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Study shows link between medicaid spending, high school dropouts

July 10, 2013



SALT LAKE CITY — A recent study has discovered a correlation between medicaid spending and high school drop out rates.

A report released in July by the Alliance for Excellent Education analyzed the statistics state by state, and the numbers showed how high school drop out rates affect medicaid expenses in the long run.

The state of Utah alone could save more than 11 million dollars in Medicaid spending if the rate of high school dropouts was decreased by 50 percent.

"If you have a child that is achieving his or her full potential in the educational setting, they will have less of an impact or need, I should say, on other programs that the state provides," said Utah Health Policy Project representative Matt Slonaker.

Utah's Medicaid expenses totaled almost two billion dollars in 2012. Policy experts believe that with a decreased rate of high school dropouts that medical expenses would be lowered, as well as a reduction in crime rates and unemployment.

The Utah Office of Education has successfully raised the graduation rate over the last few years, and representatives said that they have ambitious goals to continue increasing the number of high school graduates.

"In the last five years, Utah's cut dropout rates by 10 percent already, and that's an improvement of about 3,800 students," said Utah State Office of Education representative Mark Peterson.

Education leaders acknowledge that decreasing dropout rates by 50 percent will take time, but the report shows the cost of high school dropouts affects every taxpayer and Utah's economy. Utah's high school graduation rate is currently 78 percent, and the goal is to raise it to 90 percent by 2020.