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## **MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF MENTORSHIP PROGRAM TO COMBAT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAM**

*More than 7,000 Additional Days of Attendance for Students Who Received Mentors*

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Chief Policy Advisor John Feinblatt and Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott today announced improvements in attendance for chronically absent students who were provided with mentors, and an expansion of the mentorship program, which last year targeted 25 schools with high rates of absenteeism. The program is part of the “Every Student, Every Day” anti-truancy campaign, which includes the Wake Up! NYC campaign of wake up calls to students from celebrities to reinforce the message that school attendance matters. The first year of the mentorship program – Success Mentors – saw chronically absent students who received mentors attend a total of more than 7,000 additional days of school this year and students in the mentorship program were more likely to see improvements in attendance when compared to chronically absent students who were not in the program. This school year, the program will double the number of chronically absent students receiving in-school Success Mentors to more than 4,000 and double the number of elementary, middle and high schools that are part of the initiative. In addition, the City’s program will add new specialized mentors to work with students returning from suspensions, placements at juvenile facilities, foster care, or temporary housing, who are especially vulnerable to chronic absenteeism. The “Every Student, Every Day” campaign was developed by the Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism & School Engagement, which is overseen by John Feinblatt and Chaired by Leslie Cornfeld. The Mayor made the announcement at the High School for Teaching and The Professions in the Bronx where he was joined by Principal Gary Prince, Success Mentor Derrick Williams and other Success Mentors and students who benefited from the program.

“Truancy is often the first step in the wrong direction, because the more school a child misses during the early grades, the more unlikely it will be for him or her to succeed in the higher grades,” said Mayor Bloomberg. “Nearly 80 percent of children in the juvenile justice system were chronically absent the year prior to their arrest, and chronically absent students are more likely to experience substance problems or teen pregnancy. It’s a problem we absolutely have to continue tackling with new approaches, and the mentorship program and Task Force initiatives are showing promising results.”

“By meticulously tracking the impact on the students in the program, we’ve learned a lot over the last year about what can improve attendance,” said John Feinblatt. “We learned that it didn’t matter who the mentor was, but rather providing the mentors with the tools to have an

*(more)*

impact with access to student data and ensuring consistent, year-long relationships with the students, face-to-face interaction meetings between principals and mentors, and celebrating the students’ achievements. This year, we are going to further target the toughest cases – students returning from long suspensions, time spent in a juvenile justice facility, a prolonged illness, or from foster care. We are going to have to work even harder to have success with those students, but this issue is too important and we are going to continue to look for new ways to make an impact. We are off to a promising start.”

“Our program to reduce chronic absenteeism is working,” said Chancellor Walcott. “This past year, chronically absent students in our pilot program who were assigned mentors saw their attendance improve. We are expanding the program to include an additional 25 schools and are providing mentors to chronically absent students at these schools.”

“Strategically connecting at-risk students to a caring adult in school has produced positive outcomes,” said Leslie A. Cornfeld, Chair of the Mayor’s Task Force. “The program is using detailed analysis of empirical data and resources from across agencies and from the community to help leverage the effectiveness and accountability of the mentors.”

“Being a Success Mentor to high school students with attendance and other challenges made a clear difference in their lives,” said Derrick Williams, a Success Mentor and graduate student at the Hunter School of Social Work. “I was chronically absent in school, and it started with missing days, weeks, then a month or more of school until I couldn’t catch up and had to drop out. A mentor would have kept me on track, but I was lucky, my church got me to go back years later. My students faced real challenges every day, like babysitting siblings or relatives, poverty, gangs, or gaming videos all night with no one who cares. I was there for my students, and their parents, connected them to school, and I saw improvements that blew me away.”

“Being a part of this program gave me a sense of stability and I feel like I am part of a family here at the High School for Teaching and the Professions,” said high school senior Jean Robinson. “The Mayor’s program helped turn my high school career around. I was absent a lot, and realized I had to be here every day to succeed. My Success Mentor, is a friend, a mentor, a leader, and overall a great guide to me I every day.”

The Success Mentors program is one of several core strategies developed by the Task Force to reduce absenteeism, and is the largest, most comprehensive in-school mentoring model in the nation with more than 300 mentors. Year-end data tracking of nearly 1,500 chronically absent students who had full-year Success Mentors during the last school year shows a greater reduction in chronic absenteeism from the previous year than for similar students without mentors.

Percentage of 2009-2010 Chronically Absent Students Who Were Not Chronically Absent in 2010-2011

<b>No Mentor</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>With Mentor</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% Difference</b>
Elementary School:	43.4		Elementary School:	49.4	13.8
Middle School:	32.2		Middle School:	34.1	5.9
High School:	21.2		High School:	25.8	21.8

Percentage of 2009-2010 Severely Chronically Absent Students Who Were Not Severely Chronically Absent in 2010-2011

<b>No Mentor</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>With Mentor</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% Difference</b>
Elementary School:	60.0		Elementary School:	62.3	3.8
Middle School:	35.5		Middle School:	30.9	-12.9
High School:	10.3		High School:	23.0	123.3

Success Mentors are assigned a group of 15-20 chronically absent students whom they work with to improve attendance and educational outcomes. A unique feature of this model is that Success Mentors enter targeted schools at a leadership level with access to crucial student data, working directly with the principal and school’s community partners. They sign first-of-its kind confidentiality agreements giving them access to a new data tool developed by the Task Force and the Department of Education – the electronic Data Dashboard – which provides key student metrics: attendance, behavior and coursework. Success Mentors work 3-5 days a week, for at least 15 hours.

Success Mentor responsibilities include:

- Greet students each day and call home if the student is absent;
- Identify problems that lead to school absences;
- Meet with student/parent/guardian to engage students and improve performance;
- Connect students to existing school resources and activities, 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 the 2011-2012 school year, more than 300 individuals have been selected and trained to serve as in-school Success Mentors from a variety of organizations, including CityYear, ReServe, BuildOn, Citizen Schools, Children’s Aid Society, Princeton Center for Leadership Training, Lehman College School of Social Work, Partnership with Children, Good Shepherd Services, Wagner College, Counseling in Schools, social work students from Hunter and NYU, and the Department for the Aging. At other pilot schools, there will be trained teams of selected school staff serving as “Internal” Success Mentors. Teams of high school seniors have been selected and trained to be part of an innovative model in which they are matched with chronically absent students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, where chronic absenteeism and high school dropout rates peak.

Students are selected to receive a mentor based on levels of chronic absenteeism, with high-risk transition grades – First, Sixth and Ninth – are targeted. Additional students, who pose the most serious emerging risk of chronic absence and school failure, will be added during the course of the year.

“This is the boldest, most comprehensive in-school mentoring model in the nation,” said Dr. Robert Balfanz, research scientist at Johns Hopkins, and the task force advisor. “It is proof that when a city is committed to doing something right, by being strategic and data-driven, it can get positive outcomes for many of our most challenging students.”

“Education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, and children who miss class regularly cannot receive a quality education,” said The Children’s Aid Society President and CEO Richard Buery. “The challenges that prevent children from getting to school are complex and can often be attributed to issues around a child’s health, community safety and family stability – all barriers to learning. The Mayor’s campaign has already demonstrated success in reducing absenteeism and we must build upon his efforts to ensure that our most vulnerable families have the comprehensive supports they need to get children to school.”

“At no matter what age, children who miss weeks or months of school every year will fall behind,” said Andrew White, Director of the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School. “Often, the entire school suffers. And as these students reach high school, they are far more likely to drop out. Cities can invest billions of dollars in public education reform, but if they don’t address the issues underlying chronic absenteeism, they won’t achieve the kind of positive change we all hope to see. Since New York began to focus on chronic absenteeism, we’ve seen significant improvements. There’s still a long way to go, but City Hall and the Department of Education deserve great credit for focusing on creative strategies that are getting more kids to attend school every day. Other cities should pay attention to this work.”

“New York is leading the way on how big cities can tackle the critical issue of attendance,” said Hedy Chang, director of Attendance Works. “All of our efforts at school reform won’t matter much if students don’t show up for school. Chronic absence, starting in the elementary school, is a key early warning sign that students, or schools, are headed off track.”

“*NYC Service* is delighted to be on the Task Force and helping to launch the NYC Success Mentor Corps,” said Diahann Billings-Burford, Chief Service Officer of NYC Service. “We helped leverage the power of volunteerism to assist our most at-risk students achieve better outcomes at school, and in life.”

*New “Transition Coach” Mentoring for Students Re-Entering Schools After Suspensions, Juvenile Detention, Shelter and Other Challenges*

Students “re-entering” school after long-term suspensions, placements at juvenile facilities, foster care, or temporary housing often have elevated rates of chronic absenteeism, poor school performance and dropping out. To attack this problem, 10 retired professionals from the organization ReServe have been trained to serve as Success Mentor Transition Coaches at five of the Task Force’s pilot middle and high schools this year to assist these students.

Funded by a grant from the New York Community Trust for the 2011-2012 school year, these Transition Coaches will be matched with students “reentering” school to serve as their coach and advocate – helping to navigate administrative and course requirements, connect students with academic supports, encourage parent engagement, and student engagement at school. All Transition Coaches will sign confidentiality agreements, to have access to student data to help track and support their students, and will receive interagency trainings and feedback throughout the year.

“When the Task Force first approached The New York Community Trust about developing the City’s first-ever Transition Coaches a year ago, we were thrilled to help support the creation of this model for students in transition, returning to their schools,” said Joyce Bove, Vice President of the New York Community Trust. “It’s a promising model to help our most

vulnerable youth transition back into school successfully, and to alter the far too frequent pattern of school disengagement, poor attendance and drop out that follow returns to school.”

“Years of experience and wisdom make the Department for the Aging’s Foster Grandparents and Title V workers perfect mentors for school-aged children,” said Aging Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli. “We are happy to support the Truancy Task Force and its efforts to reduce student absenteeism.”

#### *Additional Program Expansions*

Other initiatives the Task Force is launching or expanding this year include strengthening supports for chronically absent students at homeless shelters; working with the New York City Housing Authority to identify and support chronically absent students; expanding WakeUp! NYC to more students citywide based on its popularity when piloted last year; and sending 60,000 Chancellor’s attendance letters to the families of chronically absent students alerting them that their child missed 20 or more days of school, and that attendance is required by law.

The Task Force and its programs will be amplified this year through the generous support of Macy’s, the Task Force’s lead sponsor. J & R and Starbucks also have generously supported these efforts.

“Our commitment to education goes well beyond the back-to-school season,” says Martine Reardon, Macy’s Executive Vice President of Marketing. “Macy’s is a big believer in giving back, and bettering the lives of New York City’s school children throughout the year whether it is through funding, employee volunteerism or company programs dedicated to supporting education. As New York’s most iconic department store, we’re excited and proud to be a part of a citywide program that will be at the forefront of improving attendance and school performance for chronically absent students in the City’s school system.”

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