

Presidential Candidates' Positions on Children's Issues



Gov. Jeb Bush



This guide was developed as a public service by the Child and Family Policy Center and Every Child Matters Education Fund for the Children's Policy Coalition, which represents over 40 nonpartisan Iowa organizations seeking to elevate children's issues in elections. The candidate's responses to six key child policy question are reproduced here unedited and without comment.

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1 / HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Over the last two decades, the percentage of children with health insurance has increased, largely as a result of federal and state actions to expand coverage under Medicaid and CHIP. Still, 8 percent of all children remain uninsured. Further, children need more preventive and developmental services because they are growing and developing. For the first time in our country's history, children face the prospect of growing up less healthy and living shorter lives than their parents.

Q. What actions will your administration take to ensure all children have health coverage and that this coverage is effective in responding to children's needs for healthy development?

Jeb Bush:

As Governor, I managed Florida's Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Programs to reduce waiting lists and improve the quality of care for children in our state. Our efforts focused on the most vulnerable in our state. As a Presidential candidate, I have proposed the most comprehensive health reform plan of anyone in the field.

I believe the most responsive and effective care is best delivered locally. Patients, physicians, nurses, therapists and other health care providers live, practice, treat and collaborate in communities of care. Thus, for states to meet the needs of all its citizens, states must have responsibility to make their individual insurance markets more competitive, enhance access to care and enable community-based solutions for low-income and vulnerable Americans. Instead of Washington standardization, this emphasizes transparent outcome standards.

2 / EARLY LEARNING

Too many American children start school behind and will have trouble catching up. Gaps in development start early, but investments do not. Through a variety of programs, the federal government plays a larger role in supporting early learning than it does K-12 education. Still, with current state and federal investments, for every dollar invested in the education and development of a school-aged child, only seven cents is invested in an infant or toddler and 25 cents in a preschooler. Research on brain development points to the birth-to-5 years as absolutely critical to success in the school years and adulthood.

Q. What actions will your administration take to close the “readiness gap” that appears before kids start school?

Jeb Bush:

Despite spending over \$22 billion each year on early childhood through 44 different programs— more than the federal government spends on low-income kids in K-12—too many low-income children are unprepared for school and low-income parents don’t receive the child-care they need. To ensure that low-income children get a strong start in life, I would consolidate existing federal early childhood funds and give funds directly to low-income families. Low-income families would then have the freedom to choose—and the funds to help pay for—the different types of early childhood education their children actually need (day, night, weekends, center-based, home-based etc.), rather than the help a bureaucrat is offering. Funding individuals instead of programs will ensure funds are spent on helping children instead of being wasted by bureaucracy, encourage a vibrant market of early childhood providers, reduce the amount of restrictions and regulations attached to existing programs that currently inhibit innovation, and allow for greater coordination with state-run programs as parents spend the money they receive at state-approved providers.

3 / SCHOOL SUCCESS

While Americans highly value education, too many American students lag in performance and achievement. While states and communities play the primary role in educating primary and secondary students, the federal government plays a key role in ensuring that the needs of all students, whatever their backgrounds and special concerns, are met.

Q. What actions will your administration take to ensure that the United States has a strong primary and secondary education system that meets every child’s needs?

Jeb Bush:

Our primary and secondary schools aren’t keeping up with the increasing knowledge and skill demands of our society. We need a system that meets the unique needs of students through a diverse set of educational options with strong accountability for results. This is best achieved through empowering those closest to students—parents and teachers—to make decisions and returning the funding and accountability decisions back to states and school systems. The states should continue to be the laboratories for change while the federal government’s role should be limited and focused on responsibilities for which it is uniquely suited. The federal government cannot run or fix schools from Washington, but it can make it easier for families, educators, and entrepreneurs to do so. To leverage the limited, but critical role of the federal government to create the conditions necessary for every child to graduate from high school prepared for the demands of college or the workplace, I would:

- 1) Empower parents and students with quality options
- 2) Support states with the flexibility & resources to create great public schools
- 3) Reward great teaching and successful student outcomes with additional funds
- 4) Give parents, teachers, and citizens the information they need
- 5) Drive innovation & research to break the stranglehold of the status quo

4 / SAFETY AND PERMANENCE

In 2013, 681,000 children were found by state child protective service systems to be victims of maltreatment, and 400,000 children were in foster care. Since the establishment of the 1935 Social Security Act, the federal government has partnered with states to develop child welfare services to prevent or respond to abuse and neglect and provide for the safety, permanence and well-being of children removed from home. Despite such attention, too many children enter and remain in foster care and do not have permanency in their lives. Each year, 30,000 children age out of foster care with major barriers to success. Current federal financing puts much greater emphasis on placement than prevention.

Q. What actions will your administration take to reduce the number of children who are subject to abuse and neglect, improve foster care and ensure a promising future for those aging out of care?

Jeb Bush:

Throughout my administration, I fought to bring order and greater efficiency to the child welfare system, as well as to increase the number of foster children who find stable, loving homes. There was a stronger emphasis on local decision making, with alliances of community leaders, judges and elected officials. Florida developed and supported a strategy to prevent and intervene in child abuse and neglect, including a statewide child abuse and neglect prevention network. I promoted community-based foster care as a better approach to serving at-risk children and their families. During my eight years in office, more than 16,000 adoptions were finalized in Florida, placing foster children in permanent, caring homes. The annual number of finalized adoptions increased by more than 100 percent from 1,400 before I took office to 2,906 in 2005. As President, I would build on this experience and continue to fight for children to be in loving, stable homes.

Through much hard work, the child welfare system created by my administration was one with a stronger emphasis on local decision making, with alliances of community leaders, judges and elected officials. This resulted in better outcomes for Florida's children, as well as less bureaucracy and greater focus on the individual needs of communities.

5 / ECONOMIC SECURITY

One in five American children live in poverty and more than twice that amount live in households struggling to make ends meet. Poverty, particularly persistent poverty, is one of the strongest predictors of future health, education and social well-being. Children whose families lack economic stability experience stress that compounds the barriers they face in their growth and learning.

Q. What actions will your administration take to reduce poverty among children and otherwise ensure that all children have the resources and supports they need to become successful adults?

Jeb Bush:

As president, I will do all I can to promote the right to rise for every child.

The facts show that economic growth is the best antipoverty program we have. That is why I have proposed pro-growth economic reforms to fix our nation's broken tax code, end burdensome regulations, and develop an energy policy that will meet the needs of a growing economy.

We must also reform the nation's social safety net. By discouraging people from working and otherwise behaving responsibly, our safety net impedes opportunity. These programs should focus on helping people find full-time jobs. Poor Americans aspire to achieve earned success just like the rest of us. And safety net reforms should promote childbearing within stable married families. A strong family led by two committed parents is one of the best anti-poverty programs we have. As the family breaks down, so does opportunity, and poverty is five times higher among families with single mothers than among dual-parent families.

6 / EQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

The U.S. is becoming more diverse, and children are leading the way. A land of immigrants, American society has seen diversity as a source of strength and innovation in the past, and there continues to be a strong inclination toward inclusion and equal opportunity. At the same time, there are profound disparities in child well-being—across measures of health, safety, economic security and school readiness and success—across racial and socio-economic lines that must be addressed for America’s future prosperity.

Q. What actions will your administration take to ensure that all children have equal opportunities for success and to eliminate inequities that limit them in achieving their potential?

Jeb Bush:

Every individual in this country deserves the right to rise. Yet today, the American Dream—the fundamental idea that with hard work, anything is possible—is threatened. It is threatened by an education system that is exacerbating, rather than solving, inequality and failing to prepare the next generation for the challenges of the 21st century. We must reform our education system to ensure that all Americans, no matter their background or zip code, have access to a high quality education. This requires a complete re-orientation from a system that serves bureaucracies to one that serves the needs of families and individuals. We must also help build capacity for earned success by increasing economic growth. The current administration may be content with two percent growth rates, but that is not nearly enough to deliver opportunities for all Americans. We must adopt the pro-growth policies necessary to ensure all poor Americans are able to rise out of poverty. We are on the cusp of widespread prosperity if we get a few big things right. I will replace our broken tax code with a simpler system with lower rates and higher take home pay for middle class families. And we will reform our regulatory system to reduce the burden of government on families and businesses.