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Illinois Drop Outs Come at a Cost of \$221,000 per Student

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CHICAGO — Taxpayers lose \$221,000 over the course of a lifetime for each Illinois student who drops out of school, according to a new analysis released Wednesday.

“Taxpayers bear a huge fiscal burden for the dropout problem in Illinois,” said study co-author Joe McLaughlin of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Boston’s Northeastern University.

Dropouts pay lower taxes compared to high school graduates, McLaughlin said. They collect more unemployment, welfare, food stamps, rent subsidies and other government support. They go to prison at higher rates.

The researchers used U.S. Census Bureau and Illinois data to calculate the net fiscal effect of dropping out.

The analysis was released in support of a plan to triple the number of dropouts re-enrolled annually in Illinois. The plan, submitted to the Legislature in January, calls for more money for programs tailored to dropouts.

Phased in over five years, the plan would cost \$31 million in its first year and \$166 million in its fifth year. Its goal would be to graduate 11,000 former dropouts by its fifth year.

“The program makes a lot of sense for the kids and for the taxpayers,” said task force member Jack Wuest, executive director of Chicago’s Alternative Schools Network, a non-profit organization. “By the fifth year, it should be paying for itself.”