, well-being, and academic achievement.
- _____ 2. I can articulate specific data-supported conclusions about the impact of lowered student vaccination rates in my specific district or school.
- _____ 3. I can explain the importance of information and discourse workshops to help staff, families, and community members understand the significance of lowered student vaccination rates.
- _____ 4. I can articulate a theory of action that our district or school can employ to improve lowered vaccination rates as a significant problem of practice.
- _____ 5. I have begun to work with other administrators and staff members in my district to address this important problem of practice.
- _____ 6. I can explain the significance of including project plan-based action steps related to increasing student vaccination rates as part of our strategic planning and school improvement planning efforts.
- _____ 7. I understand and support the value of student groups working on exploring the issue of lowered vaccination rates as a significant problem of practice.
- _____ 8. I can explain and encourage school-based and central office staff-based action research teams addressing key aspects of improving lowered vaccination rates in our district and schools.
- _____ 9. I am working to engage health leaders, community leaders, government leaders, and business leaders in my community to support us in addressing this significant issue.
- _____ 10. I understand ways in which we can monitor and assess our work with increasing student vaccination rates as a part of our continuous improvement process.