



Erin Murphy

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's a huge priority. We know that quality child care and early childhood education are critical for our kids and that investments made when they are young pay off for generations. Our achievement and opportunity gaps are an embarrassment and a shame, and unacceptable. We need to be a state where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. It's important to me for two reasons. The first is that everyone should be able to succeed and our public school system simply has to be the place Minnesotans can go to get a great start. Anything else is not good enough. Second is about our future. Our state is short of care givers already, and educators, and many other critical professions. Every child that doesn't reach their potential misses the opportunity to thrive in a way that could help and support their community and our economy as well. So it's about the individual success and quality of life, but to me it's also about what we lose as a whole when people struggle.

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?**

Access and affordability are critical. I support and have authored universal pre-k bills in the House, and would like to move that direction. That would ensure both access and affordability for all four year olds. I would pair it with expanded support for childcare assistance and for local efforts to increase not just affordability but access. We know in many communities, both rural and urban, access just isn't there. That's a money problem, but it's also an approach problem. We need to think outside the box to help communities create high quality options, and to help people who want to do childcare work get in and stay in the business. It won't look the same all over the state and that's OK, we don't need a one-size-fits-all approach we need to be open minded, listen to and learn from providers and parents, and expand the things that are working.

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?**

It's very hard to address this in any real and sustained way without more money. If we want to have a high-quality workforce in childcare we're going to have to pay people enough to make it an attractive profession.

There are training, licensing, and other incentive components for sure, but at the end of the day the workforce is only going to be there if the profession is one that can be fruitful for them. It's very hard work, and needs to pay accordingly. This is worthy of a bigger conversation. Obviously parents cannot afford to pay unlimited amounts for high-quality care, and cost is an access barrier for many already. We need broader solutions including community/co-op options and a better utilization of the various funding streams.

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

It's a tough but critical balance. As mentioned in the last answer, I think we need to have broader conversations around this because one-size-fits-all approaches are not likely to work in a lot of places. Our kids deserve our best. So to me it is unacceptable to leave things as the broken status quo they are for too many families and communities, and unacceptable to imagine fixes that sacrifice access, affordability, or quality. I think we can have all three if we're willing to dig in with parents, providers, funders, and lawmakers. We can do more to align funding streams in a more efficient way, as we've seen in Duluth and in Elbow Lake, to look for uncommon solutions, like they are trying in New York Mills, and to support home day care centers and corporate child care spaces and other options like that all over MN.

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?

Home visiting, along with ECFE and when needed, intervention programs, are absolutely vital to making sure our kids start on the right track. I've had a chance to meet with a number of educators and community leaders who do home visits, and with parents who appreciate and find value in the conversations and resources. This is the kind of thing, like full-service community schools, that we need to expand from successful pilots to full adoption as an option for every community. Every answer I've given comes back to more money, and I want to say that it's critical to get our budget and tax structure under control and back to a stable place with predictable revenue so we can make these kinds of investments.

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?

This comes down to streamlining both funding sources and the work Minnesotans need to do to access them. CAP agencies and others provide amazing services and help, but I agree and hear from both parents and providers that they'd appreciate it if we could make things simpler. This is a broader problem than just early childhood, but we need to have conversations throughout government about the end point user of our programs and how we make them easy to participate in.