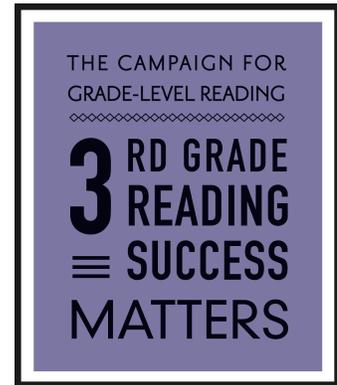# Business Partnerships for Improving Student Attendance

The Problem: Tens of thousands of kindergarten and first grade students miss a month of school every year, and that can add up to half a year of missed instruction before they finish third grade. Not surprisingly, these children are more likely to struggle with reading, repeat a grade and develop bad attendance habits, research shows. By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes an early warning sign that a student will drop out of high school. Across the country, chronically absent students miss more than 135 million days of school every year. The numbers are particularly high among children in low-income families and in communities of concentrated poverty.

Why student attendance matters to business leaders:

Missing too much instructional time has significant, negative and lasting consequences beyond the obvious effects on student performance.

- **The soft skills challenge:** Regular attendance is the precursor to the "soft skills" that employers will continue to expect and require. Students who don't develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years will find it difficult to develop them as adults.
- **The productivity challenge:** Children who are sick miss school. And their parents miss work. Employers have a real stake in reducing the numbers of days that children stay home due to preventable illnesses.

This is a problem we can solve. We can build a strong culture of attendance in every community. We can ensure that school districts are tracking the right data to identify the students and schools that are headed off track. And we can address the challenges that may be keeping many students from getting to school: illness, transportation problems, housing instability and concerns for community safety. Business leaders can work with schools, parents and communities to accomplish all these.

How business leaders can make a difference:

Marshal the data
- Work with superintendents to ensure the district is tracking chronic absence numbers—how many total absences for each student—not just daily averages of how many students showed up.
- Encourage districts to evaluate each school, grade and neighborhood. Offer tech support, if needed.
- Urge your superintendents to sign up for the Make Every Day Count Call to Action.

Nurture a culture of attendance
- Work with a local school to provide incentives for good or improved attendance, such as gift certificates, healthy snacks or backpacks.
- Host a community forum to discuss the need for good attendance and build support for community solutions.
- Talk to other business leaders about the role attendance plays in improving achievement and school success.
- Educate your own employees about the importance of good school attendance.

Address barriers to good attendance
- Work with community members to start a "Walking School Bus" or other ways to create safer routes to school.
- Support programs that address the health barriers to good attendance, particularly asthma and dental care.
- Encourage employees to volunteer as mentors for students who are missing too much school.

For more information, go to Attendance Works at www.attendanceworks.org.