

Schools chief pushes preschool investment

More spending would yield big benefits, he says

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State preschool programs over the past 25 years are saving the state \$1 billion this year in crime and education costs, with increased productivity, according to a new study announced by state school Superintendent Mike

Flanagan and early childhood development advocates.

Flanagan said Monday the study shows the state should spend much more than it does getting prekindergarten children ready for school, which would produce more far reaching benefits.

"In a K-12 system, we spend \$1 billion a grade, but we don't spend anywhere close to that where it would get the biggest bang for the buck" which is preschool programs, Flanagan said.

Flanagan said the state and school districts should

"In a K-12 system, we spend \$1 billion a grade, but we don't spend anywhere close to that" for preschool programs.

Mike Flanagan
state school superintendent

consider reducing the cost of school employee benefits and using the savings to expand preschool programs.

Among the savings cited in the study by Wilder Research of St. Paul, Minn., of the effects of preschool pro-

grams for Michigan at-risk children:

▶ A \$220 million savings to public schools because fewer students repeat grades and there is less need for special education instruction.

▶ \$584 million less for

programs for juvenile corrections, child abuse, welfare and unemployment, and more work productivity when the children enter the work force.

▶ \$347 million less in social costs as a result of less crime and substance abuse, and more income for their parents.

About 47,000 children under age 6 are enrolled in either the state-funded Great Start Readiness program or the federally funded Head Start Program.

▶ The state allocated

\$87 million this fiscal year for the Great Start program. The Wilder study found that another 35,000 children could qualify if funding was available.

"Cutting a dollar in early childhood education is not going to save money, it will cost you in the future," said Paul Anton, who oversaw the Wilder Research study.

The study was commissioned by the Early Childhood Investment Corp., a Lansing-based nonprofit agency that coordinates state preschool programs.