



**Lowell Public School District  
Middlesex District Attorney's Office  
Lowell Police Department**

**City of Lowell  
Attendance Awareness Campaign**

**Press Release - For Immediate Release**

The Lowell Public School District has joined together with the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, the Lowell Police Department and partners of the Lowell Youth Development Collaborative to develop a citywide universal attendance initiative aimed to improve attendance throughout the City of Lowell. This partnership expands the school district's existing collaboration with the Lowell Juvenile Court, the Department of Children and Families and NFI Family Resource Center to reach out to students with chronic absences and support their families. These outreach efforts have proven successful in decreasing absences for high risk students over the course of the past three years. These efforts combined with a Citywide Attendance Campaign will ensure that this important message educates all members of the Lowell community about the importance of daily attendance.

Launching a campaign emphasizing the importance of school attendance in our community is the first step in raising public awareness that every day counts. The chronic absenteeism awareness campaign entitled, *Be in School, Be on Track: Attendance Matters!* is a collaborative effort designed to provide the sense of urgency needed to drive change.

This strategy of convening a cross-sector of community leaders is critical because the causes of chronic absenteeism are so complex and varied that no school district can tackle it alone. These complex causes include but are not limited to homelessness, housing and transportation challenges, familial responsibilities, fear of gangs, bullying, medical challenges and parents or students who do not understand the importance of attendance or the ramifications of chronic absences on the overall success of students.

As reported by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Lowell Public Schools' chronic absence rate for the 2014-2015 school year was 16.9%. While it was a marked decrease than in previous years thanks to community partnerships and a districtwide commitment to tracking attendance, it still means that over 2300 students were chronically absent.

Students who are chronically absent miss 10% or more of school regardless of whether or not the absence is validly excused. That means a student who misses 18 days in a school year or has as little as 2 absences each month is considered chronically absent. Every day a student misses class is a lost learning opportunity. Missed opportunities hold our youth back, putting them and our community at risk for lifelong challenges. According to research from Attendance Works, chronic absenteeism and its effects can be reversed with the help of awareness campaigns, incentive programs and mentors.

For the first time, community leaders in the City of Lowell will play a more active role in sending a clear message about the importance of school attendance and the adverse impact of missing school. This year's campaign commenced during the Summer National Night Out hosted by the Lowell Police Department's Chief of Police and will continue annually with this event as a kick-off each year to start school. The launching of this campaign will initially provide citywide banners, attendance flyers, attendance pledges and student wristbands through the generous support of the Middlesex District Attorney's Office and the Lowell Police Department.

The *Be in School, Be on Track: Attendance Matters!* Campaign, will be available for all students in the City of Lowell as a part of a Tier I Intervention, beginning in August 2016. The goals of the program are to:

- Educate Lowell students and their families about the importance of being in school every day.
- Educate the public on the long-term impact of chronic absenteeism on students, families and the community at large.
- Team up with area businesses (phase 2) who will voluntarily display a decal on their windows indicating that:
  - They too value student attendance.
  - They will offer incentives to students and families of students who have less than 10% (4 days or less) of absences for that quarter.

- Educate the medical community on the issue of chronic absenteeism and offer suggestions towards positive attendance messaging, scheduling medical visits during non-school hours and deterring unwarranted medical visits and notes.
- Identify and offer school and community-based incentives.
- Post banners/billboards throughout Lowell Public Schools and City of Lowell with positive attendance messaging.
- Sponsor school-wide challenges including poster contests, public service announcements and other attendance-related contests.

This valuable partnership sends a clear message to all constituents across the City of Lowell that together, we are committed to taking proactive positive steps to ensure that all students and their families understand the importance of being in school every day. For more information about how you can get involved in the Citywide Attendance Campaign, please contact the Student Support Services Office of the Lowell Public Schools.

The campaign was announced today during Lowell Public Schools' Annual Summer Leadership Academy for Administrators. More than 100 leaders from across the district gathered to celebrate and kick-off the *Be in School, Be on Track: Attendance Matters!* Campaign with our partners who provided these statements about the citywide initiative:

*"I am proud to be part of this partnership to address truancy in the Lowell Public Schools," said District Attorney Ryan. "In law enforcement, we often see chronic tardiness, absenteeism and other struggles at school as a potential predictor of future involvement in the criminal justice system. For this reason it is critical to come together across the community to keep kids in school and enable them to meet their full potential."*

*"Lowell Police are very happy to support the important work of the Lowell Public Schools. This partnership is a wonderful example of our City working together," said Police Chief Taylor.*

*"Lowell Public School educators are grateful for this valuable partnership that sends a clear message that our community is committed to taking proactive steps that include the key ingredients to impact change: positive messaging, actionable steps to build capacity and shared accountability to ensure that all students and their families understand the importance of being in school, staying on track and that attendance matters," said Assistant Superintendent Durkin."*