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## **Molding Minds: Sheriff talks crime prevention, lauds pre-kindergarten program**

BELLEFONTE — Centre County Sheriff Denny Nau visited a pre-kindergarten class Wednesday to raise awareness of the crime prevention benefits of early education.

Sheriff Nau is a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Pennsylvania, a bipartisan, anti-crime organization of over 200 sheriffs, police chiefs, district attorneys, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors statewide.

The organization's members believe programs like pre-kindergarten are proven to keep kids from ever becoming criminals are among the most powerful weapons against crime and violence.

Nau toured Bellefonte Elementary School and read to the children. He also commended the district for its stellar pre-kindergarten program. The organization's state director, Bruce Clash, joined Sheriff Nau.

"In the fight against increasing crime in many Pennsylvania communities, there is no substitute for tough law enforcement; however, experience tells us that we will never arrest and imprison our way out of the crime problem," Nau said.

"Making sure at-risk children have access to quality pre-kindergarten programs is one of the most important steps we can take to cut future crime by keeping kids from becoming criminals. I am proud that the Bellefonte Area School District has made this commitment to crime prevention and school readiness," Nau said.

Yet, inadequate funding denies thousands of Pennsylvania's children in our most at-risk communities access to quality pre-kindergarten programs, leaving them more likely to engage in future criminal activity, he said.

In Pennsylvania, nearly 90,000 3- and 4-year-olds are expected to participate in a quality early childhood program in 2006-07, 37,000 more children than were served in 2002-03. This progress was the result of expanding such initiatives as the Accountability Block Grant program and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance program. Impressive as these gains are, this is still only 31 percent of Pennsylvania's 3- and 4-year-olds.

"Quality pre-kindergarten helps shape children's intellect and emotions, and even their ability to feel concern for others," said Clash. "As state policy makers debate funding priorities for the 2007-08 state budget, Pennsylvania's law enforcement leaders hope that serious consideration will be given to implementing a comprehensive anti-crime plan for the Commonwealth that not only allocates adequate resources to law enforcement today, but also invests in at-risk children to help eliminate the next generation of criminals."

The Pennsylvania General Assembly is currently considering the proposed 2007-08 budget, which includes a new Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts initiative. This initiative would allocate \$75 million in competitive grants to provide funding for more than 11,000 3- and 4-year olds to attend quality pre-kindergarten programs in schools, Head Start centers, child care centers, and nursery schools in the 2007-08 school year.

Research analyzed by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids shows at-risk kids who attend quality pre-kindergarten programs are dramatically less likely to commit future crime than those who did not participate.

A landmark study of the High/Scope Perry Preschool program randomly assigned at-risk kids to attend a high-quality preschool program similar to Head Start. By the age of 40, the grown-up children who did not attend the preschool were four times more likely to have been arrested for drug felonies and nearly twice as likely to be arrested for multiple violent crimes compared to similar kids who attended the program. The Perry Preschool study also found that the program cut crime, welfare, remedial education and other costs so much that it saved taxpayers more than \$17 for every \$1 invested, including more than \$11 in crime savings.

Chicago's government-funded Child-Parent Centers found that at-risk kids left out of the program were 70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime before their 18th birthday compared to similar kids who participated in the program. This program will have prevented an estimated 33,000 crimes by the time all the participants reach the age of 18.

The Bellefonte Area School District's pre-kindergarten program currently serves 17 children and their families through half-day morning services for preschoolers. The district is one of only 75 of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts to offer quality pre-kindergarten.

If approved by the legislature, new Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts funding could allow Bellefonte Elementary and its Pre-K Counts partners to add up to 5 additional pre-kindergarten classes to further meet the demand for these services. Current funding for the district's pre-kindergarten program comes from Head Start Supplemental Assistance funds, as well as a public-private venture also called Pre K Counts.

The current Pre K Counts has created a community leadership network in Centre County and in 30 other communities to increase and sustain quality pre-kindergarten services to children across the state. Among its funders are the William Penn Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, The Grable Foundation, and the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

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