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Investing In The State's Children

Kids Count data reveal increase in abuse and poverty. Experts say the way to cut the statistics is to properly invest resources.

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Education is instrumental to a child's development but according to the latest Kids Count data, development cannot be limited to the classroom.

"The bad news is we still have 12,000 teens who give birth before they finish high school. This year poverty increased 60 percent," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior associate for the Michigan League of Human Services. "We all care about education but education can't do it by itself. We need to have strong systems that support children and families across the board."

But in dealing with a multi-billion dollar state deficit, allocating resources is not easy.

"I think policy makers have to get creative," said Michele Corey, advocacy director for Michigan's Children. "They have to begin to learn how to leverage other dollars, leverage partnerships so that we can better support education of our kids."

Otto Middle School in Lansing has found resources to help advance part of its education. A health clinic with a nurse practitioner on staff who can diagnose, write prescriptions --- offer full treatment to students without leaving school grounds.

"My friends tell me their schools don't have health centers. I wouldn't know how it would be --- it would be hard," said eighth grader DeMarquise Salaam.

"More and more kids are getting sick and more are having health issues and they would have to go home and miss school and not get the education needed to succeed," said Otto middle school student Anji Kuran.

While the newest statistics show child abuse, neglect and poverty are on the rise, the health clinic and programs that are attentive to all the needs of the student can start to make a difference.

"We need more educated kids at higher levels of education. We can't get there without making the investments," said Zehnder-Merrell.

Some students at Otto Middle say they are beginning to understand the value of good investments.

"Your whole life starts with your education," said eighth grader R.J. Everett. "If you truly don't

get a good education, you can't get a good job to survive."

For more information on the Kids Count data, click the link below.

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http://www.wilx.com/schools/headlines/Investing_In_The_States_Children_115596074.html