



**Lori Swanson**

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?**

*Early childhood care and education is a priority of the Swanson Administration.*

*Substantial gaps between the environments of advantaged children and those of disadvantaged children raise serious concerns about the life prospects of disadvantaged children and the state of social mobility in America.*

*The Obama administration has promoted programs like Head Start as vehicles of opportunity and social mobility and has called for increased investment in high-quality early education programs. The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge program is based on the successful outcomes of early learning programs in preparing children for school. Similarly, the Pre-school Development Grants issued by the U.S. Department of Education is based on the measured success of early pre-K programs.*

*Minnesota pays dearly when it has such an achievement gap. We pay with societal costs such as unemployment and underemployment, increased chemical addiction, low self-esteem, and poverty entrapment.*

*Part of the achievement gap in Minnesota relates in part to the humanity of the state. We have 1.8% of the population in the United States but receive 13% of the refugees entering the United States. Many of these families have children who are simply unprepared for school, having physical challenged, mental stress and extreme poverty. The state needs to make early education a priority as a means to lessen the societal effects of poverty.*

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?**

*The legislative auditor noted that the current system is fragmented, with nine separate programs being administered, some with overlapping missions. Three state agencies administer these programs and the auditor questioned the coordination of these programs. I would like to give serious consideration to the auditor's recommendations but also consult with the many stakeholders in this area who have contributed so much to the financial and substantive support of such programs.*

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?**

*An assortment of programs hopefully will address some of the problems of the shortage.*

*We currently have “scholarship” programs as well as direct placement.*

*We can also evaluate the use of child care credits for companies that offer day care services to their employees. General Swanson was invited to give the ribbon cutting for the opening of a day care center at Bell International Labs in Eagan, Minnesota. The owner has 400 employees and is finding that such a program offered on campus is a great recruiting tool where competition is tight for qualified employees. One could consider tax credits for companies that make such programs available, although such a proposal does not necessarily achieve the purpose of elevating the preparation of low income families. Much has been written about the subject, including the use of such facilities during World War II.*

*We should also explore the use of senior care facilities for day care support of children. Much has been written about the subject, including the use of such facilities although the oversight of such facilities probably requires more substantial review.*

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

*Low income children need to be prioritized. This should be achieved through scholarships to families as well as direct programs. I am impressed with Art Rolnick’s comments that, rather than focus the limited funds on education for all children at age four, the programs should focus on impoverished children from age one through five.*

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?**

*Absolutely. It is well documented that many parents lack training and guidance in terms of raising children. Some have been raised in dysfunctional families and simply don’t know how to raise a child. Others are limited in terms of intellectual capacity or mental health and are compromised in their ability to undertake the challenge of raising a child.*

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?**

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