

# SUPERINTENDENTS CALL TO ACTION: MISSING SCHOOL MATTERS

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Across the country, local superintendents are joining a growing national movement to address an urgent issue: too many children are missing too many days of school. Millions of children starting in the early grades are chronically absent—missing 10 percent or more of the school year in excused and unexcused absences. Add your name to this Superintendents Call to Action. Join America's Promise Alliance, Attendance Works, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Everyone Graduates Center, Get Schooled, Healthy Schools Campaign, the Institute for Educational Leadership, MENTOR and United Way Worldwide, in announcing your commitment to:

- 1. PRIORITIZE ATTENDANCE:** Make clear that reducing chronic absence is one of your top priorities. Ask your principals, teachers and school board members to make it one of theirs, as well. Designate a senior member of your staff to oversee implementation. Use September to publicize your commitment in your communications to staff, the board, schools, families and the media.
- 2. MOBILIZE THE COMMUNITY:** Reach out to make improved student attendance a broadly owned and widely shared civic priority. Engage families through positive messaging and offering alerts and personalized outreach when absenteeism becomes a problem. Tap civic and elected leaders, local businesses and libraries, health providers, housing authorities, museums and service providers in developing and implementing a shared plan of action.
- 3. DRIVE WITH DATA:** Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reporting of chronic absence is required. Local school districts are essential to ensuring chronic absence data is accurate and used to activate prevention and early intervention. Use data to raise awareness, trigger supports and establish shared targets for improvement, especially for grades, schools or student populations with elevated levels of poor attendance.

The start of each school year offers an important opportunity to look beyond average daily attendance and truancy numbers to monitor and address chronic absence. By determining who shows signs of chronic absence starting in the first month of school, schools and community partners can work together to help students get to class before they have missed so much instruction that they require academic remediation.

## THE HIDDEN CRISIS

About 8 million students across the United States are chronically absent, but their absenteeism too often has gone unnoticed and unaddressed because it has been masked by data on average daily attendance and truancy (unexcused absences). Chronically absent students are found in 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 misses 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 students living in poverty who need school the most and too often face the greatest barriers to getting to school.

## THE CALL TO ACT

The time is right to make a difference. Although many people – parents, public officials, business leaders, health providers, public agencies and community organizations – understand the critical connection between school attendance and achievement, few realize how quickly absences can add up to too much lost time in the classroom. Research suggests that most families want their children to succeed and recognize that regular attendance is important. But few realize missing as little as two days a month can throw their child off track.

Chronic absence is a problem we can solve when schools, families and community partners work together to create an engaging school climate that motivates daily attendance, use data to identify, as early as possible, when chronic absence is a problem, and help families overcome hurdles to getting children to school. These hurdles can include chronic illness, lack of health or dental care, unsafe neighborhoods, unreliable transportation, unstable housing or overly strict school discipline practices. We have seen local efforts achieve measurable differences in chronic absence within a single academic year, often before improvements in academic indicators are visible. This offers an early win and morale boost for all involved.

Join this effort to guarantee that all students have a chance to learn and succeed by making sure every day counts, starting in kindergarten. Special thanks to Scholastic for serving as a corporate sponsor of the Call to Action. To sign-up for the Call to Action, or to learn more, please visit:

[www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action](http://www.attendanceworks.org/superintendents-call-to-action)

## CO-SPONSORS



**AMERICAS PROMISE ALLIANCE** leads an alliance of organizations, communities and individuals dedicated to making the promise of America real for every child. As its signature effort, the GradNation campaign mobilizes Americans to increase the on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and prepare young people for postsecondary enrollment and the 21st century workforce.



**ATTENDANCE WORKS** is a national initiative dedicated to improving the policy, practice and research around attendance. Its website offers materials, research and success stories about reducing chronic absence. Attendance Works also offers technical assistance to school districts and communities.



**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.



**EVERYONE GRADUATES CENTER** combines analysis of the causes, location, and consequences of the nation's dropout crisis with the development of tools and models designed to keep all students on the path to graduation. That includes tracking of early warning indicators, including chronic absence.



**GET SCHOOLED** Middle and high schools can use Get Schooled's Fall Attendance Challenge as a fun way to tackle issues around attendance and gain exposure to all of the free college access resources online! We've seen the Fall Attendance Challenge initiate a change in school culture and increase attendance as much as 10 percent. Students can earn individual incentives by participating and schools can earn grants up to \$2,000.



**HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN (HSC)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to making schools healthier places for all students. HSC provides leadership development and tools to school stakeholders and advocates for better access to nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources and clean air to shape children's lifelong learning and health.



**INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization which has been at the forefront of innovative efforts that bring together leaders across the various sectors of education (P-20), workforce development and child- and youth-serving systems. IEL builds partnerships across institutional boundaries, helping tackle leadership challenges and leverage the resources of multiple partners.



**MENTOR:** The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) is the unifying champion for expanding quality youth mentoring relationships in the United States. For more than 25 years, MENTOR has served the mentoring field by providing a public voice; developing and delivering resources to mentoring programs nationwide; and promoting quality for mentoring through evidence-based standards, innovative research and essential tools.



**UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE** is engaged in nearly 1,800 communities across more than 40 countries and territories worldwide. We bring people and organizations from all sectors of society together to improve EDUCATION, INCOME and HEALTH, the building blocks for a better life and a stronger community.