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Exploring The Annual New York State School Survey: A Qualitative and Quantitative Approach

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Background: Immunization represents one of the great successes of public health in the twentieth century. To keep the public healthy the state of New York has established laws and regulations requiring children entering pre-school, primary, middle or high school in New York State to receive certain vaccinations before they can enter the school system. However, children can be exempted from receiving the required vaccinations with an authorized religious or medical exemption. To monitor the compliance with these immunization regulations each public and private school in New York State must complete and mail an annual immunization survey to the Immunization Program at the New York State Department of Health. This survey documents the immunization rates of the children who attend each school.

Project: This project involved using a telephone survey of school nurses, or the individual who completed the survey, in New York to evaluate their satisfaction with the survey. Apart from the quantitative data contained on the school survey form there was an interest in exploring, qualitatively, the reasons why some people choose to submit a religious exemption to receiving vaccinations. Therefore, in an effort to learn about why people reject immunizations, the project also involved exploring the religious beliefs of two specific religious groups in NY, the Amish and Mennonites and the current Public Health outreach activities that apply to these groups. The research and resulting guidebook explore options for further outreach and suggest best practices for future outreach activities.