

Key Areas for Action

THE MAYORS' ACTION CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Opportunities to Learn and Grow

We know that opportunities to learn and grow must begin in the earliest years of life, with parent education and support as well as community-wide initiatives that emphasize early literacy. Home visiting programs, supports for informal caregivers (family, friends, and neighbors), mayor's book clubs and universal access to preschool for three- and four-year-olds all make it more likely that young children will enter school ready to learn and succeed.

It has been demonstrated that afterschool programs and other enrichment opportunities during out-of-school time play critical roles in helping children and youth continue to learn, grow, and stay out of trouble. Quality standards for afterschool programs, expanded access to out-of-school time offerings in underserved neighborhoods, and city partnerships with libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions can all support academic achievement as well as broader youth development and public safety goals.

Finally, it is clear that high school completion and postsecondary training and education are essential to long-term success in today's rapidly changing labor market and global economy. Bold new scholarship programs, dropout prevention and recovery initiatives, and additional postsecondary access and completion efforts can send powerful messages to all youth that two- and four-year colleges as well as vocational and technical institutions are within their reach and help ensure that less advantaged youth succeed in these settings.

A Safe Neighborhood to Call Home

We all know that our young people cannot learn and grow unless they feel safe and are protected from violence in their schools and neighborhoods. Cities can combat youth violence effectively by treating it as a public health problem and ensuring a focus on four key steps: connecting every young person with a trusted and caring adult; intervening at the first sign that youth are at risk of violence; restoring young people who have gone down the wrong path; and involving youth and community leaders in public education campaigns to unlearn the culture of violence.

Comprehensive approaches within cities that combine prevention, intervention, and enforcement strategies can dramatically reduce youth violence and offer positive alternatives to crime or gang affiliation. For example, municipal leaders can work with school and community partners to establish truancy and curfew centers that engage parents and link young people to services they need to stay in school. Intensive, community-based services can help youth already caught up in the juvenile justice system. Mayors and law enforcement officials can work together to restrict access to guns, and city leaders can also involve young people as partners in helping to reduce youth violence and improve their communities.

A Healthy Lifestyle and Environment

We recognize our responsibility to promote health and wellness so that our children can reach their full potential. Transportation and land use policies that promote walking and biking as well as neighborhood park and playground development can encourage physical activity. City parks and recreation departments can also play a major role in encouraging physical fitness and active lifestyles. Mayors and other city leaders can also enhance families' access to healthy foods by working with community groups to enroll eligible families in the federal food stamp and child nutrition programs, attract supermarkets to underserved neighborhoods, and promote farmers' markets and community gardens.

City-school partnerships offer particularly promising ways to promote healthy lifestyles and environments, including through the development of community wellness plans. By collaborating with school districts, municipal leaders can help educate young people about healthy food choices and improve their eating habits. Removing snack foods and soft drinks from schools, offering more nutritious food choices in school cafeterias, and ensuring that young people have an opportunity to be physically active during the school day are some of the steps that city and school leaders can take when working together.

A Financially Fit Family in Which to Thrive

We know that our children and youth are far less likely to learn and grow up to be healthy and productive citizens if their families lack the financial means to meet their basic needs. Municipal leaders are uniquely positioned to mount community-wide efforts that empower families and bolster their chances of achieving long-term economic success. Asset-building strategies, outreach and public education campaigns, and workforce development programs all represent valuable approaches to assist struggling parents and their families.

City-led initiatives to ensure that low-income families receive the federal Earned Income Tax Credit and other key public benefits can boost their incomes while bringing more federal and state funds into local economies. Mayors and other city leaders can also help families avoid foreclosure and predatory lenders, become more savvy consumers of financial services, and gain access to low-cost bank accounts and mainstream financial services. Finally, cities can develop and support transitional jobs, housing, and shelter programs and other creative strategies to help hard-to-employ residents enter or regain their footing in the labor market.



Statement of Principles and Call to Action



THE MAYORS' ACTION CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Supported by the National League of Cities through its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Statement of Principles

THE MAYORS' ACTION CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



Whereas: Strong cities are built on a foundation of strong families and empowered neighborhoods that support every child; and

Whereas: The steps we take to strengthen families and improve outcomes for children and youth are among the most important investments we make in the health and vibrancy of our communities; and

Whereas: The costs of not investing in children, youth, and families are enormous, reflected in individual lives, municipal budgets, and prospects for cities' economic growth and revitalization; and

Whereas: Mayors and other city leaders witness every day the personal tragedies and strains that occur when children, youth, families, and communities fail; and

Whereas: The challenges facing our nation's cities have been exacerbated by economic instability and inadequate federal and state responses to the needs of struggling families and children at risk; and

Whereas: A new Administration and Congress, along with new governors and legislative leaders in a number of states, have the opportunity to join cities in charting a new course and setting priorities that respond to these challenges and needs; and

Whereas: Municipal governments have become centers of leadership and innovation in a host of key areas, including school readiness, afterschool programming, access to postsecondary training and education, family and youth violence prevention, community wellness, and family economic success; and

Whereas: Mayors are in a unique position, based on our proximity to these issues and track record of innovation, to take action and speak with one collective voice on behalf of the children, youth, and families in our communities;

Now, therefore, we resolve to build upon the progress we have already made in our cities and commit ourselves to establish at least one bold, measurable, locally-defined goal in each of the following areas to ensure that every child has, at a minimum:

◆ Opportunities to Learn and Grow

Key areas for action include: Parent education and support; early literacy and preschool programs; afterschool programs and other enrichment activities during out-of-school time; dropout prevention and recovery initiatives; scholarship programs and other postsecondary access and completion efforts.

Examples of local targets to consider: Number or proportion of children attending prekindergarten or afterschool programs; high school graduation rates; number of scholarships provided for postsecondary education and training; and postsecondary enrollment and completion rates.

◆ A Safe Neighborhood to Call Home

Key areas for action include: Mentoring and other initiatives that connect young people to trusted and caring adults; early intervention at the first sign that youth are at risk of violence; juvenile reentry and rehabilitation efforts that restore young people who have gone down the wrong path; and public education campaigns that involve a broad range of youth and community leaders to unlearn the culture of violence.

Examples of local targets to consider: Number of children and youth with adult mentors; number of successful truancy interventions; youth homicide rates; juvenile and neighborhood crime rates; number of youth leadership opportunities and community service projects; and number of juvenile offenders participating in rehabilitation or reentry programs.

◆ A Healthy Lifestyle and Environment

Key areas for action include: Transportation and land use policies that encourage biking and walking; neighborhood park and playground development; sports and recreation programs; food stamp, school lunch and school breakfast outreach campaigns; incentives for supermarkets and farmers' markets to open in low-income neighborhoods; collaborations with schools to educate youth about healthy food choices and expand access to nutritious foods; and community-wide fitness and wellness campaigns.

Examples of local targets to consider: Miles of bike routes and walking paths; number of neighborhood parks and playgrounds; proportion of eligible families enrolled in the federal food stamp and child nutrition programs; number of supermarkets or farmers' markets in low-income neighborhoods; childhood obesity rates; levels of physical activity among children and youth; and removal of snack foods and unhealthy food choices from schools.

◆ A Financially Fit Family in Which to Thrive

Key areas for action include: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and other benefit outreach campaigns targeting low-income working families; efforts to open low-cost checking or savings accounts for "unbanked" residents; financial literacy, education, and coaching programs; measures to curb predatory lending and avoid foreclosures; homeownership incentives and counseling; transitional employment initiatives for parents facing barriers to work; and other strategies to help families build financial assets.

Examples of local targets to consider: Number of eligible families claiming the EITC and other federal or state benefits; proportion or number of families with access to mainstream financial services; poverty rates; foreclosure rates; number of check-cashing operations and predatory lenders in low-income neighborhoods; and number of transitional jobs available to hard-to-employ residents.

We further resolve to:

- ◆ Set timetables for local action and evaluation and report on progress within our respective cities;
- ◆ Collaborate with school district, county, state, law enforcement, nonprofit, business, faith-based, neighborhood, and other community leaders to take concrete steps toward achieving our individual goals;
- ◆ Use our collective voices to urge the Administration, Congress, state policymakers, and school districts to join us as full partners in efforts to identify and replicate effective strategies and interventions, including through support for new federal action to:
 - ❖ fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Center program to expand afterschool programs and Pell Grants to increase access to postsecondary education and training;
 - ❖ provide flexible funding to support implementation of comprehensive youth violence prevention plans developed by local communities and based on proven public health models;
 - ❖ ensure universal access to health care, including preventive services that promote health and wellness, for all Americans; and
 - ❖ expand and modernize the Earned Income Tax Credit while increasing support for local outreach campaigns that seek to ensure that it is claimed by all eligible individuals and families;
- ◆ Work with the National League of Cities, its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors to share best practices and promising approaches with other cities; and
- ◆ Invite other mayors to join us in this national call to action by signing on to this Challenge.