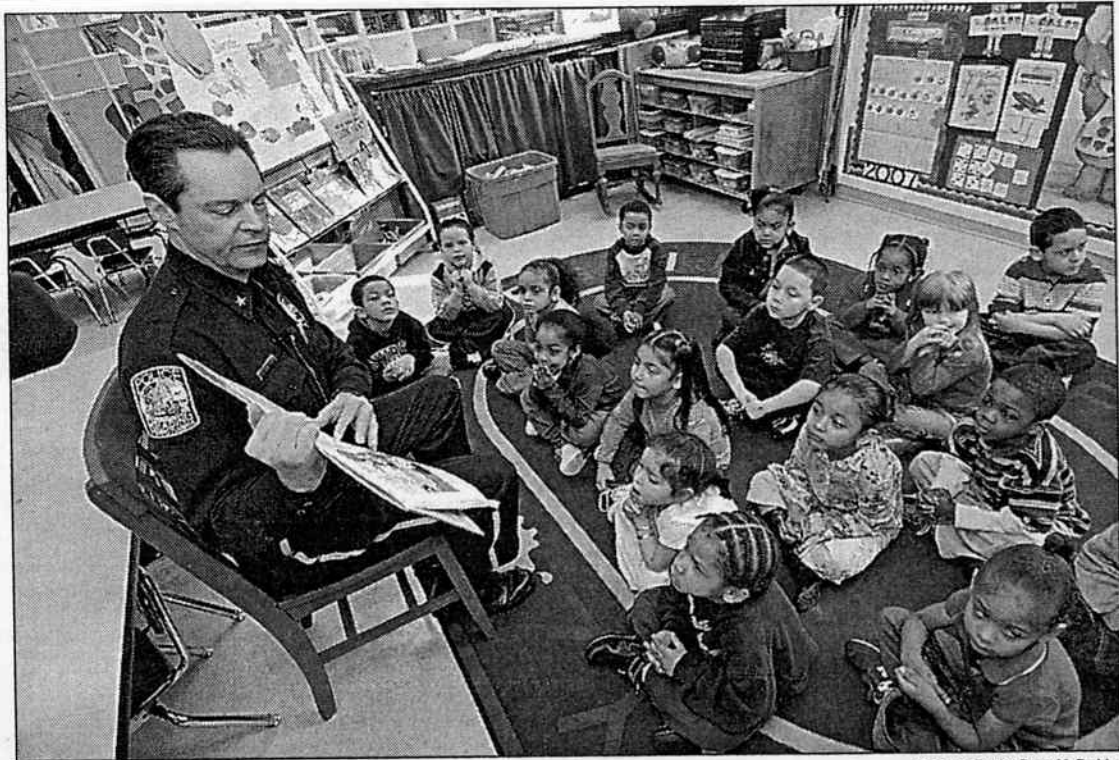


READING EAGLE

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Reading Eagle: Ryan McFadden

Reading Police Chief William M. Heim reads to Sharon L. Hand's pre-kindergarten class Thursday at Lauer's Park Elementary School.

Heim sees pre-K as good place to steer children to right road

The police chief visits Lauer's Park Elementary School as part of a statewide push to give at-risk youngsters the tools they need to be great citizens.

By **Steven Henshaw**
Reading Eagle

Reading Police Chief William M. Heim knows officers spend too much time taking youngsters to City Hall in handcuffs.

That's why Heim invested some of his time Thursday reading to 4- and 5-year-old students in Sharon L. Hand's pre-kindergarten class at Lauer's Park Elementary School.

The visit was part of a campaign by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a bipartisan, statewide anti-crime organization, promoting a \$75 million state initiative to fund pre-K programs across the state.

Bruce R. Clash, director of the organization, said Pennsylvania's law enforcement lead-

ers hope that serious consideration will be given to investing in at-risk children to help eliminate the next generation of criminals.

The Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts initiative is part of Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed 2007-08 budget. It would provide funding through competitive grants for more than 11,000 children to attend quality pre-K programs in schools, Head Start centers, child care centers and nursery schools in the next year.

Heim is among 200 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and domestic violence survivors who are members of the coalition.

He said the investment will pay dividends in the end.

"The message is really important — that kids get pre-K so

when they grow up they have all the tools they need to fight delinquency, drugs and gangs and be great citizens," Heim said.

The chief's visit was a big hit with the children.

"You're the police chief?" asked Aajaylah Terrell, 5, after their teacher introduced Heim.

The chief read the illustrated book "Officer Buckle and Gloria."

The Reading School District is among a minority of school districts in Pennsylvania that provide pre-K programs, Clash said.

A state grant funds the program in all city elementary schools, but because classroom space is limited, there's a waiting list of about 280 students for the program, said Deborah Kopetsky, director of elementary education.

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