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CASE STUDY

# Keeping Students in the Classroom

*Raising Vaccination Rates at LAUSD with Breakthrough Results*

*by Lauren Wein Feldman and Kathleen Choi*

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# Keeping Students in the Classroom

## *Raising Vaccination Rates at LAUSD with Breakthrough Results*

Lauren Wein Feldman and Kathleen Choi

To keep students, teachers, and staff as safe as possible and in the classroom, the Board of Education of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) passed a policy in September 2021 requiring all students ages 12 and older to be vaccinated against Covid-19 (or have a medical or other exemption) by January 10, 2022. But by mid-October 2021, the district realized that while some schools' vaccination campaigns were making great strides, others were struggling, with many having cleared rates (those vaccinated plus those with approved exemptions) of less than 50%. At this rate, when the new policy would take effect in January, tens of thousands of students would not be able to attend school or take part in sports or any extracurriculars — and students from the highest-need populations were the ones who would be most affected.



Having achieved tremendous results tackling a variety of challenges with the Breakthrough Results approach, LAUSD decided to apply this approach to raising vaccination rates. In November 2021, all six LAUSD local districts worked with District Management Group (DMGroup) to launch Breakthrough Results at the 62 schools with the lowest vaccination rates. Within 11 weeks, the 62 schools went from an average cleared rate of 58% to an average cleared rate of 86% — exceeding the original goal of 85% cleared. The cleared rate at the 62 target schools increased by a rate of almost 50% compared to nonparticipating schools' increase of 30% (*Exhibit 1*).

### FAST FACTS

\*SY2021-2022



Los Angeles Unified  
School District (CA)

### 2nd-largest district in the nation

(Boundaries stretch across 720 square miles including the City of Los Angeles along with all or portions of 25 cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County)

### Almost 600,000 students\*

- 73.4% Latino
- 10.5% White
- 7.5% African American
- 3.9% Asian
- 2.0% Filipino

\*Includes independent charter schools, early education, adult enrollment, and other.

### 73,800 employees

(Second-largest employer in Los Angeles County)

## Putting Breakthrough Results into Action

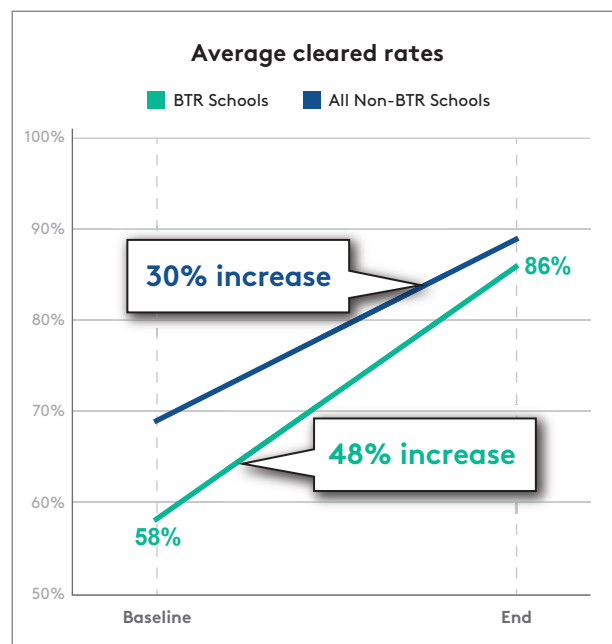
### Setting the Stage

Critical to success is getting the teams organized—enlisting the appropriate individuals on various teams and setting clear roles and responsibilities. At LAUSD, the work began with the creation of a Sponsorship Team composed of a small group of senior administrators from across LAUSD to champion the work. This team was charged with ensuring that the work received the necessary attention and resources, and intervening quickly to remove any obstacles to success. The Sponsorship Team selected the 62 schools to target, which included 33,000 students 12 and older who were neither vaccinated nor exempted. Working with DMGroup, the Sponsorship Team set a goal of getting these 62 targeted schools to meet or exceed the overall LAUSD goal of 85% cleared.

The 62 participating schools were then organized into 32 Breakthrough Results teams based on their Community of School—LAUSD's regional groupings of schools. Teams were organized in this way in recognition that schools within the same community often confront similar issues in access to vaccinations and vaccine hesitancy; grouping them together would thus allow the schools to share their learnings and successes rapidly. Within each Breakthrough Results team, there were often two to three school teams; each school team was composed of three to six individuals who best knew their students and families. This familiarity with students and their families was identified as a critical factor since the decision to vaccinate is a family decision. School teams typically included those in the roles of principal, assistant principal, parent support administrator, and counselor.

The thought and time spent enlisting the appropriate individuals on various teams and setting clear roles and

*Exhibit 1* CHANGE IN CLEARED RATES  
11/07/2021 - 01/21/2022



Source: DMGroup.

responsibilities were critical to success. At the end of the challenge, several Breakthrough Results team members expressed their appreciation for the clear directive and support they received from the superintendent, board, central office, local district, and Community of Schools administrators, which helped prioritize this effort among all of the competing priorities and helped eliminate impediments encountered along the way.

With these teams established and their roles and authorities defined, LAUSD was ready to launch its 11-week Breakthrough Results effort to reach its goal of 85% of students cleared at 62 of its most challenged schools.

### 44 Communities of School (CoS)

(Groups of schools centered around a neighborhood – working to support students, families, and schools in the community. Each Community of School has a dedicated CoS Administrator and support team)

Schools and Centers:

**1,400+**

General Fund Budget:

**\$9.8 billion**

Languages Spoken:

**97**

Source: Fingertip Facts 2021-2022, LAUSD, [https://achieve.lausd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=66505&dataid=109597&FileName=Fingertip\\_Facts\\_2021\\_2022\\_FINAL\\_ENG.pdf](https://achieve.lausd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=66505&dataid=109597&FileName=Fingertip_Facts_2021_2022_FINAL_ENG.pdf)

## Putting the Breakthrough Results Approach into Action

The Breakthrough Results approach focuses on a highly specific goal, and then empowers participants to work to achieve this goal within a short time period—usually about 8 to 10 weeks. Teams are given dedicated time to meet weekly. Together, they develop strategies which they immediately put into action; then, every other week, they review data to assess their progress and seek to refine strategies or explore new tactics to achieve their goal.

Each weekly team meeting is supported by a dedicated performance coach from DMGroup who provides real-time coaching and professional development. The performance coach encourages the teams to be innovative and solution-oriented, and keeps them focused on their goal. Any difficulties are flagged and elevated to the Sponsorship Team, which is responsible for quickly addressing and eliminating obstacles. As multiple teams are launched simultaneously, a healthy sense of competition and collaboration is almost palpable. Teams share ideas and lessons learned as they all innovate and iterate to achieve their goal. They all want to succeed for their students, and to meet their goal.

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*Within 11 weeks, the 62 schools went from an average cleared rate of 58% to an average cleared rate of 86%.*

For this vaccine challenge, the goal for every team was clear: to meet or exceed the overall goal of 85% cleared (vaccinated or exempted). Teams brainstormed and came up with different ways to increase vaccination rates.

## Putting Strategies into Action and Overcoming Obstacles

After brainstorming about strategies to increase vaccination rates, the Breakthrough Results teams began taking action. But increasing vaccination rates was not easy. Teams encountered many obstacles to success, but working together, and with the support of their performance

coach, the Community of Schools administrator, and the Sponsorship Team, these difficulties were flagged and addressed quickly. Some examples included:

### Data challenges:

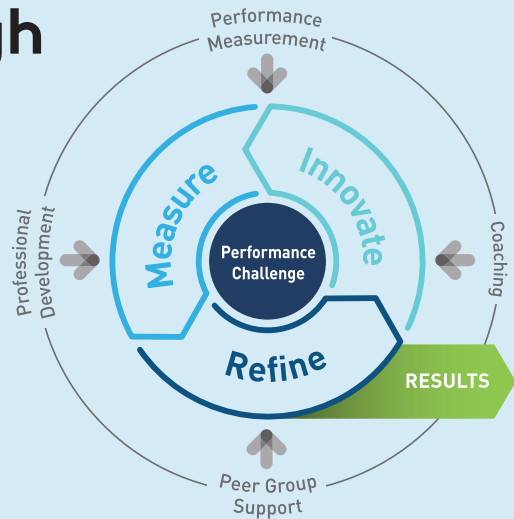
- Data access challenges:
  - Obstacle: Many schools did not have access to the real-time data and the family contact information needed to direct their outreach and interventions.
  - Solution: The performance coaches brought this issue to the Sponsorship Team, who then provided direct data access to the Breakthrough Results team leads.
- Difficulty understanding data:
  - Obstacle: There was confusion about what the different categories of data meant, and what really mattered. Did "vaccinated" mean partially vaccinated or fully vaccinated? How would the school know if a student was exempt? What does "cleared" mean?
  - Solution: The performance coaches alerted the Sponsorship Team that the data training and communications initially provided had not been sufficient. More information was then provided at the Community of Schools-level to increase clarity not just to the Breakthrough Results Teams but to all school leaders.

### Variability in access to resources:

- Obstacle: LAUSD allocated significant resources to support vaccination efforts, from having pop-up clinic providers, mobile clinics visiting every secondary school at least twice, incentive dollars, extra staff and staff overtime, and more. However, the district learned from the Breakthrough Results teams that many schools did not know that these resources existed or how to access them.

# What Is the Breakthrough Results Approach?

The Breakthrough Results approach is based on the premise that “successful change programs begin with results”<sup>\*</sup> and that tremendous success can be achieved by unleashing the talents and ideas within one’s organization.



## Why do so many initiatives fail?

New initiatives are launched with regularity across organizations, but the vast majority fail to achieve significant tangible results. Why is that? Barriers to success typically cited include:

- Goals lack clarity and specificity;
- Success measures are misaligned (the focus is on activities instead of performance outputs);
- Long timelines create a lack of urgency;
- Resource requirements are unrealistic or ill-defined;
- There is no clear owner or too many owners of the objective;
- “Doers” are not well informed or well prepared;
- There are too many competing initiatives;
- Progress is unclear as it often takes a long time to access performance results.

Teachers and staff are organized into small teams and are empowered to focus on their specific team goal and work in rapid cycles to achieve results in the short timeframe. Another important factor is that multiple teams are launched simultaneously, creating a sense of community as well as a healthy sense of competition among the teams.

With this approach, teams achieve results while building their capacity to lead and effect change. By the end of the cycle, teams are excited by the results they have achieved and feel empowered to continue the work. Indeed, the process shows that “successful change programs begin with results.”

To learn more, go to [www.dmgrouppk12.com/breakthrough](http://www.dmgrouppk12.com/breakthrough)

## Why the Breakthrough Results Approach Works

The Breakthrough Results approach breaks through the typical barriers to success with a unique methodology that creates focus, builds a sense of urgency, improves transparency, and maintains accountability, while providing support and building capacity.

### The Breakthrough Results approach includes:

- **A highly specific goal/performance challenge**
- **Short timeframe** (Usually about 10 weeks)
- **Data analysis** to measure progress
- **Weekly meetings** to review data, iterate, and innovate in rapid cycles
- **Coaching and professional development** provided just-in-time by a dedicated Breakthrough Results performance coach from DMGroup

<sup>\*</sup> Robert H. Schaffer and Harvey A. Thomson, “Successful Change Programs Begin with Results,” *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 1992), <https://hbr.org/1992/01/successful-change-programs-begin-with-results>.

- Solution: The performance coaches alerted the Sponsorship Team, which pushed more resources to every Community of Schools Administrator to ensure information and access to resources at the local level.

Knowing that their Breakthrough Results performance coach and the Sponsorship Team had their backs and were counting on them to succeed, team members felt supported, empowered, and energized about the work. And, identifying these obstacles and removing them helped not only the Breakthrough Results teams' work, but helped the whole district.

## Uncovering Successful Strategies

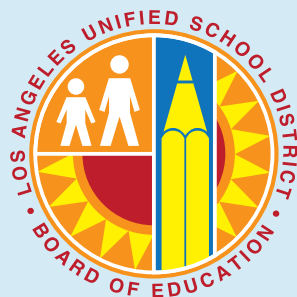
Through a process of trying many different approaches, abandoning failures, and iterating on promising strategies, the teams uncovered many successful strategies. A few particularly successful ideas included:

- **Making vaccination events accessible to families and communities.** Many schools were holding vaccination events focused on providing students with access to the vaccine. However, one successful strategy that emerged was to schedule the events in the evening, and bring in pizza to make it a "family event" where everyone could come, discuss their questions about the vaccine with staff and teachers they trusted, and then choose to get vaccinated together right then and there.
- **Tailoring outreach to local community demographics.** Strategies included:
  - Inviting doctors and researchers who had credibility in the community to speak to families about the effectiveness and safety of the vaccine.
  - Sharing testimonials from people of similar backgrounds who were impacted by the virus.
- **Holding "Upload Mondays."** The teams realized that the challenge was not only to get students vaccinated, but to get proof of vaccination uploaded into the system. Knowing that many students were getting vaccinated over the weekends, some teams started hosting "Upload Mondays" where staff would encourage families to bring their vaccination cards to school and would arrange for extra support to help families upload this information.
- **Providing linguistic support and taking the fear out of some of the documents that are distributed during vaccination clinics.** Many families and guardians were overwhelmed by the vaccine information and forms. Although efforts had been made to provide linguistic support at vaccination events, it became clear that adequate support had not always been available to help explain information and fill out forms. Having trusted members of the school community on site to provide this support and to be available to address questions made a significant difference.

## Tackling Challenges at LAUSD with Breakthrough Results

LAUSD has used Breakthrough Results with tremendous success in:

- ✓ Raising math achievement
- ✓ Raising reading achievement
- ✓ Increasing graduation rates
- ✓ Reducing absenteeism
- ✓ Increasing FAFSA submissions
- ✓ Increasing support for specialized student populations





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*LAUSD will use the learnings from the Student Vaccination Challenge for future district-wide efforts. The Breakthrough Results process is about how to improve anything, and we'll take these skills with us for the next big challenges ahead.*

– David Kooper

Community of Schools Administrator and lead sponsor for the Breakthrough Results Student Vaccination Challenge

• **Ensuring students and families felt valued.**

Team members reached out directly to families to understand their concerns and to engage in tough but trust-based conversations.

The teams were able to share these successes and lessons learned with each other. School teams shared lessons in their specific Breakthrough Results teams, and performance coaches helped spread the information across all of the teams so that all could benefit from successful strategies.

Despite the challenges of operating during a pandemic, the teams were energized by this team-based approach. Team members forged stronger relationships among themselves, and felt that they deepened their relationships with families through this work. One team member shared: “We had to pull together to make this happen. We stopped looking at it as ‘another thing to do.’ We used the opportunity to get to know our students and families more by having those individual conversations with them.” Another commented: “We divided the list ... and became very familiar with the families. Now we are building relationships with them besides just [on] Covid-related issues.”

## **Tremendous Results Achieved**

By mid-January, after 11 weeks, the schools participating in the Breakthrough Results approach had an average cleared rate of 86%, compared with the district average of 89% overall. Participating schools grew their percentage of

students cleared at a rate of 49% on average, compared to a growth rate of 30% among schools not participating in Breakthrough Results.

Midway through the Breakthrough Results challenge, LAUSD's Board of Education agreed to delay the enforcement of its vaccine mandate until fall 2022. While the deadline has been pushed back, the Breakthrough Results work helped the whole district by identifying obstacles and by identifying some powerful strategies to overcome them. The teams were energized by their success, and district and school leaders feel more hopeful that they have strategies that will enable them to move forward and keep students in the classroom when the mandate takes effect next fall. And there is a sense that the team building and skills developed will carry beyond this challenge. David Kooper, Community of Schools Administrator and lead sponsor for the Breakthrough Results Student Vaccination Challenge, commented, “LAUSD will use the learnings from the Student Vaccination Challenge for future district-wide efforts. The Breakthrough Results Teams process is about how to improve anything, and we'll take these skills with us for the next big challenges ahead.” ♦