

## **2024 Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics-Underserved Populations Return to School (RADx-UP R2S) Scientific Meeting**

*September 10, 2024 from 1:00 – 4:00 pm EST*

### **Executive Summary**

As a culminating event for the RADx-UP Safe in School/Return to School (R2S) program, this public scientific meeting served as an opportunity for projects to present their research findings and share lessons learned. As the program comes to an end and the COVID-19 pandemic moves into a different phase of urgency and interest in the scientific community, it is important to reflect on the lessons learned and share key research findings in preparation for future pandemics and other areas of health. The meeting centered around six key themes:

- Child health in school settings
- Other aspects of health considered in interventions
- Mental health and socialization
- Community-academic-research partnerships
- Impact of community empowerment on research
- Underserved populations as a driver for the program.

There were nine presentations total, five primarily focused on overall research results and four primarily focused on community partnership followed by two panel and question & answer sessions.

### **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

#### **Overview of the RADx-UP Program**

*Dr. Eliseo Pérez-Stable, Director, NIMHD*

The RADx-UP program was established in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when racial and ethnic minorities were being disproportionately affected by the virus. For example, Hispanic or Latino people were 2x more likely to have a COVID-19 case compared to a White person. American Indian and Alaska Native People were 3.5x more likely to be hospitalized and 2.4x more likely to die of COVID-19 than a White person. Other minority groups shared similar disparities for cases, hospitalization, and death during this time.

The RADx-UP program is comprised of 141 projects with 1 coordination and data collection center with representation in all 50 states and all U.S. territories. Over 411,000 participants have been enrolled and over 446,000 COVID-19 tests have been administered prospectively by RADx-UP grantees. There have been over 300 published articles by these projects and over 270 community engagement resources generated. A supplement in the American

Journal of Public Health has been published about RADx-UP's prioritization of community-engaged research. Articles in the supplement demonstrate the mutual trust and tangible benefits that arise from authentic partnerships between community organizations and academic health researchers.

### **Overview of the RADx-UP Return to School Diagnostic Testing Initiative**

*Dr. Alison Cernich, Deputy Director, NICHD*

As a part of the RADx-UP program, the Return to School Diagnostic Testing Initiative was established in April 2021. The goal of this initiative was to carry out the national priority of safely returning children to in-person educational settings with a focus on students in underserved communities. A total of 16 projects were awarded in the two phases to provide evidence for the effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of COVID-19 testing approaches and mitigation strategies. Over the last 3.5 years, the investigators and project teams of the R2S program, have contributed to the knowledge base in substantial ways.

### **Session on Research Results (moderated by Chris Lindsey, NICHD)**

#### **Assessing Strategies to Increase COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake in Underserved Population**

*Jason Newland- Washington University in St. Louis*

The objective of this project was to evaluate the impact of motivational interviewing (MI) versus text messaging with links to COVID-19 vaccine videos with an adaptive trial design to identify the best strategies to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake assess participant readiness for behavior change. The project concluded that interventions did not have differential impact on vaccine uptake and the importance of motivational interviewing.

#### **Assessing Knowledge, Feasibility, and Intervention for COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination in School-based Settings**

*Elizabeth Pulgaron, Tara Kenworthy LaMarca, Lisa Gwynn- University of Miami*

This project conducted three studies. The first aim was to use surveys and focus groups to understand COVID-19 knowledge, experiences, and decision-making. The second aim was to offer COVID-19 testing in school-based clinics. The third aim was to develop a tailored COVID-19 health education initiative based on community needs and engagement, in the context of under-resourced school-based settings. Through these three studies, the Gwynn group concluded that: testing in schools shows preliminary effectiveness for monitoring positivity rates and decreasing absenteeism; COVID 19 intervention was well received and improved parents' levels of confidence; the likelihood to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine was significantly positively related to trust in official sources of information, but not personal sources of information.

## **Kaona: Promoting Youth Well-Being Through a Culturally-Centered Role-Playing Intervention**

*May Okihiro- University of Hawaii at Manoa*

This project aimed to bridge content understanding through simulations and gaming to increase health literacy based on Native Hawaiian cultural practices such as storytelling (mo'olelo). Kaona is "hidden meaning" in Hawaiian, and is a game based on the Lōkahi wheel framework (6 aspects that a person needs to balance developed by Kamehameha schools). Students were involved in the co-design of the game. In addition to the board game intervention development, a video application is in development with narration, user testing, and iteration in the future.

## **Communicating with Parents at Schools for Children with Disabilities During a Pandemic**

*Christina Gurnett- Washington University of St. Louis*

This project's objective was to increase uptake of weekly SARS-CoV-2 screening within schools as one measure to increase school safety for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A cluster randomized control trial was conducted with messaging sent through email, text messages, PeachJar (school message distribution) to staff and parents, general messages to all schools, and personalized messages to randomized schools. The project found that enhanced messaging strategies did not increase testing uptake and the need to improve communications with families.

## **Qualitative Analysis of the Mobile Health for Migrant Health (mHealth-4-mHealth) COVID-19 Response Program Among Nebraska Migrant Families**

*Jon Figliomeni and Russell McCulloh- University of Nebraska Medical Center*

This project conducted qualitative interviews with migrant participants in the mHealth program which created a trusted path for migrants to use following COVID-19 symptoms or exposure through the development of a bilingual, bicultural investigative team for community engagement. The group found that authentic community engagement drove program success, migrant families face a lack of vocational protections, and the mHealth program resulted in participant empowerment.

*A panel and discussion segment followed the research results session for project teams to answer questions about their research.*

## **Session on Community Partnerships (moderated by Sonia Lee, NICHD)**

### **Highlights and Lessons from the Three Years of the School TLC Study**

*Dana Keener-Mast, Jennifer Schuster, Jennifer Goldman- ICF Macro, Inc and Children's Mercy Hospital*

This project evolved over three study phases expanding from three schools to 35 schools and two community-based locations to perform COVID-19 screening and on-demand testing of over 2,500 participants and 5,000 tests. The project found that: most participants preferred nasal swab over saliva test, but elementary students were almost evenly divided between the two; most parents were in favor of COVID-19 testing at school; over half of tested participants said they would not have been tested elsewhere if testing was not available through the School TLC study.

### **Effective Academic-District Partnership for Communicating and Acting on Evolving Science**

*Moira Inkelas- University of California, Los Angeles*

This project sought to optimize equitable in-person learning in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The partnership with research enabled LAUSD to act as a learning system with expertise in the rapidly evolving science, translation of complex issues into easy to understand concepts, actionable metrics to signal a change in conditions, and real time research that is responsive to operational requirements. The Inkelas team has expanded their work with LAUSD to include a response to the opioid crisis.

### **Reflections and Lessons Learned from a Return to School Project in Washington State**

*Linda Ko- University of Washington*

This project had three aims to impact students in the Yakima valley: identify rural Latino community's social, ethical, behavioral needs and resources for students to return to school and maintain onsite learning using qualitative assessments with school partners, parents, and students; evaluate the effectiveness of risk communication + testing on students' attendance, non-pharmaceutical preventive behaviors, testing, and vaccine uptake using a cluster RCT; and assess implementation outcomes of the intervention. Through the study, the project found that it was important to create an overarching message with regular, consistent, science backed, risk communications to multiple audiences while co-designing the messages with community partners for enhanced cultural relevance and appeal. Also, creating a sense of community to avoid stigma and simplifying the enrollment process help achieve the project aims.

## **Using the CFIR to Extrapolate Lessons Learned from a School-based COVID-19 Testing Program for Application in a Broader Public Health Context**

*Amanda Miller, Susan Kiene- San Diego State University*

This project sought to reduce implementation burden on schools and make testing accessible to household members for broader community impact through conducting a non-inferiority trial to determine that distribution of at-home COVID-19 testing kits as a school-wide testing program for middle schools was not inferior to onsite COVID-19 antigen testing. After this trial, it was scaled to include all middle schools in the district. The project found that unmet healthcare needs predicted community utilization, flexibility within fidelity enables rapid adaptation, inner setting motivation is critical to program success, and outer setting ideologies can impact program receptiveness.

*A panel and discussion segment followed the research results session for project teams to answer questions about their research.*

### **Thank You and Closing Remarks**

Dr. Sonia Lee provided closing remarks and thanked the presenters and attendees.