

## **When You Vote, Vote with Kids and Families in Mind**

*November 2, 2016* - At a youth-led candidate forum at Lansing's Ingham Academy this month, several young people faced off with a panel of candidates over issues that had created enormous challenges in their lives -- shortcomings in the foster care system, homelessness, street violence, human trafficking, and the trials of living with parents with untreated mental illness.

The conversations were spell-binding, leaving the audience and candidates with an appreciation for the need to invest in systems that better support families and build stronger communities. Candidates also came away with the expectation that should they win, the issues raised in the forum should be top of their agenda. With these dialogues begun, youth and candidates appeared excited to keep working together should they be elected.

In contrast to what's often been the sad circus sideshow at the national presidential debates, the youth-led forums sponsored by [Michigan's Children](http://www.michiganschildren.org), have again raised the voices of our youth and gotten people thinking and talking about the real issues *that matter to Michigan families in 2016* – our motto this election season. These forums, and other work of Michigan's Children, tap into the desire of families and youth who wrestle with many challenges to connect with candidates and influence the actions of future elected leaders.

Our state and nation face a critical turning point next week with the election of a new president, and leaders at the state and local levels. We urge all citizens to exercise their hard-fought right to vote. Consider your candidate choices from the perspective of what's best for children, youth, families and Michigan's future.

Elections, after all, are about setting new courses and priorities for action. As Michigan's economy improves and with a renewed focus on rebuilding our education system for a better educated workforce, how do your candidates' views stack up with that charge? How have your candidates embraced the common sense findings that demonstrate that the well-being of parents have a direct link to the social-emotional, physical, economic wellbeing and educational and life success of their children?

Have your candidates acknowledged the struggles young families face with affordable, high quality child care which not only provides parents an ability to attend work and school but provides the essential foundation to their children's academic success? What about improving college and career readiness? Are we doing enough to close the achievement gap for all students so that everyone has a good chance for academic and career success? For young people who were unsuccessful in traditional schools, are we helping to improve their high school graduation

rates by providing options that take into consideration the circumstances of individual students, including alternative and adult education options that work?

Before you go to the polls, weigh your decisions carefully and consider candidates who value these issues. Visit [Every Child Matters](#) to learn where the presidential candidates from the major parties stand on key children's issues. And learn where state and local candidates you'll see on your ballot stand on issues by visiting the [League of Women Voters](#). Read our issue briefs for ["Raising the Issues that Matter to Michigan Families"](#) and elect candidates who will give us the best chance of making Michigan the best place to raise a family and be a kid. Then after Election Day, stay engaged with your elected officials because voting is just step one. Change only comes when you remain in the political process and continue to support programs and services that make a difference for Michigan children and families.

***Matt Gillard is the President & CEO of Michigan's Children, only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families.***

## \* Raising The Issues

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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 those issues as children, youth and families across the State of Michigan continue to struggle. This election season, Michigan's Children will be working to raise the issues that matter to Michigan families and provide resources so that you can talk to candidates about these issues, ask the tough questions, and then make informed decisions in the voting booth. Below are the top issues Michigan's Children is raising this campaign season, and each election brief includes an overview of the issue, [questions for candidates](#), and what candidates can do to improve policies in each of these areas if elected into public office.

Also, be sure to learn where the candidates stand on important issues so you can make an informed decision on November 8, 2016 — Election Day. Visit [Every Child Matters](#) to learn where the presidential candidates from the major parties stand on key children's issues. And learn where state and local candidates you'll see on your ballot stand on issues by visiting the [League of Women Voters](#).

### Building Better Support for Families

Too many Michigan children and families are struggling with nearly one in four children living in poverty, child abuse and neglect rates rising, and other family well-being indicators stagnant. 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. Public policies must take into account the needs of children and their parents to ensure that families can thrive. Once elected, officials must drive policy decisions that better support families through proven strategies that help children thrive while their parents move ahead.

Read our election brief on [building better support for families](#).

### Supporting Child Care & Expanded Learning

Families need affordable, high quality child care for young children and after-school and summer learning opportunities for school-aged children – also

known as expanded learning options – while parents work or engage in job training. Access to high quality child care can ensure young children are building the foundation they need to succeed. High quality expanded learning programs ensure school-aged children stay engaged in learning and remain academically on-track. Once elected, officials must make child care and expanded learning policy and budget decisions that help the state's most challenged children and youth access these high quality out-of-school learning options to reduce the achievement gap.

Read our election brief on [high quality child care and expanded learning](#).

## Improving College & Career Readiness

Michigan has many educational challenges including some of the largest achievement gaps in the nation, consistently poor showing on several educational measures, and limited improvement on state assessments. Many proven strategies have increased high school graduation rates including having multiple pathways, more time and flexibility towards a credential, lowering suspension and expulsion rates, addressing trauma, and ensuring non-academic services are available for students to stay academically engaged. Since a high school diploma is essential to post-secondary education, employment and lifelong success; once elected, officials must support proven strategies.

Read our election brief on [college and career readiness](#).

## Questions for Candidates on Supporting Families

- 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?
- 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?

## Questions for Candidates on Child Care & Expanded Learning

- As a parent, I struggle to pay for programs for my child when s/he is not in school – after school and in the summer. What will you do to ensure that enriching programs that keep my kid safe and engaged while I'm working are available to families like mine?
- As a child care provider, the state subsidy is far too low for me to accept many subsidized kids into my care without going bankrupt. What will you do to ensure child care businesses like my own can stay in business while helping more of Michigan's lowest income families?
- As an active member of my community, I see the benefit that afterschool and summer programs have on young people and their families, and I support them privately as best I can. How will you ensure that the public sector puts up their fair share of support?

## Questions for Candidates on College & Career Readiness

As a business owner/leader I recognize that I need every young person in my community to be prepared to succeed in work. How will you make sure that even struggling learners are graduating from high school prepared for their next steps?

- As a mental health professional, I see how the challenges some young people face make it tough for them to succeed in school. How will you make sure that there are educational settings that work for kids who have experienced trauma or have trouble regulating their behavior?
- As a kid who has had trouble in school, how will you give me another chance to succeed so I can contribute to my family and my community?

For more suggested questions for candidates, read our [Sandbox Party Election briefs](#).

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