During our Week 3 sessions, Hattaway Communications presented findings from a nationally representative sample (from a study completed over the last 18 months) indicating that:

- The majority of parents/guardians would be at least somewhat likely to allow their students to be tested if testing were offered in schools.
- 25% of parents/guardians are unaware of their schools’ mitigation strategies, and 10% believe that their schools are not doing anything.

We then discussed the importance of creating a unified and strategic communications plan to accurately inform families about school-based testing policies – particularly in the context of pandemic fatigue and continued spread of misinformation – and identified several ways to strategically engage families in a school or district’s testing program.

### Best Practices for Engaging Families to Increase Buy-In for Testing

- **Diversify the messenger** and send a unified message: allow families to hear about the importance of testing from a variety of stakeholders. Utilize student ambassadors, community leaders, school nurses, and external health experts to spread the same message, so that families hear from people they trust.

  > “School nurses are the faces of health in school communities...focus on this group as that is who parents trust.” - State Department of Education Nurse Consultant

- **Time your communications strategically**: utilize key periods throughout the school year to provide information about the school or district’s testing program (think start of the school year, before and after holiday breaks, etc.).

- **Break down misconceptions** that families may have about the types of tests being utilized and ensure everyone has the necessary **background knowledge**:
  - Provide videos of the tests being used and the testing process itself (see video links below and here).
  - Let parents observe the testing process (or even get a test themselves!).
  - Use parent-led groups (e.g., PTA, PTO) to organize messaging.
  - Partner with local media (e.g., radio stations) to showcase the positive aspects of testing.
  - Offer a phone hotline for parents to call in and ask questions/receive information. This could be done in partnership with the local health department or local pharmacy if resources are scarce.
  - Allow students to walk each other through the sample collection process.

- **Anchor, “why test?” in messaging that resonates with families**: the following three motivating messages tested well in the national study referenced above
  - **“Do Your Part”**: encourage a sense of personal responsibility and agency to build momentum.
  - **“Do It For Them”**: emphasize how testing protects those you love, respect, or empathize with.
  - **“Before It’s Too Late”**: create a sense of urgency around what is to be gained if we act and what is to be lost if we do not.
“Reminding people there are still people who cannot get vaccinated, people who are particularly vulnerable – this idea that regular testing helps us know where the virus is spreading. We want to keep our eye on it. That’s another powerful idea that people really responded to. That made sense. An early warning system.” - Communications Expert

Ah-ha’s!

- Providing families with the science behind testing (and vaccines) is critical to stopping the spread of misinformation. This is particularly important for families of color who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

  “There seems to be a target on communities of color where misinformation is designed to hurt us. Our health director said, ‘the vaccine is not going to kill you, but the misinformation can’...” - District COVID-19 Testing Coordinator

- Families’ initial willingness to test and their actual opt-in participation rates may not match up. To help solve for this, plan multiple ways to reach out to families to discuss testing such as one-on-one conversations, text messaging, and posting testing consent forms across multiple district web pages.

- Incentives (e.g., gift cards and raffles) can increase buy-in for both students and their families. ESSER funds (as noted below) funds can be used to purchase incentives.

Resources Shared During Session:

Communication/Family Education Resources

American Attitudes about the Pandemic: https://newscast.astho.org/67-polling-the-pandemic/


School-Based Testing Videos:

- COVID-19 Testing in Alabama Schools:
  - Younger Children: https://vimeo.com/580466970/86014fd766
  - Older Children: https://vimeo.com/580466987/5eac16afe6
  - Teachers: https://vimeo.com/580466916/4804561fef
  - Superintendents: https://vimeo.com/580466946/f859e25cd9

- Safer, Smarter Schools video, Louisiana Department of Health: https://ldh.la.gov/safer-smarter-schools
Diagnostic Screening Testing, Jefferson County Public Schools: 
https://youtu.be/acyB61_iCwQ

Upcoming Communications Learning Opportunities:
● December 1st: a webinar that will review the biggest lessons in COVID-19 comms over the past year. Register here:
  https://hattaway.zoom.us/webinar/register/6416170394553/WN_a7yi1ZBhTgKuHTfYBl2HxQ

Other school-specific resources

CDC’s Steps for Determining Close Contact and Quarantine in K–12 Schools: 

CDC’s Guidance on School Testing for COVID-19:


Guidance on using ESSER funds for incentives: COVID-19 relief funds that go to states and school districts can be used for vaccinations and testing, including incentives. ESSER and incentive related information below:

● Use of Funds for COVID-19 Vaccinations and Testing (July 2021): 

● Using American Rescue Plan and Other Pandemic Relief Funds to Provide Incentives to Students to Get the COVID-19 Vaccination (July 2021): 

● Using American Rescue Plan Act Funding to Provide Incentives for Participation in School-Based COVID-19 Screening Testing (October 2021): 