

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY EDUCATION

Lawmakers, top cops go to preschool

By Roland Stoy

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COLDWATER — Children need to be made ready for life, and it needs to begin at the beginning.

K.P. Pelleran, state director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and others, spoke to this at the Fremont School Early Education Center on Monday.

Local Great Start Collaborative Director Amy Galliers, parent liaison Sheila Taylor, state Sen. Bruce Caswell, R-Pittsford, state Rep.

Ken Kurtz, R-Coldwater, Coldwater Public Safety Director Brett Pehrson, Branch County Sheriff Warren Canon, Undersheriff Keith Eichler, and Jail Administrator Fred Blankenship talked about the importance of early education before joining children at the center

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Above, from left, Pehrson, Blankenship, Canon, Caswell, Kurtz and Eichler at the reading session with the children. Below, from left, Galliers, Taylor and Pelleran before the meeting. ROLAND STOY PHOTOS



GREAT START

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to read to them.

There are 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, attorneys general and others involved in Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, with the mantra "Pay now or pay much more later."

While early education faces cuts from Congress, law enforcement leaders at the meeting cited statistics that have shown investment in these programs significantly cut the greater cost of crime and incarceration later.

Galliers, who spoke of many children not in licensed day care centers who could be in early education programs, said she was delighted to welcome those who attended.

As the roundtable began, Canon said "One of the things we see out there is the dropout rate from high schools is the same, 1-5 percent, as the incarceration rate. It goes hand in hand. We know in the future, if they drop out, they'll be incarcerated."

With Michigan spending nearly \$2 billion on corrections in 2010, one study showed those who did not participate in early education were five times more likely to be chronic offenders by age 2-7, and were 8-6 percent more likely to be in jail or prison by age 4-0.

Eichler spoke of trying to talk with young people about staying in school, Blankenship spoke to the high number of young offenders in jail, and Pehrson shared statistics showing children with pre school experience less likely to repeat grades.

He also spoke to the cycle of successive generations doing jail time.

"We need to get an early start on these kids," he said.

"We need to get these kids ready for life," said Pelleran.

Said Kurtz, "Sometimes it's so easy to be reactive. We want to save the kids, we want to save the homes. We want to be proactive. This is being proactive."

"I think this discussion is important, and needs to be continued," said Caswell. "I hope to see good ideas rise to

the top, with the dollars we have to spend.”

Galliers had shared that 95 percent of brain development takes place before age 5, and some of those with developing brains gathered for the reading of “Officer Buckles and Gloria” as Caswell and Kurtz read and law enforcement held the pages open so the children could see the illustrations.

In the book was humor and words of wisdom for young ones, such as “Beware of swivel chairs,” “Don’t leave a tack where you might sit on it,” and the final rule, number 1-01, “Always stick with your buddies.”



The meeting before the reading session, clockwise from left, Pelleran, Blankenship, Caswell, Kurtz, Pehrson, Eichler, Canon, Galliers and Taylor. ROLAND STOY PHOTO