



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasing Student Vaccination Rates:  
Introducing the AASA/Merck Vaccination Toolkit



## A Message from Dan Domenech

Executive Director

AASA, The School Superintendents Association to AASA

*We are at a crisis point in public education in the United States. Without question, our shared commitment to supporting the whole learner requires that in addition to students' cognitive-academic growth, educators must also approach learning holistically and ensure that all students are safe, healthy, and perceive themselves as a viable part of the school's learning community. To support that critically important goal, AASA is extremely pleased to share with educational leaders our latest publication, "Addressing the Decline of Vaccination Rates of U.S. Students: A Toolkit for Educational Leaders."*

*This toolkit is designed to provide practical guidance, recommendations, and resources to ensure that all students receive vaccinations required for entry into school in a timely and efficient way. As the summary below will highlight, the recent pandemic has resulted in a troubling decline in vaccination rates, especially for minority and economically disadvantaged students. We sincerely hope that superintendents will be able to use the six modules in this new toolkit to increase understanding of the vaccination crisis, analyze its implications for your school or district, and use the rich range of resources as part of ongoing professional learning and parent, family, and community outreach. Thanks to each of you for your ongoing and tireless commitment to students and their well being.*

# Addressing a Critical National Issue

We are living in a time that can best be described as a crisis point in our history as a nation. As Dan Domenech suggests, our shared commitment to equity and excellence in education reaches beyond the classroom to include school and district efforts to expand student access to required vaccinations. As the data presented below suggest, this is an immediate priority—one that cannot be delayed before another health crisis arises in the United States. It is critically vital that school districts partner with parents, families, and community partners to increase the accessibility of required vaccinations—especially for students living in areas where transportation and health services may be limited.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, during the COVID-19 pandemic, children have missed well-child care and related vaccinations. If these rates decline below levels needed to maintain herd immunity, dangerous outbreaks of preventable diseases could follow. During the past two years, routine vaccinations in this country have plummeted across all age groups, with our most vulnerable and underserved populations suffering the greatest decline. Data suggest that the percentage of children receiving required vaccinations has decreased by 14% as a result of the pandemic and related school closures. This decline is becoming a major equity issue across the United States today. Here are a few startling statistics for educational leaders to consider:



1

Nearly 400,000 fewer children entered kindergarten during the last school year because of pandemic-related disruptions, raising concerns that no one knows how many kids received childhood vaccinations for common diseases.<sup>1</sup>

2

The Centers for Disease Control confirm that vaccination coverage for kindergartners dropped across the country in the 2020-21 school year. Coverage for three state-required vaccines for public and private schools—measles, mumps, and diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough as well as chicken pox—fell by one percent to appropriately 94 percent, with most states reporting a drop.<sup>2</sup>

3

There are 35,000 more children in the United States during this time period without documentation of complete vaccination against common disease.<sup>3</sup> This decline has pediatricians, school nurses and public health experts worried that preventable and possibly fatal childhood illnesses, once thought to be a thing of the past, could become more common.<sup>4</sup>

#### Resources:

1. "CDC finds drop in kindergarten enrollment, stirring vaccination-rate fears" in *The Washington Post* (A16), Friday, April 22, 2022.
2. Krista Mahr. "CDC: Kindergarten vaccination rates drop across the U.S. *POLITICOPRO*, 04/21/2022 (1:29 PM EDT).
3. Krista Mahr. "CDC: Kindergarten vaccination rates drop across the U.S. *POLITICOPRO*, 04/21/2022 (1:29 PM EDT).
4. Megan Messerly and Krista Mahr. "Covid vaccine concerns are starting to spill over into routine immunizations." *POLITICO*, 04/18/2022.