



Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR WALCOTT ANNOUNCES “CHANCELLOR’S SUMMER CHALLENGE” FOR SCHOOLS IN THE MAYOR’S INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE TO COMBAT TRUANCY AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Scholastic to Donate Thousands of Books to Participating Task Force Schools

Chancellor to Participate in Summer Reading Challenge

Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott today announced a new partnership with Scholastic Inc. and the Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement which will be known as the “Chancellor’s Summer Challenge.” The aim of the program is to get students and schools involved in the [Scholastic Summer Challenge™](#), an exciting initiative that aims to keep students reading over the summer months. The partnership will specifically target the 57 elementary and middle schools that are part of the Mayor’s Task Force; as an incentive for participation in the challenge, each school that signs on will receive 100 free books courtesy of Scholastic.

Now in its seventh year, the Scholastic Summer Challenge is a free online reading program where students can log their reading minutes [online](#) or via [free mobile app](#) to earn rewards and help set a new 2013 world record for summer reading. To add to the excitement of this opportunity, Chancellor Walcott will be participating in the challenge by logging his summer reading online just as students are encouraged to do. He will read Common Core-aligned texts that are appropriate and suggested for elementary and middle school students. The top Task Force elementary and middle school that logs the most reading minutes throughout the summer will each receive an additional 500 free books from Scholastic and a certificate of recognition from the Chancellor.

The Chancellor kicked off the Summer Challenge today at Manhattan’s P.S. 15 Roberto Clemente, one of the Task Force schools participating in the challenge, where he was joined by the Truancy Task Force’s Chair Leslie Cornfeld and Scholastic Inc. Classroom and Community Group President Greg Worrell. Award-winning author and illustrator Elisha Cooper was also on hand to read aloud from his children’s book *Farm* for an audience of P.S. 15 second grade students. P.S. 15, a veteran Task Force school now in its second year, is a model of success. This year, it reduced chronic absenteeism school-wide by over 30 percent from the pre-pilot year. For chronically absent students who received a Success Mentor -- a core intervention of the Task Force -- chronic absenteeism declined by 50 percent. This translates into more instructional time in school, producing stronger readers and students.

“I am thrilled to participate in Scholastic’s Summer Challenge this year and encourage all

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schools and students to get involved,” said Chancellor Walcott. “Experts agree that staying academically engaged during the summer months is crucial to students’ retention of knowledge. The Summer Challenge is a fun and creative way for students to stay on track. I want to thank Scholastic for this generous donation of nearly 7,000 books, which will benefit some of our students most in need.”

“With DOE's partnership, the Task Force has developed strategies to help improve attendance and drive achievement during the school year –but research shows that keeping kids engaged over the summer in reading skills is critical to their continued success,” said Mayor’s Task Force on Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism Chair Leslie Cornfeld. “We are delighted that the Task Force pilot schools can participate in the Scholastic Summer Challenge – and look forward to announcing the Task Force school with the most reading minutes in the fall.”

“We know from research that when kids have access to the right books, they are more likely to read, gain confidence and succeed in school,” said Scholastic Classroom and Community Group President Greg Worrell. “We applaud the Chancellor for being an exemplary reading role model, and all the Task Force schools for making summer reading a priority and encouraging their students to read every day.

The challenge also encourages teachers and parents to get involved to support their child’s reading. Through June 30, any teacher who registers his or her class for the Summer Challenge can enter for a chance to win a free classroom library from Scholastic. Parents of students at participating schools will also be provided with information on how to sign children up for the program, as well as information and tips on how to keep them academically engaged over the summer months. Once their child is signed up, parents can download a free [Storia® ebook](#) for their child to read this summer, and can track their child’s reading success all summer via the free [Scholastic Reading Timer app](#).

The Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement in collaboration with the Department of Education’s Office of Safety and Youth Development has launched the nation’s boldest, most comprehensive effort to combat truancy and chronic absenteeism in New York City’s public schools. Established by Mayor Bloomberg in 2010 in partnership with the Department of Education, the Task Force has piloted innovative, data-driven programs and policies in 100 pilot schools to help identify best practices for schools citywide. This year, Task Force Success Mentors are working with approximately 9,000 student mentees in our public schools, making it the largest, school-based mentoring effort in the country. Last year, chronically absent students with Success Mentors gained over 11,800 additional days of school as compared to chronically absent students at comparison schools. Research shows that the

(More)



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consequences of chronic absenteeism are severe: three out of four students who are severely chronically absent in the sixth grade never graduate from high school; chronic absenteeism is now recognized as a lever to drive student achievement, graduation rates, and reduce the achievement gap, especially in high-need communities where absenteeism rates are highest.

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