

# 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, or 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, FutureEd, 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 the beginning of the school year 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, to identify where additional supports are needed to improve conditions for learning, and establish shared targets for improvement, especially for grades, schools or student groups 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 NATIONAL 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 – families, 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 and how to proactively address this problem. 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 incorporates positive conditions for learning and motivates daily attendance; use data to identify, as early as possible, when chronic absence is a problem; and help families or groups of students overcome hurdles to getting to school. These hurdles can be in the community, including chronic illness, lack of health or dental care, unsafe neighborhoods, unreliable transportation or unstable housing. They might also be in school such as bullying, the lack of an engaging classroom experience, or biased and harsh 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. 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



**ATTENDANCE WORKS** is a national, non-profit 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.



**AMERICAS PROMISE ALLIANCE** brings together organizations, communities and individuals dedicated to making the promise of America real for every child. The work is powered by the belief that all children are capable of learning and thriving, and that every individual, institution and sector shares the responsibility to help young people succeed.



**CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING** seeks to disrupt generational poverty by mobilizing communities to promote early school success for children currently on the high-risk side of the achievement gap. It has helped spark a "grassroots to governors" movement for advancing grade-level reading and reducing chronic absence as important policy priorities.



**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.



**FUTUREED** is an independent, solution-oriented think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Its areas of study include chronic absenteeism in state accountability systems.



**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.