

## Dropouts cost \$169 million

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The tens of thousands of high school dropouts statewide cost North Carolina at least \$169 million a year in taxes and public spending, a study released yesterday says.

A group that's attempting to persuade lawmakers to support a school voucher program released the study. They say a voucher program would both reduce dropouts and save money. According to the Department of Public Instruction, two thirds of North Carolina ninth-graders earn a high school diploma within four years. The total cost for every dropout in North Carolina is \$4,437 annually. Dropouts also generate \$712 million less in taxes and fees annually because they pay fewer taxes than those with higher incomes. Additionally, \$155 million is generated in Medicaid spending because dropouts disproportionately use the government health care program, according to the report.

Supporters of a voucher-style program hope that by using taxpayer dollars to allow parents to send an additional 53,754 children to private schools, public costs would be reduced by \$24 million annually. Those in opposition say that such a system would take away funds from public schools and put them in private schools. Supporters say students are more successful in a private school setting.

State superintendent June Atkinson said private schools usually can't offer the career and technical courses, however, that lead many students to think twice before dropping out.