



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 19, 2010

No. 360

www.nyc.gov

**MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES COMPREHENSIVE NEW STRATEGIES TO
REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY IN CITY SCHOOLS**

Every Student. Every Day.

New NYC Success Mentor Corps

*Reliance on Data Triggers 5,200 Special Chancellor's Letters Sent to At-Risk Students Today,
Targeting Students Before School Begins*

*As Part of Comprehensive Outreach Effort, Free Backpacks – Donated by the Office Depot
Foundation – Offered at the Targeted Schools to Every Elementary School Student Who
Attends the First Day*

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today announced the first steps of an ambitious new program by the Department of Education and other City agencies to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy during the school year that starts next month. The program is called “Every Student. Every Day” and was developed by the Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism led by John Feinblatt, the Mayor’s Chief Advisor for Policy and Strategic Planning. The program will first be deployed in a core group of 25 schools that will test pilot initiatives before they are brought to schools citywide. The 25 schools have principals who have volunteered to participate in an innovative effort to combat below average levels of attendance. To help reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy at the 25 targeted schools, the Mayor’s Task Force will create the new NYC Success Mentor Corps, whose members will work with students to improve attendance. The task force will also deploy new data tools that give teachers, principals and community partners the information they need to improve student attendance, and it will launch a comprehensive parent-student outreach campaign that includes a series of targeted Chancellor letters, phone calls, a video message from the Mayor and student incentives.

“At the beginning of the school year, 1,500 students who are most at-risk for attendance problems will be matched with a supportive school mentor, who will work to keep them in school and on track throughout the year,” said Mayor Bloomberg. “We are also using data and community support groups in new ways, and reminding students and parents about the importance of going to school everyday. Too many children miss too much school, and truancy is often a child’s first step in the wrong direction. Students need to be in school: Every Student. Every Day.”

(more)

Task Force Tackles Pockets of Chronic Absenteeism

The Task Force, launched by the Mayor on June 10th, has focused its first efforts on developing responses to early warning signals in a child's early years – before truancy is an entrenched habit. While overall daily attendance rates, which have been steadily increasing in recent years, averaged 91 percent last year in New York City, there are pockets of school children who miss far too much school. About 20 percent of all City school students missed one month of school or more last year. Research shows that three out of four students who are severely chronically absent in the sixth grade never graduate from high school. In New York City, over 80 percent of children in the juvenile justice system had missed a month or more of school; 40 percent had missed two or more months. Absenteeism rates are highest in low-income communities, where school offers students the best opportunity for future success.

The Mayor was joined at the announcement, held at Patrolman Robert Bolden Elementary School in Brooklyn, by the Mayor's Chief Advisor for Policy and Strategic Planning, John Feinblatt, Deputy Mayor for Education and Community Development Dennis Walcott, Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein, Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Seth Diamond, Task Force Chair Leslie Cornfeld, NYC Service Chief Service Officer Diahann Billings-Burford, Administration for Children's Services Assistant Commissioner Dale P. Joseph, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Assistant Commissioner for School Health Roger Platt, Department of Youth and Community Development Assistant Commissioner Darryl Rattray, Patrolman Robert Bolden Elementary School Principal Wanda Holt, Johns Hopkins University Research Scientist and Task Force advisor Robert Balfanz and Mary Wong of the Office Depot Foundation.

The Interagency Task Force that developed these initiatives is headed by John Feinblatt, the Mayor's Chief Advisor for Policy and Strategic Planning, and chaired by Leslie Cornfeld, a former federal prosecutor, who served as director of the Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Child Safety and Welfare after the tragic child abuse death of Nixzmary Brown. The Mayor's Task Force and the Department of Education selected the 25 schools based on the presence of strong leadership, well-established community partners and above average rates of chronic absenteeism. There are ten elementary schools, eight middle schools and seven high schools in all five boroughs that will test the comprehensive, multiagency strategy before it is expanded. The initiatives announced today are the result of several months of extensive data analysis, research, field visits, and outreach to hundreds of individuals from New York City and the country, including school personnel at all levels, community organizations, advocacy groups, academic institutions, faith based leaders and representatives from all levels of government with expertise in this area.

“There has been remarkable success at New York City's public schools over the past eight years in improving not only attendance rates, but the educational outcomes for New York City students,” said John Feinblatt. “The initiatives announced today, however, address the fact that too many students are missing the benefits of our school system. This is not solely a Department of Education issue – it's a government-wide and community wide issue that requires the strategic collaboration of key City agencies, because the causes of absenteeism are complex and varied.”

“Student test scores, attendance and drop out rates have steadily improved over the past eight years, as has the quality of a New York City public school education,” said Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein. “These interagency collaborations will take us one step closer to ensuring that all students have the chance to take advantage of what our schools are offering.”

“The power and scale of these Task Force initiatives is profound. It is the first time any city has attempted to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy in such a comprehensive, strategic, and collaborative manner,” said Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins. “What is striking is that the Task Force is addressing the problem on so many fronts simultaneously in its initiatives, recognizing the complexity and multiple causes of truancy and chronic absenteeism. These new programs announced today should serve as a model for all cities attempting to address this problem.”

Innovative New Mentoring Program for 1,500 At-Risk Students at Targeted Schools

The Mayor’s Task Force is launching the first-ever NYC Success Mentor Corps. At the 25 schools taking part in the program, Success Mentors will be assigned a group of 15 students who they will work with to improve attendance and educational outcomes. Success Mentors will enter targeted schools at a leadership level, working directly with the principal and school’s community partners. Success Mentors will be given limited access to attendance information for their target population so they can identify problems early and intervene more effectively. Success Mentors will work three to five days per week, for five to eight hours per day. Steps that Success Mentors can take include:

- Meet with students, parents and guardians to discuss absences;
- Identify problems that lead to school absences;
- Connect students to existing school resources, including counseling;
- Connect students to existing community-based organizations; and
- Serve as a bridge between the student, his or her parents, and the school.

For this school year, over 100 individuals have committed to serving as in-school Success Mentors for the full school year. The 1,500 chronically absent students will be selected based on levels of chronic absenteeism. At the high school level, 9th graders will be targeted because data show that chronic absenteeism rates historically increase in the 9th grade often result in a student dropping out of school. Additional students, flagged as posing the most serious emerging risk of chronic absence, will be added during the course of the year.

The Task Force will use different models of volunteers, from recent college graduates to retired professionals, and assess which is most effective in this role. Success Mentors will be stipended volunteers from the volunteer service organizations City Year, Citizen Schools, Hunter College School of Social Work, ReServe, and Learning Leaders. The Children’s Aid Society will assist the Task Force in the program’s development and implementation.

This is the largest, most comprehensive volunteer effort the City has ever undertaken to target at-risk students at City schools. Research shows that attendance and educational outcomes can be strengthened by connecting at-risk students with a supportive adult who can personalize school and engage with students in a positive way.

“The Success Mentor program shows the impact that volunteer organizations can have on our City’s at-risk students – especially when they are organized around a comprehensive strategy for improved outcomes,” said Chief Service Officer Diahann Billings-Burford. “I am pleased that NYC Service can contribute to improving student attendance and student success.”

New Student Success Data Dashboard to Help Target and Reduce Truancy

At the 25 schools, the Mayor's Task Force will launch a first of its kind Student Success Data Dashboard to provide a real-time look at performance in the three key "ABC" areas of Attendance, Behavior and Coursework. Research shows that the "ABCs" are strong early warning predictors of school failure and drop out. The Student Success Data Dashboard will be reviewed collaboratively at mandatory weekly Student Success meetings attended by the principal, community partners, Success Mentor, and other principal designees. At the meetings, students who are falling further behind in attendance can be identified and given directed interventions as appropriate. Those interventions can be after-school programming, case conferences, tutoring, special recognitions and "shout-outs," and other incentives.

"This data dashboard program will revolutionize our ability to help at-risk students who we work with at our schools, by allowing us to identify students-in-need early on, and track our progress with them," said City Year Executive Director Itai Dinour. "City Year is a proud partner in this innovative approach that will make sure more students show-up to a welcoming school learning environment. We commend the Task Force for not only recognizing the role that New Yorkers, including City Year's corps members, can play in addressing schools' critical needs, but also supporting these efforts with data systems, trainings, and access to City services."

Comprehensive Outreach Campaign During Crucial First Months of School

Research shows that attendance for the first four to six weeks of school is predictive of attendance for the remainder of the year; strong attendance at the beginning of the school year is critical for reducing truancy and absenteeism. The Task Force is therefore launching a campaign to start the school year off strong, relying on targeted student and parent outreach, new summit meetings and school-wide interventions. Today, 5,200 special Chancellor's Letters will be mailed to all students at the targeted schools that were chronically absent last year. The day before school starts, a telephone call campaign will target the same 5,200 students and families. The letters and calls will emphasize the importance of attendance every day for school and life success. Chancellor Letters to target elementary school students will contain a notice for a free backpack, donated by the Office Depot Foundation. All elementary school students who attend the first day of school will be able to redeem the backpack.

Each of the 25 schools will also convene, during the first month of school, a Parents' Student Success Summit to help support getting their child to school every day. The summit will be the first-ever systematic collaboration with school leadership, local community partners, and City agencies to engage the hardest-to-reach students and inculcate a culture of attendance. Each summit will have representatives from community organizations and other partners that can help students and parents learn about athletics, treating asthma, housing, mental health and tutoring.

The Task Force is also working with the Health Department's Office of Minority Health to contact faith based, and other, organizations to heighten awareness about the importance of school attendance every day. A new "Every Student. Every Day." tool kit will be sent to over 1,000 faith based, and other, community leaders – and will include key facts about the dangers of truancy and chronic absenteeism; and ideas for how to combat it. There will also be a video message from the Mayor Bloomberg about the importance of attendance every day.

New Partnerships With Community Based Organizations and Homeless Services

Schools are often unaware of available community resources and are therefore unable to connect the hardest to engage students to important local services. Through the Administration for Children's Services Community Partnership Initiative, which organizes neighborhood-based social service organizations, the Task Force will create connections between the targeted schools and local service organizations. A point person will be assigned to work with each of the 11 networks maintained by the ACS program to help the schools connect students to service providers and other supports in the community.

City homeless shelters are particularly vulnerable to absenteeism. To create a culture of school attendance and success at City homeless shelters, the Task Force, the Department of Education and the Department of Homeless Services will create a new weekly report to track student attendance and absences at 15 targeted shelters. The reports will be reviewed by a newly designated DHS point person at each shelter and a point person for each school in an effort to maximize attendance and school success. Each of the fifteen shelters will also designate an area of the shelter to serve as a "homework center" to encourage studying and success.

"These initiatives will help develop a culture of attendance and school success at targeted city shelters," said Commissioner of Homeless Services, Seth Diamond. "They mark an important first-ever effort to improve attendance and reduce absenteeism at selected shelters through the use of new data-based tracking tools, and interagency collaboration."

"Linking schools to our Community Partnerships will allow us to expand our ability to support at-risk children through the schools, and provide services to students and families where needed," said ACS Commissioner John Mattingly. "This will allow for more effective interventions for at-risk students who are truant or chronically absent."

"Public school reformers have spent a great deal of time raising standards and improving the education system, but when you get right down to it, if a child's not in school she can't learn," said Andrew White, director of the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School and co-author of a study on chronic absenteeism. "New initiatives like this one are important for cities to launch so they have a chance of getting more kids in the school door and helping them stay there. A child who attends school consistently in the early years is far more likely to finish school later on."

"When Mayor Bloomberg's office learned about our National Backpack Program and asked us to support this vitally important initiative, we were happy to assist," said Mary Wong of the Office Depot Foundation, which donated 5,000 backpacks. "These wonderful backpacks not only help kids get ready for the new school year, but they truly bring hope and dignity to children whose families couldn't otherwise afford to equip them with this essential item."

To help incentivize and reward improved attendance, Starbucks and Old Navy have generously agreed to provide free products to students who are able to improve their attendance.

The Task Force will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives announced today, and modify them, where appropriate, throughout the school year. It will also announce additional initiatives being developed.

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