

The Pueblo Chieftain

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Top cops tout value of early education

At-risk children who lack early education are more likely to commit violent crimes, one study shows.

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THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN



Jim Billings



Kirk Taylor

The best way to combat crime is providing youths with books and learning programs, Pueblo's law enforcement community said Wednesday.

"That's the best way to keep more kids in schools and out of our jails," said Pueblo County Sheriff Kirk Taylor. "We're calling on Representative (John) Salazar (D-Colo.) to help President Obama make good on his promises by championing investments in quality education programs through the appropriations process."

Obama has said he'll devote \$10 billion to youth educational programs in the 2010 budget. Pueblo's Head Start Program would be one of those beneficiaries.

Taylor, Pueblo Police Chief Jim Billings and Colorado Springs Deputy Police Chief Ron Gibson met at Pueblo's Head Start headquarters, 330 Lake Ave., on Wednesday to stump for federal funding for early education programs. The event was sponsored by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national nonprofit organization whose members include more than 5,000 leaders in law enforcement.

"There are pretty compelling statistics out there that show kids stay out of trouble through these education programs," Billings said.

According to the Fight Crime nonprofit, a long-term study was done in child-parent centers in Chicago that showed 70 percent of at-risk children who didn't attend the early education programs were more likely to commit a violent crime by the age of 18.

"They were also significantly more likely to repeat grades, drop out of school and collect welfare," according to a press release issued by the nonprofit.

After Wednesday's press conference, Billings and Taylor read books to the children at Head Start. "That was the best part of my day," Billings said.