

# A CALL TO ACTION: MAKE EVERY DAY COUNT

## THE OPPORTUNITY

A new school year is beginning. Across the country, superintendents and school leaders are laying out their vision, challenges and priorities for the year. The start of school presents an especially important opportunity to lift up an increasingly urgent issue: Too many children are missing too many days of school. Literally tens of thousands of children even in the early grades are chronically absent—missing nearly a month or more of school every year.

## THE HIDDEN CRISIS

The new report, *The Importance of Being in School*, by Robert Balfanz and Vaughn Byrnes reveals that chronic absence is a hidden national crisis. An estimated 7.5 million students across the United States are missing at least 10 percent of the school year, but their absenteeism is not being noticed or acted upon because it is masked by data on average attendance and truancy (unexcused absences). Chronically absent students are found in virtually every type of community—urban, suburban or rural. The problem of poor attendance can start early, long before middle or high school. Nationwide, one out of 10 kindergartners and first graders are chronically absent. In some communities, as many as one out of four young students miss that much school.

Whether absences are excused or not, the resulting loss of instructional time is substantial and, for many students, the academic consequences are decidedly negative. Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade and are more likely to have poor attendance in later grades. By middle and high school, chronic absence is a proven early warning sign that a student will drop out. This is especially true for those students living in poverty who need school the most and are sometimes getting the least.

## THE CALL TO ACT

The time is right to make a difference. The action of the U.S. Conference of Mayors pledging mayoral leadership on this issue is a game changer. It brings new allies to the table to nurture a culture of attendance and remove barriers such as lack of access to medical care, poor transportation, unhealthy or unstable housing or unsafe neighborhoods. As Mayor Taveras of Providence, Rhode Island, explains, “Ending chronic absenteeism requires all hands on deck.”

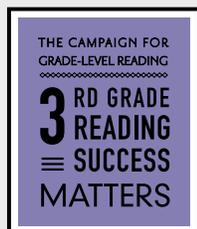
Recent meetings with business leaders confirm that they, too, understand the critical importance of school attendance. They realize that attendance habits formed in the early years set the pattern for later grades and for the “soft skills” of the adults they employ. They also see it as a productivity issue since parents often miss work when children miss school.

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and Attendance Works now call upon superintendents across the country to raise your voices and take a lead role in improving attendance starting in the early grades. We ask you to:

1. **Own the Issue:** Make clear that improved student attendance is one of your top priorities. Ask your teachers and school leaders to make it one of theirs, as well.
2. **Mobilize the Community:** Reach out to make improved student attendance a broadly owned and widely shared civic priority. Engage parents, civic and elected leaders, local businesses and libraries, museums and service providers.
3. **Drive with Data:** Use data to raise public awareness, establish targets and goals, track progress and ensure accountability.

Join our effort to guarantee that all students have a chance to learn and succeed by making sure every day counts, starting in kindergarten.

## EVERY DAY COUNTS CO-SPONSORS



**The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading** is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and active citizenship. The Campaign focuses on the most important predictor of school success and high school graduation: grade-level reading by the end of third grade.

Our goal is that, by 2020, a dozen states or more will increase by at least 100 percent the number of children from low-income families reading proficiently at the end of third grade. To accomplish that, we are working to rebuild what is now a chaotic system of early care and early grade education by using grade-level reading proficiency as a unifying goal; promote quality teaching for every child in every setting every day; support community solutions to address lack of school readiness, chronic absence, and summer learning loss; and help parents succeed in their critical roles as first teachers and best advocates.

For more information, go to [www.gradelevelreading.net](http://www.gradelevelreading.net).



**Attendance Works** is a national and state-level initiative that promotes better policy, practice and research around school attendance. Our goal is to ensure that every district in the country not only tracks chronic absence data beginning in kindergarten or ideally earlier, but also partners with families and community agencies to intervene when attendance is a problem for children or particular schools.

We work on three levels: Nationally, we build public awareness and political will about the need to address chronic absence. This includes outreach to the media and national organizations to spread the word about why attendance matters and explore the role federal government can play. On the state level, we foster state policy advances by developing coalitions and encouraging statewide analyses of chronic absence data. Locally, we provide technical assistance and tools to help communities, schools and school districts monitor and work together to address chronic absence. This includes creating peer learning networks and tapping skills and assets available from state and national organizations.

For more resources see [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org).