School and Childcare Immunization Data Transparency and the Colorado Parents for Vaccinated Communities Campaign: A One-Two Punch to Transform the Immunization Landscape in Colorado

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Summary of Topic:
Colorado is at the forefront of using statewide school immunization data to build a pro-vaccine parent network effective at improving immunization practice and policy. Session participants will gain knowledge on the value of school immunization data transparency and learn methods to replicate the impact of Colorado Parents for Vaccinated Communities.

Description of Session:
School and Childcare Immunization Data Transparency: Why This Matters and How Colorado is Using Local Data to Increase Coverage Rates and Strengthen Policy

Colorado’s 2016 immunization data reporting law requires every school to report immunization and exemption rates annually to the state health department. Local data on almost 1 million children show that school-reported measles vaccine rates are below 79% in 4 rural counties, while exemption rates are as high as 54% in 20 public and private schools across the state, representing diverse communities. Recent formative research conducted by the Colorado Children’s Immunization Coalition (CCIC) found that 29% of Colorado parents interviewed plan to or have delayed or refused vaccines. Geographic and socioeconomic differences require targeted strategies to improve both access to and acceptance of vaccines.

Despite these challenges, most Colorado parents vaccinate and want their children to attend schools with high immunization rates. 87% of those interviewed support increased funding for immunization programs and advancing policy options, such as requiring school staff to be vaccinated. But they remain silent about their views, especially in public and on social media. These findings led CCIC to use school immunization data to target resources and strategies to activate vaccinating parents about immunization and exemption rates in their own schools and communities and train them to effectively influence their peers, school administrators, public officials and the media to support improving immunization practice and policy. Stephanie Wasserman, MSPH, Executive Director of the Colorado Children’s Immunization Coalition

When Pro-Vaccine Parents Speak-Up, Everybody Listens: The Policy and Media Impact of Colorado Parents for Vaccinated Communities

A small, but vocal group of activists have successfully engaged with some Colorado lawmakers and advocated for the introduction of several bills in the 2017 legislative session to make the state’s already lenient vaccine exemption rules, even more lax, and to defund or erode the state's immunization programs. Although not successful, the activists used the opportunity to broadcast their views during public testimony and in the media. These actions have built momentum for their cause and continue to erode the public’s trust in the safety and efficacy of vaccines. However, recent formative research conducted by CCIC found that more than half of parents surveyed believe that it is important for their elected officials to be pro-vaccine. Similarly, 27% would be willing to join a pro-vaccine parent group. As a result, CCIC used statewide school immunization data to launch Colorado Parents for Vaccinated Communities and after one year, has recruited nearly 400 members from across the state to
advocate for vaccines at their schools, in the media, during public testimony and through engagement strategies. The campaign now creates 22,500 daily impressions on social media. Parent members use actionable school immunization data to provide testimony at board of health and legislative hearings to advance immunization policy. They also attend public town hall meetings to speak as pro-vaccine advocates, and publish letters to the editors in newspapers across the state. Sundari Kraft, parent founder of Colorado Parents for Vaccinated Communities