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**MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES FIRST-EVER CITYWIDE CAMPAIGN TO
REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY IN CITY SCHOOLS**

Comprehensive Strategy to be Developed for 2010-2011 School Year

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today announced the creation of a new Mayoral Interagency Task Force to be headed by John Feinblatt, the Mayor's Chief Advisor for Policy and Strategic Planning, to strengthen the City's response to chronic absenteeism and truancy at City schools. The Task Force will develop and launch the city's first-ever comprehensive set of initiatives to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism. It will address excessive absenteeism at all grade levels at schools with the most severe absenteeism problems, but will focus largely on early intervention initiatives in elementary and middle schools.

"Truancy is often a child's first step in the wrong direction," said Mayor Bloomberg. "Chronic absenteeism leads to higher rates of school failure, delinquency, and dropping out. From there, it is often hard to recover. We are going to focus on truant children because keeping them in school is an investment in their health, future success, and everyone's safety. The sooner we can identify the cause of truancy and absenteeism, the sooner we can get that child back on track."

While attendance rates, which have been steadily increasing in recent years, averaged 90 percent last year in New York City, there are pockets of school children who miss far too much school. Nearly 20 percent of City elementary school students missed one month of school or more last year. Research shows that 3 out of 4 students who are chronically absent in the sixth grade never graduate from high school. In New York City, over 40 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have been chronically absent. Absenteeism rates are highest in low-income communities, where school offers students the best opportunity for future success. The Task Force will focus on developing responses to early warning signals in the early years – before truancy is an entrenched habit.

Mayor Bloomberg was joined at the announcement, held at CS 61 / IS 190 in the Bronx, by Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, Chief Policy Advisory John Feinblatt, Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein, Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Commissioner Jeanne B. Mullgrav, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Commissioner Thomas Farley, Department of Homeless Services (DHS) Commissioner Seth Diamond, NYC

(more)

Service Chief Service Officer Diahann Billings-Burford, NYPD Assistant Chief Thomas Chan, Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Deputy Commissioner for Division for Child Protection Jan Flory, ACS PINS/DAS Program Director Sara Hemmeter, and Task Force Chair Leslie Cornfeld.

The Task Force will be headed by John Feinblatt, and chaired by Leslie Cornfeld, a former federal prosecutor, who served as Director of the Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Child Welfare and Safety, created after the tragic child abuse death of Nixzmary Brown. The task force will work closely with community-based organizations and organizations with records of success in this area, and will examine models of success from schools in NYC and throughout the country.

The Task Force will consist of the heads of the key stakeholder agencies responsible for these areas, including the Department of Education (DOE), ACS, New York City Police Department, DYCD, DOHMH, DHS and NYC Service.

"New York City's public schools have had remarkable success this year, and over the past eight years in improving the educational outcomes for our students," said John Feinblatt. "Test scores have improved, graduation rates are higher than ever and our student attendance rates have improved at all grade levels. However, we want to do even better. Too many students are missing the opportunities that our NYC public schools provide. Developing a comprehensive approach to this problem requires a well-coordinated, interagency effort overseen and supported by the Mayor's Office."

"Despite substantial success in improving educational outcomes for the students of NYC public schools, students can not take advantage of these opportunities if they don't show up," said Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein. "We want to ensure that every student in NYC has the chance to take advantage of what our public schools offer. By partnering with other agencies citywide, we can ensure that all NYC students have a fair chance to attend and succeed in school, and in life."

"Children's lives are complicated. The issues families deal with never fit neatly into the box defined by one government agency or another," said Andrew White, director of the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School. "I'm thrilled City Hall has chosen to take on the issue of chronic absenteeism by creating an interagency task force. This should spur invaluable collaboration across agencies and organizations, and it could eventually make a difference for tens of thousands of students every year. I look forward to helping out in the months to come."

Johns Hopkins University Research Scientist, Robert Balfanz, a nationally recognized expert in absenteeism and dropout prevention, will serve as an advisor to the Task Force. He is currently the Co-Director of the Johns Hopkins Everyone Graduates Center.

The Task Force will examine a broad spectrum of areas, including: developing a protocol for using absenteeism data to alert parents/guardians and other necessary stakeholders about absences; developing protocols for engaging and supporting targeted students and families; strengthening NYC's current truancy-related policies and practices; developing protocols to strengthen school partnerships with community-based organizations, service providers and law enforcement; and developing data-driven models for identifying and responding to students and schools at greatest risk of chronic absenteeism.

“Truancy and chronic absenteeism is a public safety issue,” said Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly. “When children and teens are truant during school hours, they are more likely to be the victims of and commit crimes. The risk of drug use, gang activity, and criminal behavior increases significantly when students are on the street instead of in the classroom. The NYPD is committed to working with other city agencies on the Task Force to ensure that during school hours all young people are in school learning, engaged and safe.”

“Chronic absenteeism and educational neglect are often the first signal that something is very wrong in that student’s life, including his family situation, his health, or his safety; it is also a strong predictor of poor life outcomes going forward,” said ACS Commissioner John B. Mattingly. “Because the causes of absenteeism are so varied and complex, interagency collaboration is the best way to address this problem. We look forward to working with the Task Force to improve outcomes for these at-risk children and teens.”

“Asthma can cost children valuable school time if it’s not well managed,” said Dr. Thomas Farley, New York City Health Commissioner. “We recommend that children with asthma visit their health care providers now to see if they can benefit from medications that prevent asthma attacks. The right treatment can help ensure that every child can stay in school to learn.”

“The Children’s Aid Society, United Way, Good Shepherd Services, City Year, BuildOn, Learning Leaders and other outstanding community partners will work with the Task Force and NYC Service to engage our at-risk youth at New York City public schools so that they can have every opportunity to reach their potential and succeed in life,” said Chief Service Officer Diahann Billings-Burford.

“As part of our commitment to driving positive, enduring change in local communities, we’re proud to help strengthen educational outcomes for at-risk youth in New York City,” said Andrew Alfano, Starbucks regional vice president, New York metro area.

The Task Force will begin its work today and will launch its first set of initiatives at the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic school year. It will immediately begin to select and target the schools that could benefit most from strategic interagency interventions, will monitor the effectiveness of all initiatives, and report to the Mayor on its progress.

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Contact: Stu Loeser/Jason Post

(212) 788-2958