



**Jeff Johnson**

1. The earliest years of a child's life can often determine the outcome of a child's future, as studies show 90% of brain development occurs by age 5. Yet currently in Minnesota, half of Minnesota's children are not ready for kindergarten, putting the future of children, our communities, and our state at risk. **As the Governor, where will early childhood care and education fall in your list of priorities?**

It will be one of my top priorities as governor. We've had some of the worst education gaps in America for decades and we have done little to solve them. We are failing some of our children miserably and I will do whatever I can to change that.

2. While Minnesota has made great strides in early childhood in the last decade, more than 35,000 children that qualify for high quality early childhood care and education based on economic need lack access these programs. Countless studies have shown early childhood investments can close Minnesota's worst-in-the-nation opportunity gaps and set up children and families for lifelong successes. **As the Governor, will you work to expand access to early childhood? If so, how do you plan to expand access?**

I propose we target those kids and families that most need these resources and could not otherwise afford them on their own; the ones we can identify most at risk to fall into the opportunity gap and later achievement gaps.

3. Throughout Minnesota, there is a shortage in the early childcare workforce. This shortage often prevents parents from returning to work after a child is born because they cannot find childcare. **As the Governor, how will you address this shortage?**

We have many quality in-home providers - particularly in Greater Minnesota - who are choosing to exit the market because state government is essentially regulating them out of business. I believe it's time that government actually partners with small businesses, including child care providers, instead of trying to stifle and control them.

4. **As the Governor, how will you strive to balance access, affordability, and quality in early childhood care and education?**

I think it starts by identifying potential recipients at the highest risk of lack of opportunity early on and tailoring solutions that are efficient, flexible, and effective for those families. The scholarship model that MELF developed is a great tool that give parents the power to choose what works best for their kids and I think it's our job at the State to demand results of establishments eligible to receive scholarship funds. Additionally, the Legislative Auditor pointed out the inefficiencies of our current system. I will streamline the financing and oversight of any early learning program the State implements. And we must know how these programs are performing. Currently the legislature is not requesting assessments of the existing programs and we owe it to

the families and taxpayers that the programs are working and producing results for them, which would include kindergarten preparedness assessments.

5. Home visiting programs consist of a trained home visitor providing health information and ongoing parenting support for high-need families on a voluntary basis. These programs have been shown to improve outcomes for children and families which include improved maternal and newborn health; reduction of child injuries, abuse, or neglect; improvements in school readiness; and increased economic self-sufficiency of families. **As the Governor, how will you support home visiting programs?**

Certainly nothing is off the table. We will evaluate programs for their effectiveness and return on cost invested. We currently utilize grant funds distributed through an evidence-based evaluation program, and I think this is a great start. But the source of grants funds is the ACA, which may not be a long-term source of funding, so we will have to find new sources of funding which may include private-public partnerships.

6. The recent report on early childhood programs by the Office of the Legislative Auditor highlighted the complexity of early childhood programs in Minnesota. This complexity can be a barrier for families with the greatest need to access these programs. **As the Governor, how will you reform state programs to help better serve children and families?**

As the Auditor reports suggest, we have multiple agencies providing different, and sometimes duplicative services, and funding is confusing. I propose we streamline the financing and oversight of any early learning program the State implements. And we must know how these programs are performing. Currently the legislature is not requesting assessments of the existing programs and we owe it to the families and taxpayers that the programs are working and producing results for them, which would include kindergarten preparedness assessments.