

CASE STUDY

Mastery Schools builds community connections to pave the way for equitable COVID-19 testing

Program snapshot

16,000

students and staff given access to weekly PCR testing

27 individual test locations across two states (PA and NJ)

Testing completed in ~10-15 minutes per class

Notable outcomes

Sizeable increases in participation through community engagement

Benefits to employee engagement and retention

Bridging the health equity gap with COVID-19 testing

Equity is a core value for Mastery Schools, many of which serve communities where the majority of students are Black or people of color. School leaders knew COVID-19 testing was crucial to health equity in their communities in Philadelphia, PA and Camden, NJ hit hard by the pandemic, especially those in low-income households. But resources for COVID-19 mitigation weren't readily available.

On top of that, the school community's confidence in public health services was low. Building an effective program wouldn't be enough. Transparency for parents was as important as the results driving COVID-19 strategies.

Addressing parent concerns across 27 school communities

Living in congested areas, chances of spread among asymptomatic students were high. Weekly PCR testing could help mitigate risks, but the logistics of testing 27 schools in two different states called for site-by-site adaptation and additional full-time "COVID-19 teams," bolstered by federal ESSER funding, to manage testing and reporting duties.

With a program structure in place, school leaders turned to gaining consents. Schools held open houses and hosted personal meetings with hesitant families. They invited early adopters in to share their experiences parent-to-parent. The honest conversations and thorough educational outreach contributed to building hard-earned trust among skeptics.

Peace of mind that students can thrive

Slowly but surely, consent rates started to rise, reaching as high as over 70% in some schools. School leaders had the data they needed to drive COVID-19 strategies, even as they dealt with the winter wave caused by the Omicron variant. Teachers, boosted by the confidence of consistent testing, could focus on learning and enrichment rather than restrictions and risks.

Every week, the program shared the data they were using to make decisions on the district website. Clear transparency gave parents peace of mind, and strong participation helped Mastery Schools continue on its mission that all students learn and thrive and truly be prepared for their chosen path for post-secondary success.

“Buy-in is really important. We work really well with the community and parents, and always get feedback from families. That's always going to be more effective in the long run...We [also] wanted staff buy-in, as they're the ones pulling it off. One of the biggest five-star [staff survey results] was that we could test at school. This was big for peace of mind, especially for teachers.”

Jay Muchemi

Director of Health and Safety at Mastery Schools

