

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

“It’s About Our Children”

Introduction

Everyone recognizes that the health, safety, education, and development of our children are critical to America’s future growth and prosperity. A recent Urban Institute study has shown that the federal level of domestic spending on children has declined by 23% from 1960 to the present and the aging of American society is placing new pressures on domestic spending that could further erode federal investments in children. The next President will set the tone regarding federal government leadership on children’s issues and the degree to which child policy plays a key role in federal domestic policy.

Our organizations have come together with a goal of elevating child policy issues to the visibility and prominence they deserve during the Iowa Presidential caucuses. We are asking all Presidential Candidates to provide written responses of 200 words or less to each of the survey questions below. We will publicize the first two hundred words of each candidate’s response, in both a written document and on a web site for Iowa caucus participants to better understand candidate views on these issues and to raise their visibility in the Iowa Presidential caucuses. In addition to the question itself, we are providing some background regarding the issues and its importance to children and family.

The following organizations participated in the development of these questions and encourage all Presidential candidates to provide written responses to them:

Iowa Child Policy Coalition Participants:

Child and Family Policy Center
Child Care Resource and Referral
Coalition for Family and Children’s Services in Iowa
Every Child Counts
Every Child Matters
Iowa Afterschool Alliance
Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children
Iowa Association of School Boards
Iowa Community Action Agency Association
Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church
Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
Iowa Head Start Association
Iowa Human Needs Advocates
The Joan & Lyle Middleton Center for Children’s Rights at the Drake University Law School
National Association of Social Workers - Iowa Chapter
Orchard Place
Prevent Child Abuse Iowa
State Public Policy Group
Urban Education Network
Visiting Nurse Services
Women for Change

1. High Quality Child Care

America has grown economically over the last three decades in significant part due to the entry of mothers into the workforce, often out of economic necessity to support their families. Nationally, more than six out of ten mothers of children under six are in the workforce.

This has dramatically expanded the need for child care. Yet families of all incomes struggle to find child care that is affordable, dependable, and of good quality. This is true, even though it is clear that good quality care is important to all children's and particularly lower income children's, development and school readiness.

Question: As President, what role should the federal government play to ensure that every child, regardless of income or background, has access to high-quality child care?

2. Preschool

Landmark brain research has confirmed that learning begins at birth and the first years of life are critical to building the foundation needed for lifelong learning. High quality pre-kindergarten programs for three-and four-year olds, particularly for low-income and disadvantaged children, have been proven to be effective investments with large benefits to society in great educational success and reduced social welfare and criminal justice costs. Quality preschool programs benefit all children, and public opinion polls consistently show strong support for government investments in preschool for all. At the same time, Head Start and other preschool programs funded by state, federal, and school district sources serve less than half of all children in the country.

Question: As President, what role should the federal government play in expanding preschool programming, both specifically for low-income and disadvantaged children and more generally to provide opportunities for all children?

3. Afterschool

Currently, 79% of children between six and 17 live in households where both parents work. High quality, affordable, and accessible afterschool programs are essential community programs. On school days, the hours from 3-6 P.M. are peak hours for juvenile crime. Currently, 73% of sixth graders and 85% of either graders spend at least one to five hours a day unsupervised. Quality afterschool programs are cost effective, improve educational success, and reduce crime.

Question: As President, what role should the federal government play to promote afterschool programs and services that provide learning activities and connect children and teens with caring adults?

4. Child Health Care

Nationally, 9 million children have no health insurance – more than the total number of children enrolled in the first and second grades in U.S. public schools. Each year, more working families lose health care coverage through their employers and those that have it face high cost premiums and deductibles. Children with health coverage are more likely to get the care they need when they need it. Many adult diseases and health conditions can be reduced or eliminated when preventive actions are taken in childhood. Children's health is dependent upon health care that supports healthy mental development and good oral health, and provides information and support for their parents to assure children's access to necessary treatments.

Question: As President, what role should the federal government play to assure that all children receive and have access to primary and preventive health services inclusive of mental health care and oral health care?

5. Children with Disabilities

In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) granted all children with disabilities a free, appropriate public education but the Act has never been fully funded. For instance, the infant and toddler early intervention provisions (Part C) of that Act serve only 2% of all 0-2 year olds, while 8-16% of those infants and toddlers have developmental issues and concerns that could be identified and treated early. Children with disabilities often face difficulties in obtaining the services they need, creating both economic and social strains on their families.

Question: As President, what role should the federal government play to support children with disabilities and ensure their quality of life?

6. Child Abuse and Neglect

In 2006, there were 9,000 confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect in Iowa involving 13,000 children. On average, nine young children in Iowa are the victims of fatal child abuse each year. Nationally, there are over 900,000 confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect (from three million reports) and over 500,000 children are in foster care. Billions of dollars annually are spent on placement services for the most vulnerable children, but far less is spent on efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect or to intervene early. The child welfare system has been under increased pressure to meet its obligations and mandates to serve children in need of assistance. Child abuse and neglect contribute to numerous other social problems and concerns beyond the safety of the child, including school achievement, mental illness, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency.

Question: As President, what role should the federal government play in reducing child abuse and neglect and making improvements in the child welfare system to assure that children receive quality services?

7. Family Economic Security and Success

Child poverty is much higher in America than in any other industrialized democracy in the world. 35.1 million people – including 12.4 million children – live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. This represents more than one in ten households in the United States (11.0 percent)¹. While welfare reform has been successful in reducing the number of families on public assistance and increasing the attachment of parents to the work force, too many families with children remain in low-wage employment. This jeopardizes their ability to make ends meet and support and invest in their children. Experts generally agree families need nearly twice the federal poverty level of income to be able to make ends meet. The Earned Income Tax Credit is one of the nation's most effective anti-poverty programs, but its current structure does not raise many working families to a level of economic security.

Question: *As President, what role should the federal government play in reducing child poverty and ensuring that working families have sufficient resources to care for their children and invest in their future success?*

8. Immigration Policy

A very significant portion of America's diverse child population comes from immigrant families both documented and undocumented. Some state and federal policies place additional restrictions upon serving immigrant children that can impact their health, safety, education and development. Immigration policy is a child issue.

Question: *As President, what role should the federal government play regarding immigration policy and providing for immigrant children and their health, education, and other needs?*

9. Ensuring Equal Opportunity

America is becoming increasingly diverse, and children are leading the way. In 2005, 45% of America's youngest residents were either Hispanic or a race other than White compared with 19% of seniors. One-fifth were English language learners. The future of America will be determined by the health and education of this diverse population of children and youth and the skills they develop as they move into adulthood.

At the same time, there are persistent and profound gaps in current outcomes and opportunities for children of color in America – starting at birth in infant mortality and morbidity and progressing through school in test scores and high school completion, and extending into the juvenile and adult corrections and welfare systems.

Question: *As President, what role should the federal government play in assuring equal opportunity and closing current gaps in child outcomes by race, ethnicity, language, and culture?*

¹ *Household Food Security in the United States, 2005*. USDA Economic Research Service. November, 2006.