



## What to Listen for When the Presidential Candidates Debate Tonight

HOUSTON, TX – Ten Democratic campaigns for President are converging in Houston tonight (**Sept. 12, 2019**) to debate, and Michigan's Children will be poised to hear how each candidate addresses and understands the issues impacting our children and families.

We'll tune in with kids and families in mind, and urge you to do the same because there's more to presidential politics than polling numbers and pundits. Presidents make policies that affect a nation!

The debate is scheduled from **8-11 p.m.** and you can watch it on ABC and Univision and on streaming services. The candidates are: Former Vice President [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#), Senator [Elizabeth Warren](#), Senator [Bernie Sanders](#), Senator [Kamala Harris](#), Mayor [Pete Buttigieg](#), the entrepreneur [Andrew Yang](#), Senator [Cory Booker](#), former Representative [Beto O'Rourke](#), Senator [Amy Klobuchar](#) and former housing secretary [Julián Castro](#).

To help you view the event, review questions we've crafted to help assess the politicians' positions and policies on important issues that impact outcomes and well-being of our children and families. Consider them today and throughout the 2020 Presidential Campaign as you decide for yourself who can best lead our nation by strengthening American families. Read our Proven Plays for [Strong Families](#), [Ready Learners](#), [Thriving Students](#), and [Successful Transitions](#) to learn more.

And if you haven't taken the Michigan's Children [Pledge to Make Kids and Families a Priority](#) this year, please do so today!

### **Accessible High-Quality Child Care and Expanded Learning Matter**

Families need affordable, safe, nurturing options while they work or continue their training and education so their children can also learn and grow during critical development years. However, access to quality care is limited with child care costs exceeding the annual cost of housing, and most difficult for parents who work second- and third-shifts. Forty percent of Michigan families live in "child care deserts" where affordable, licensed care is scarce. What's more, families with lower incomes rely on state support to afford child care, but Michigan's below-market child care subsidy rates makes it difficult for quality providers to serve subsidy-eligible children. Many providers – up to 100 a month – are simply closing shop, making care even harder to find.

*What solutions do our elected leaders have for expanding access to high-quality child care?*

*How can we strengthen the child care workforce and extend eligibility of subsidies to more hard-working families who need them?*

### **Families Matter: Building Better Support for Families**

The well-being of parents affect their children's social-emotional, physical, and economic well-being and life success. Helping families facing barriers including poverty, literacy challenges, and the prevention of abuse and neglect are therefore critical to strengthening and stabilizing all families. In Michigan, nearly one in four children live in poverty, and the stats are worse for children of color. Multiple studies have shown that the more education parents attain the greater their literacy skills and educational success. This also serves as a strong predictor for their children's success. That's why building literacy skills in families

is a priority of Michigan's Children! Also key to family stability is access to child abuse and neglect prevention services to ensure homes are free from domestic violence, and that children are safe and healthy in their homes. Congressional support is necessary for families connected to the child welfare system, including family preservation programs.

*How can we support parents in their employment opportunities regardless of where they live?*

*What should be done to ensure the child care system enables families to access high-quality programs, including for those families of low income?*

*How can we better support families who come in contact with the child welfare system?*

*How can we help young parents struggling to complete a GED or job training program including support in their literacy so that they can better support their children?*

*For kids who aren't safe at home, how can we strengthen the foster care system so that they can achieve educational and life success under state care?*

## **Foster Care Matters: Making Good on Our Promise to Children, Youth and Families**

Over 13,000 children and youth experience foster care in Michigan and despite some improvements to the system it remains fraught with predictably poor outcomes for children, youth and families. Nearly half of all young people in care have four or more adverse childhood experiences with children suffering from toxic stress and trauma. Supportive adults and services are critical. A clear imperative is to better serve vulnerable families to prevent children from entering the system. When that can't happen, children need well-trained, trauma-informed foster families to support their upbringing.

*How should we prioritize supporting families so that they can avoid entering the child care and foster care systems?*

*How can we ensure that caregivers in the systems are well trained and have the resources they need to support children?*

*How can we ensure that children and youth in care have timely and consistent access to physical and mental health care?*

*For young people exiting foster care, how can we best support them to ensure they have educational and life success?*

## **Learning Matters: Helping All Kids Thrive and Achieve in School**

A high-quality K-12 educational system is one of Michigan's top goals but today we're not helping our kids meet the high standards needed for life success with just 44 percent of Michigan children scoring proficient in reading at the third-grade level. For Black, Hispanic and American Indian children, the proficiency score is much less – just 20 percent, 32 percent and 31 percent, respectively. Drop-out rates are high for our children of color, and for those challenged by poverty, disabilities and homelessness.

*How can we ensure that Michigan students who are at-risk of falling behind have access to programs that help them stay in school, catch up, and succeed?*

*How can we support parents and other caregivers to have the skills necessary to assist their children meet educational benchmarks like third-grade reading and eighth-grade math proficiency?*

*How can we ensure that every child has access to trained, supportive school professionals including counselors, health professionals, and social workers?*

*How can we ensure that families of infants and toddlers have access to help when their young children are experiencing developmental delays?*

## **Mental Health Matters: Promoting Mental Health and Well-being in Children and Families**

Federal law requires the provision of mental health and substance use insurance benefits, but 56 percent of individuals living with mental illness in Michigan have not received care in years. Mental health is critical for the healthy growth and well-being of children and youth and for family stability. Michigan must expand access to mental health services, both through health care and in the systems that serve children, youth and families, including education, child welfare, and criminal justice.

*If elected, how would you ensure children, youth and their parents have access to mental health and substance use services they need to stay healthy and productive?*

*How should we ensure that children and youth in the foster care system receive consistent mental health and behavioral services?*

*How can we ensure that youth in court jurisdictions have access to developmentally-appropriate juvenile services that make them less likely to reoffend?*