



# Every Student, Every Day: Obama Administration Launches First-ever National, Cross-Sector Initiative to Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism in Our Nation's Schools

OCTOBER 7, 2015

**Contact:** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary

In response to the President's call to action to improve the lives of all young people through the My Brother's Keeper Initiative (MBK), today the Obama Administration is launching ***Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism***. Led by the White House, U.S. Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Justice (DOJ), the Administration is announcing new steps to combat chronic absenteeism and calling on states and local communities across the country to join in taking immediate action to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism by at least 10 percent each year, beginning in the current school year (2015-16).

*Every Student, Every Day* is focused on the estimated 5 to 7.5 million students who are chronically absent each year. Defined as missing at least 10 percent (approximately 18 days) of school days in a school year, chronic absenteeism puts students at heightened risk of falling behind and dropping out of school. Together, communities can address and eliminate chronic absenteeism, and ultimately boost student success and strengthen our nation's workforce and our future prosperity. As part of this initiative, the Administration is partnering with states, local communities, and nonprofit, faith, and philanthropic organizations to support local, cross-sector efforts.

"There should be no barriers when it comes to providing young people with a quality education. Chronic absences from school cause children, especially those who can least afford it, to fall further and further behind their peers. The President's My Brother's Keeper Task Force recognizes that school attendance is critical to the goal of ensuring that students are able to reach their full potential and to have the necessary tools to succeed. I commend public and private sector commitments to eliminate chronic absenteeism. Making sure that every child is in school every day will bring us one step closer to fulfilling the promise of My Brother's Keeper," stated Broderick Johnson, White House Cabinet Secretary and Chair of the My Brother's Keeper Task Force.

"It's common-sense—students have to be in their classrooms to learn, yet too many of our children, and most often our most vulnerable children, are missing almost a month or more of school every year. Through this national initiative we are partnering with communities and providing tools to help our all of our young people attend school every day, so that they are learning the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in school, careers and life," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

"Kids who are chronically absent from school are much more likely to drop out later—and not only do they miss the opportunities that come through education, but they are also at greater risk of involvement with the justice system," said Attorney General Lynch. "This new initiative will help teachers and school administrators keep our young people on track for a quality education and a future of achievement."

"A quality education is one of the greatest gifts we can give to our children. But too many students today don't have a safe, stable place to call home, preventing them from attending class regularly and reaching their true potential. This initiative will empower educators and communities to close the opportunity gap facing our most vulnerable children and ensure there's a student at every school desk, every day," said U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julián Castro.

"We know that habits form early, and that's why an important part of the early education program's effort is to help children develop important social-emotional skills," said Linda Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "If attendance issues are observed, high quality early childhood programs address these and reach out to families facing attendance

challenges to find out why. As a result of offering support and solutions, children may then have better attendance habits in the early years that last throughout their school years."

Frequent absences from school can be devastating to a child's future. The effects start early and spiral dramatically over time.

- Children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read on grade level by the third grade.
- Students who can't read at grade level by the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.
- By high school, regular attendance is a better dropout indicator than test scores.
- A student who is chronically absent in any year between the eighth and twelfth grade is seven times more likely to drop out of school.

Despite record high school graduation rates, too many of our nation's young people—particularly students who are low-income, of color, homeless, highly mobile, with disabilities, and/or juvenile justice-involved—still do not graduate from high school or are off-track toward that important goal. While every child and family grapples with challenges from time to time, such as an illness or unexpected family emergency, the growing research on absenteeism is clear and shows that **chronic absence from school** is not only a primary cause of low academic achievement but also a powerful predictor of which students are at a higher risk for dropping out. Research also connects chronic absenteeism to the school-to-prison pipeline.

In launching his MBK initiative, President Obama issued a call to action to close opportunity gaps still faced by too many young people and often by boys and young men of color in particular. Building on the progress the MBK initiative has seen in addressing these gaps, *Every Student, Every Day* responds to Recommendation 8.2 of the My Brother's Keeper Task Force Report to the President, which called for a national absenteeism initiative.

As part of this initiative, the Administration is announcing the following today:

## New Federal Tools and Resources to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism

- *Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*. *This Toolkit*, which includes guidance to help schools combat chronic absenteeism, from ED, HHS, HUD, and DOJ, is designed to support coordinated community action that addresses the underlying causes of local chronic absenteeism affecting millions of children in our Nation's public schools each year. The Toolkit provides action steps and lists of existing tools and evidence-based resources to begin or enhance the work of addressing and eliminating chronic absenteeism. In addition to the departmental efforts to share this information, the administration will work to put the tool-kit and successful case studies for tackling absenteeism in the hands of community leaders through its community-led initiatives.
- *First-Ever Data on Absenteeism in the Civil Rights Data Collection*. In spring 2016, ED will release the 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), including the first-ever school-level data on all students across the nation who missed at least 15 days of school for any reason, which translates into approximately 8.5 percent of a typical school year. The CRDC will shed new light on the scope of the chronic absenteeism problem including where it is most prevalent and whom it most affects, and further catalyze efforts to engage students who are chronically absent.
- *Nationwide Summit in Spring 2016 Following the Release of New Absenteeism Data*. The Administration will sponsor a national, cross-sector summit to combat chronic absenteeism in spring 2016 for states, school districts, and communities that are committed to implementing proven strategies including implementing early warning prevention and identification systems and cross-sector interventions and supports that connect students to meaningful education, health, housing, juvenile justice, and other critical services.
- *New Technical Assistance for States and Local School Districts to Implement Early Warning Systems*. Beginning in January 2016, ED will provide technical assistance to states and local school districts that are interested in implementing or enhancing early warning indicator systems that use student-level data—including absenteeism data—to identify and match appropriate interventions and supports for at-risk students, particularly those who are, or are at-risk of becoming, chronically absent from school. This new technical assistance will be freely available to all States and local school districts across the country.

## Public-Private Partnerships to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism

- *Public Awareness Campaign*. To heighten awareness about this problem, the Ad Council, and the Education Department are spearheading a public-private partnership to launch a communications campaign to help eliminate chronic absenteeism and drive higher student achievement in and graduation from our nation's

public schools. This public awareness campaign will help educate parents and communities about the devastating impact of chronic absenteeism on academic and life outcomes. The campaign will target public areas as well as social media channels. It will also include the creation of a digital platform—a microsite—that includes materials and resources to combat this problem.

- *Mentoring as a Solution to Chronic Absenteeism.* The Education Department, the United Way, Johns Hopkins University and MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership will sponsor a public-private initiative that will include the nation's first-ever effort to bring a data-driven, evidence-based mentoring model to scale targeting chronically absent students in high-need communities. This week, MENTOR will send out a message from Secretary Duncan to mentoring programs nationwide elevating the challenge of absenteeism and asking that the programs and their mentors make encouragement of strong school attendance a focal point. MENTOR will also provide guidance around ways to implement and integrate mentoring to curb chronic absenteeism and give guidance to mentors to help be part of the solution.
- *Virtual Summit to Help States and Communities to Identify and Support Chronically Absent Students.* The Education Department is partnering with Attendance Works, the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, and United Way to host **Every Student, Every Day: A Virtual Summit on Addressing and Eliminating Chronic Absence**, a virtual summit on November 12, 2015 to provide school districts and communities with strategies to improve school attendance, eliminate chronic absenteeism, and close achievement gaps, especially among youth who are, or are at-risk of becoming, chronically absent from school. [Registration opens today](#) to states, communities, and schools interested in combatting this problem.

For more information about *Every Day Every Child*, including video messages from Secretary Duncan on the national chronic absenteeism problem in both English and Spanish, go to <http://ed.gov/chronicabsenteeism>

**Tags:** Press Releases