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VIDEO: District Attorney Risa Ferman, state Sen. Stewart Greenleaf read to students at Ambler Head Start

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Mattison Avenue Elementary School welcomed some high-profile guests for storytime May 5, as District Attorney Risa Ferman and state Sen. Stewart Greenleaf, R-12, read to students as part of the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids program.

Ferman and Greenleaf visited the Ambler school's Head Start classroom, reading to a group of 18 students.

The pair read Ferman's recently published children's book, "The Mouse Who Went Surfing Alone," in what Ferman remarked was the first time she had read the book to a group of children. While Greenleaf read the story, Ferman showed off the book's illustrations, and the two discussed the book's message of safety with the students.

Ferman then signed two copies of the book, which were given to the classroom.

While the students probably were too young to understand who their visitors were, they were excited nonetheless. The class welcomed Ferman and Greenleaf by singing a song and presented them with a poster thanking them for the visit.

The visit was organized by the Pennsylvania branch of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.

"Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is a organization of 220 Pennsylvania police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys who really advocate for programs that research shows really work to keep at-risk kids from ever getting into trouble in the first place," said Bruce Clash, state director for the

organization. "We know that early childhood education is the foundation of a child's life and that if they get a high-quality start, they're much less likely to turn to crime later on and hence we can save taxpayer dollars and promote successful lives for many of our most at-risk kids."

The classroom Ferman and Greenleaf visited was the Ambler site of the Montgomery County Head Start program.

Head Start is a government-funded program that focuses on "meeting the social, emotional, health and nutritional needs of income-eligible children aged 3 to 5" by providing "a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate early childhood program that enables and empowers families to become their own advocates," according to the program's website.

Before going into the classroom, Ferman and Greenleaf met with representatives from Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and Montgomery County Head Start to discuss the program and the importance of early childhood education.

Both Ferman and Greenleaf noted programs like Head Start are crucial because by reaching children at a young age, they can go a long way toward preventing at-risk youth from committing crimes.

A 2009 Pennsylvania study showed pre-kindergarten programs can reduce the percentage of children who score as being at-risk for problematic social and self-control behavior, according to information from Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. Studies have shown 60 percent of children with "persistent high levels of disruptive, aggressive behaviors" during their early childhood years will show "high levels of antisocial and delinquent behavior" when they grow up.

Both said it is best to invest in early childhood education, rather than have to pay more for corrections programs and prisons.

They each, however, noted the lack of funding currently provided to Head Start and other programs.

"We have to do all we can to make sure the dollars are there to help kids," Ferman said.

"We're getting them at an early age, and that's where we should put the money," Greenleaf said.

Clash said Fight Crime: Invest in Kids organized the visit as Ferman and Greenleaf continue to push for more funding for early childhood programs.

"It's fun for those who are champions of kids to interact with kids who are directly benefiting from tax dollars that we all work so hard to pay but we know we're getting a high return on the back end in terms of less incarceration, less welfare, less other social supports," Clash said.

He noted Ferman is a member of the organization.

"She sees every day the agony that crime leaves in its wake," he said. "And she's equally passionate not only in prosecuting those who need to be prosecuted, who committed wrong and harmed others, but she's equally passionate about making sure that at-risk children don't reach her office or do harm in society in the first place. Her voice is truly a help and a boon to this effort."

Clash also credited Greenleaf with being a champion for early childhood education.

"We wanted the opportunity, as the state budget is being negotiated, to thank our champion Sen. Greenleaf, to help him reinforce what happens in these high-quality early childhood classroom environments and be able to take that back to Harrisburg when he's sitting at the negotiating table, to fight for the preservation of these dollars in the state budget," he said.

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