

Scranton Police Chief Hails Pre-kindergarten as Crime Prevention Tool; Urges Support of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Initiative

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SCRANTON, April 17—Scranton Police Chief David Elliott visited a pre-kindergarten class today to raise awareness of the crime prevention benefits of quality pre-k. He also urged legislative support for the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts initiative.

“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,” Elliott 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.”

Chief Elliott is a member of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS PENNSYLVANIA, a bipartisan, anti-crime organization of over 225 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors statewide. The organization’s state director, Bruce Clash, joined Chief Elliott for the visit.

Elliott toured William Prescott School and read to the children. He praised the district’s stellar program but said inadequate funding denies thousands of Pennsylvania’s children in the most at-risk communities access to quality pre-k programs.

“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 2007-2008 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 2007-2008 Executive 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 2007-2008 school year. As part of this initiative, Lackawanna County early childhood education providers could receive up to \$4 million in new state funding to make quality enhancements for 500 additional students.

In Pennsylvania, nearly 90,000 3- and 4-year-olds are expected to participate in a quality early childhood program in 2006-2007, 37,000 more children than were served in 2002-2003. 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% of Pennsylvania’s 3- and 4-year-olds.

Research analyzed by FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS PENNSYLVANIA shows that 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 Scranton School District's pre-kindergarten program currently serves 485 children and their families through half-day morning and afternoon services for preschoolers. The District is one of only 75 of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts to offer quality pre-kindergarten. Current funding for the District's pre-kindergarten program comes from federal Title 1 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 Lackawanna County and in 30 other communities to increase and sustain quality pre-kindergarten services to children across the state. Currently in Lackawanna County, this venture has benefited over 500 children through quality improvements to early childhood education in schools; Head Start centers and private child care centers. Among its funders are the William Penn Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, The Grable Foundation, and the Richard King Mellon Foundation.