



June 2016

How Will Candidates Ensure That Children Thrive And Parents Move Ahead? Using This Election Season to Build Better Support for Families

This election season, many candidates will be talking about Michigan's recovering economy and how they will work to continue to make Michigan stronger. They may even talk about the need to build a more educated workforce needed to support economic strength. What they may not be discussing is how they will address that as families across the state continue to struggle. Nearly one in four children live in poverty. Child abuse and neglect rates continue to rise, and other family well-being indicators are stagnate. Candidates must embrace common sense, and strong research findings demonstrating that the well-being of parents matters to their children's social-emotional, physical, and economic well-being and educational and life success. Once elected, officials must drive policy to better support families through proven strategies that help children thrive while their parents move ahead.

How to Better Support Families:

Public policy decisions must take into account the needs of children and their parents to ensure that families can thrive. This ensures that policies aimed towards children take into consideration program benefit for families facing the most challenges. And that adult-focused policies include strategies that promote well-being of children in those families. These family supporting "two-generation" strategies have the following critical components that are intentional and linked:

- 1) Education and/or job training that leads to a credential and family-supporting employment that helps parents get ahead in life to better support their families and improve outcomes for their children.
- 2) High quality educational opportunities inside and outside the school building that support children's learning and development from birth through high school that results in education and life success.
- 3) Comprehensive wraparound services like family support, access to basic needs, health and mental health services for children, adolescents and their parents, and developmental screening and other assessments in child care, early education, and K-12 settings that appropriately engage parents more effectively in their children's learning and development.

What Families Need:

- ✓ Programs proven to support low-income parents of young children with voluntary home-based coaching to improve their parenting skills and connect them to opportunities in their communities while also ensuring that their young children are healthy and developmentally on-track.
- ✓ Affordable, high quality child care during the early years as well as before and after-school and during the summer months for school-aged children that provides enriching learning environments while also supporting the needs of working parents and parents in education and employment training.
- ✓ Adult literacy and high school credentialing programs geared toward adult skill-building that take into account the needs of students who are parents. Parents with limited education typically have more limited income, and may face more challenges navigating systems like education and health care for their children.
- ✓ Workforce development programs that take into account the needs of students who are parents, and provide parents with paths toward family-supporting employment opportunities.
- ✓ Comprehensive wraparound services that connect families to basic needs like stable housing and food assistance; health and mental health services for children, adolescents and their parents; domestic violence

- services; as well as developmental screening and other assessments in child care, early education, and K-12 settings that appropriately engage parents more effectively in their children's learning and development.
- ✓ Consistent support to maintain safe environments for those identified with the most challenges, targeting efforts to prevent and reduce child abuse and neglect; adequate services for families to reunify after children have been temporarily removed, and support for other caregivers when parents aren't able to provide a safe and secure home.

What is the Role of Policymakers?

Policymakers at the state and federal levels make decisions on how to fund programs that support children, youth and their families; and these investment decisions demonstrate where the public's priorities lie. Both Congress and the State Legislature fund family supporting programs that embrace two-generation strategies like Head Start and Early Head Start, evidence-based home visiting, child care, and adult education and workforce development opportunities. Congress also funds programs that support families connected to the child welfare system including family preservation programs. However, all of these programs are underfunded at both the state and federal levels and reach only a fraction of families who could utilize these types of supports. Michigan's budget challenges have resulted in the state's strong reliance on federal funds – particularly for programs that support children and families – and the combination of insufficient federal and state funds has resulted in too many Michigan families continuing to struggle to get on solid footing.

Suggested Questions for Candidates:

- As a new parent, I've really struggled to provide for my family. What will you do to support other new parents like me who struggle to do the best I can for my family?
- In my community, I've seen many families benefiting from the preschool expansion, but many families can't access high quality child care for their infants and toddlers or for their school-aged children afterschool or during the summer. What will you do to ensure that our child care system can enable families to access high quality programming that meets the needs of low-income working parents?
- As an adult educator, I've seen lots of young parents struggle to complete a GED or job training program so that they can find jobs that will allow them to adequately support their families. What will you do to ensure that more parents can access the appropriate education and training services they need to get ahead in life?
- I've seen many families struggling in my community which has led to an uptick in confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect. What will you do to ensure that we can support struggling families before they have to come into contact with the child welfare system? What will you do to ensure families in the child welfare system can receive the services they need to reunify with their children and be able to provide a safe and stable home environment?

What Candidates Can Do If Elected Into Office:

- ✓ Expand evidence-based home visiting services to ensure all eligible families can access them.
- ✓ Pair education and training pathways with high quality child care so that parents can effectively utilize those programs to get ahead in life while their children's developmental and educational needs are being met.
- ✓ Ensure the child care system helps low-income working parents stay employed while providing access to high quality options for their children, and that the subsidy payment reflects the child care market.
- ✓ Support opportunities for families to tackle mental health and substance use challenges so that adults parenting capacities are not compromised and children's mental health needs are appropriately met so that they can stay on-track in school and life.
- ✓ Expand access to child abuse and neglect prevention services that provide parents with the skills to handle challenging situations while ensuring that children are safe and healthy in their homes.
- ✓ Support opportunities for parents to build literacy skills, complete high school and move into post-secondary and family-supporting employment.