

Testimony

Governor's Education Reform Commission Hearing
Chief Tim Currier, Massena Police Department
Monday, September 24, 2012
Mohawk Valley Community College

Chairman Parsons and other distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Tim Currier and I am the Chief of Police in Massena, New York. You are probably wondering what in the heck a Police Chief is doing testifying at a hearing on education reform! Simply put, Success in school is essential to the crime prevention equation and we are currently losing this battle.

Seventy percent of people in prisons failed to graduate from high school. This large number is inexcusable and it is setting far too many of our children on paths that lead not to success but to jail.

The members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK know that school success is central to life success and in order to win the fight against crime, we must prevent kids from becoming criminals in the first place. We believe in tough law enforcement - but the research and our first-hand experience has shown us that strict law enforcement combined with proven prevention programs is the best way to make our communities safer.

Research shows that high school dropouts are three-and-a-half times more likely than graduates to be arrested and eight times more likely to be incarcerated. In New York, 31 percent of students fail to graduate on schedule. Even worse, this number is nearly 50 percent in the major cities.

In my community, our dropout rate is around 19%. We know this is contributing to an increasing crime rate and burden on an already stretched thin criminal justice community.

Columbia University researcher Henry Levin conducted an extensive search of programs impacting graduation and “found very few interventions that significantly increased high school graduation rates on the basis of rigorous and systematic evaluation.” 2 of the 5 programs his study found to be effective is High-quality pre-k programs, which can increase graduation rates by **10 percentage** points or more.

In New York this means that we could prevent 180 murders and 100 aggravated assaults each year. We would save approximately \$913 million dollars every year, including almost \$573 million in reduced crime costs alone. That’s why law enforcement strongly supported the Governor’s recent \$384 million allocation for pre-k. This is a smart crime prevention investment and it is a smart taxpayer dollar investment.

But here is the catch – investment in pre-k is *only* a smart investment if we are investing in *high-quality* programs. That is why I am here today to ask you to include two recommendations in your final report on how to transform New York’s schools. Our **first** recommendation is that high-quality pre-school be made universally available to all New York pre-schoolers.

The **second** recommendation we ask is that QUALITYstarsNY be implemented statewide. QUALITYstarsNY is a quality rating improvement system that would ensure that we are investing our state resources in high-quality programs as it would set clear quality standards for early education programs and create a roadmap for program improvement. Besides providing the resources and technical assistance needed to improve programs, it would also give parents reliable information on how to choose the best program for their child.

If we are to transform our schools, as the Governor is ambitiously proposing, we need to begin doing so long before children walk through the door to kindergarten and first grade.

As numerous studies and decades of research point out, children who attend high-quality early education are much more likely to succeed in school and less likely to commit crimes than similar children who do not have access to these programs. Far too often, today's dropouts are tomorrow's criminals. The research is extensive and is covered in our "Quality Matters" report and additional written testimony I am leaving with you today.

Please make sure that access to high-quality pre-school for all New York Children is included in your final report as the foundational piece of any education reform. If our intention is to help kids earn diplomas instead of rap sheets, high-quality pre-school is an essential investment that is necessary to achieving this goal. It is good for kids and it is good for public safety.