

Letter to Editor: Pre-K initiative worthy of communities' support

Shamokin News Item

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To the editor: During the 2005-2006 school year, Line Mountain School District provided quality pre-kindergarten services to its community using state education Accountability Block Grant funding.

Unfortunately, due to local economics, the district had to disband its pre-kindergarten program for the 2006-2007 school year. This situation is deeply unfortunate for the 72 students enrolled, their parents and their teachers. It is also a concern for myself and for Northumberland County law enforcement.

In the fight against increasing violent crime, there is no substitute for tough law enforcement, smart deployment of resources and putting dangerous criminals behind bars. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that we will never arrest and imprison our way out of the crime problem. Information compiled by "Fight Crime Invest in Kids" show that a \$1,000 investment in quality pre-K returns more than \$19,000 in 20 years, while a stock market investment returns less than \$4,000. Also, a 35-year study done by the Perry Preschool Program found that these programs 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). Any comprehensive plan to beat back crime must include long-term solutions, like quality pre-kindergarten that are proven to help cut the pipeline that funnels young people into lives of crime and violence.

Studies have shown that at-risk children who did not attend quality pre-K were five times more likely to be chronic lawbreakers when they grow up than the children who attended.

Fortunately, included in the state budget currently being considered by the General Assembly is the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts initiative, which would allocate a \$75 million investment to create half- and full-day pre-school programs in school districts, Head Start, child care centers and nursery schools across the state, serving as many as 11,000 children 3 and 4 years of age. If authorized, funding from this initiative could be utilized by Line Mountain School District, along with other community partners, to help expand the crime prevention impact of quality pre-kindergarten in the communities of Northumberland County.

Kids from pre-K programs have an advantage that begins early and stays with them for the rest of their lives, which ultimately makes our communities safer and more secure. The sooner we start, the sooner we will realize the benefits. The Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts initiative is worth our support.

Chad A. Reiner
Northumberland County Sheriff