

## **Tim Walz**

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?** 

As my running mate Peggy Flanagan often says, children don't come in pieces, and when it comes to education, that is abundantly clear. This fact makes early childhood care essential to our education system in Minnesota, which would be the top priority for me as Governor. Minnesota's history of investing in education is one of the most significant components of our historic economic success, and something that we are consistently identified as a leader. Closing these opportunity gaps isn't just a moral imperative; it's an economic necessity as our workforce demands are ever increasing. And whenever we make decisions, Peggy and I will return to our North Star: Bringing people directly affected by those policy to the table.

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?

Peggy and I support high-quality, public, universal pre-k for all Minnesota 4 year olds. In order to achieve this goal, we would advocate for securing the additional funding needed to expand this program across the state. We would need to implement universal pre-k with great care and intention, ensuring that child care providers don't suffer financial hardship through the loss of 4-year-olds in their care.

We would also work to secure the necessary policy and funding provisions needed to support full-service community schools. This is a school improvement model that provides equitable opportunities for all our kids and families. This model puts social, medical and supplemental academic services and enrichment activities where they are most accessible – at the school.

I also understand the need to review and build more coordination among the many revenue streams and programs funded by the state and so we would charge our administration to work to ensure we're spending dollars effectively to expand high quality early learning opportunities across the state.

Finally, a Walz-Flanagan Administration would take significant steps to ensure that we address child care needs across the state, from North Mankato to the North Shore to North Minneapolis. This means the following:

• Increasing the child and dependent care tax credit, and the income limit for this tax credit so that more

- families can benefit from it
- Fully fund and forecast the Child Care Assistance Program, so that all income eligible families can obtain funding to pay for early care and education for their children
- Increase access to quality child care programs for children receiving child care assistance by supporting the growth of the Parent Aware quality rating and improvement system and ensuring that it is culturally responsive and culturally competent
- Invest in the Community Solutions Fund for Healthy Child Development, a proposal from Voices and Choices for Children. This fund would provide flexible funding streams to disburse funds of varying sizes that communities can use to build upon what they see working; acknowledging that communities of color and indigenous communities have invaluable knowledge, and must be active and valued participants within the creation of solutions for themselves.
- Partner with organizations like WomenVenture to develop cooperatively-owned child care businesses in low-income areas and in greater Minnesota

## 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?**

Minnesota reimburses child care providers at significantly low rates. Consequently, child care capacity, especially in rural Minnesota, has declined over the last decade or more. Much has been discussed about child care regulations, and I'm willing to explore common sense regulatory reforms that help providers. However, we will direct our administration to determine how we can draw down additional federal child care funds, along with adding state funds in order to improve child care reimbursement rates.

We strongly support securing the necessary funding to ensure that quality child care programs are accessible and affordable for all Minnesota families. However, we would like to draw the distinction between child care and early education programs (such as universal, public pre-K). While both are critically important for closing the opportunity gap, they are not always one in the same. Many children and families need access to both preschool AND high-quality child care to meet both the educational needs of children and provide economic stability for their families, especially for families with parents who work the second or third shift. As stated above, we need to address child care reimbursement rates to ensure quality care, as well as funding universal, public pre-K programs.

In addition, we should explore many more of the items in MinneMinds policy agenda from expanding state grants for retaining and increasing the number of providers, to programs like TEACH and RETAIN and more. We appreciate these programs and want to work together to support them.

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

Fully funding the biennial increase into the state's budget to meet the needs of Minnesota's children and families will be very challenging. But it is a challenge we believe we can achieve. For far too long we have bought into a narrative of scarcity of resources instead of looking at our spending priorities. As we work to get there, my first focus would be on ensuring low income and other high-needs kids and families (for example,

kids in child protection or foster care) would be a priority. However, we still believe universal access to high-quality, public pre-K would benefit all families and it is achievable.

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 programs have never been adequately funded. A Walz-Flanagan Administration would invest in programs that are currently successfully implementing home visits, work to increase flexibility and access to these programs, then ensure sufficient funding through a home visiting grant program.

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?

Our administration would first examine all programs and revenue streams to identify where there is overlap and duplication in order to determine their effectiveness. We would also like to explore the policy and financial implications of aligning funding and eligibility requirements of early childhood programs. We would also work to create a comprehensive early childhood plan that ensures coordination between MDE. DHS, and MDH through an Office of Early Learning. This would ensure that all programs and funding are better coordinated to improve effectiveness and efficiency. A Walz-Flanagan administration will also work in partnership with MinneMinds and their coalition members to ensure that we're designing systems that are more easily navigated by the families who need the most access to early childhood programs.

Minnesota has left federal child care funding on the table by not conforming to federal program requirements. We're interested in exploring our options in the child care assistance program. The net result is that Minnesota may in fact have a 'complex' system, but that doesn't mean it's ineffective. Minnesota is a large and diverse state and we will work toward pragmatic solutions to create access and opportunities for all.