

2010 Voter's Guide

Iowa's Gubernatorial Candidates' Views on Children and Families



Former Iowa Governor
Terry Branstad
Republican Candidate



Incumbent Iowa Governor
Chet Culver
Democratic Candidate

Developed as a public service by:
Every Child Counts



About the Guide

The 2010 Voter's Guide presents the views of incumbent Iowa Governor Chet Culver and former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad on twelve important child and family policy issues. The candidates submitted written responses to each issue. Directions to the candidates were to keep their responses to individual questions to 150 words or less. As we committed to them, their responses are provided here, without editing or comment.

The Voter's Guide has been used successfully in the four previous Gubernatorial elections to inform voters on where Iowa's Gubernatorial candidates stand on important child and family policy issues. The endorsing organizations listed below thank the candidates for their responses to these questions and their commitment to the state and its children and families.

Endorsing Organizations

Child Care Resource and Referral of Central
Iowa
Child and Family Policy Center
Every Child Counts
Every Child Matters
Iowa Afterschool Alliance
Iowa Association for the Education of Young
Children
Iowa Association of School Boards
Iowa Cancer Society
Iowa Community College Early Childhood
Alliance
Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
Iowa Community Action Association

Iowa Conference of the United Methodist
Church
Iowa Head Start Association
The Joan & Lyle Middleton Center for
Children's Rights at the Drake University
Law School
National Association of Social Workers, Iowa
Chapter
Orchard Place
Prevent Child Abuse Iowa
Polk County Empowerment
RESULTS
School Administrators Of Iowa
State Public Policy Group
Visiting Nurse Services of Iowa



The State Budget and Children

In the federal system, state governments have the primary responsibility to finance education, health, and human services for children. Consequently, over two-thirds of the Iowa general fund budget is devoted to serving children and youth – through preschool, K-12, and higher education; child health care coverage; and child safety services in child welfare and juvenile justice. Many programs serving children have experienced significant cutbacks during the recession, and enacting a 2011-12 budget next year that makes needed investments in children will be challenging, with nearly \$500 million in non-recurring revenues used to balance the Medicaid budget in 2010-11 alone that will not be available for 2011-12. Balancing the state budget will require finding very substantial savings within the current budget, raising revenue, or simply reducing services to children and families.

As Governor, what will you do to ensure that needed investments in children and youth are made in the 2011-12 budget?



CULVER: State budgets are about priorities. During the recent economic downturn, we worked to limit the effect of the across-the-board cuts on children's programs by

backfilling programs such as Prevent Child Abuse, Child Health Specialty Clinic, Childhood Lead program, children's mental health restructuring, voluntary preschool and Before and After School Grants. During this year's session we moved forward by adding \$100 million in funding to K-12 education and then funding 2% allowable growth as well as increases in funding for community colleges and Regents' institutions. Our record speaks to our commitment to making education and children's programs a priority as we work with the General Assembly on the Fiscal Year 2012 budget next year.



BRANSTAD: It is clear this coming budget year will present a real challenge. The role of a governor is to provide leadership, selecting department heads that are tasked

with bringing to the governor avenues of efficiency and to discover savings within his/her department. Of special importance are to find those line items and programs that no are no longer necessary or do not provide the level of service necessary to be continued. In lean times this will be even more important. It is also the role of the governor to provide leadership to identify priority areas where money should be spent. Public safety, education and services for the most unfortunate in our society will take precedence. All opportunities to allow for public-private partnerships should be pursued.

Primary and Secondary Education

Iowans place a very high value on education and government's role in supporting schools. Yet while Iowa still ranks well among states in the percentage of the adult population completing high school, Iowa now has a much lower percentage of college graduates among its adult population than the country as a whole. While historically, Iowa has been a leader among states in overall fourth and eighth grade student reading and mathematics scores, today Iowa ranks in the bottom half of states, particularly among its white, nonhispanic student population. Students preparing for the 21st century economy require much higher skills than in the past, and this requires a world class educational system.

As Governor, what will you do to ensure Iowa students acquire the skills they need for the 21st century economy?



BRANSTAD: We need to have high expectations for our students. We need state standards, and to give local schools the freedom to have strategies to achieve those standards. We

should have uniform assessments, then recognize and reward good schools and good teachers. We should make necessary changes for those not getting the job done. I believe we need to reinstate funding that rewards teachers on the basis of performance.



CULVER: I support education because as a former teacher I know the real-life challenges that teachers and students face in the classroom. Iowa, through the Iowa Core Curriculum, is one

of the few states to identify the 21st century skills necessary for students to achieve as a required element of our education programs. Through investments in teacher pay and professional development and the pathway set out by our Race to the Top Application, we can give Iowa students a world class education by increasing student achievement overall, decreasing achievement gaps among student subgroups, increasing the number and percentage of students of color who graduate, increasing college enrollment and the number of students who complete at least the equivalent of one year of college credit that can be applied toward a degree, and increasing undergraduate enrollment in STEM majors in Iowa's institutions of higher education.

Early Childhood (Birth to Three)

Brain research has shown that the very first years of life are critical to lifelong development and are a time when families often undergo the most changes and stresses. Children need safe and nurturing environments throughout the day, whether with their parents or in formal or informal care arrangements. Through Early Childhood Iowa (now community empowerment), Iowa has been a leader in providing supports to families with very young children, but Iowa ranks at the bottom among states in its overall child care subsidy eligibility level and its licensing and registration standards. Much of the affordable child care available to families of infants and toddlers is considered to be of poor or mediocre quality. Iowa leads the nation in the proportion of families with young children where both parents (or the only parent) are in the workforce, so the state's role in ensuring safe, affordable, and quality child care alternatives is an important policy issue.

As Governor, what will you do to support parents of very young children and ensure that safe, affordable, and quality alternatives are available to them for their children's care and development?



CULVER: Investments in early childhood, when the brain is still developing, whether through preschool or zero through three programs, are some of the most cost-effective investments

we can make to improve educational and social outcomes for Iowa children. My Administration has worked and will continue to work to shore up the child care quality rating system. In addition, we have worked to protect Early Childhood Iowa (formerly the Empowerment program) from cuts and have worked with stakeholders to improve accountability and services in this important program.

The development of children zero to three does not occur in a vacuum. While quality child care is essential so is making sure parents have good paying jobs and entire families have access to quality health care. Alleviating the financial stresses on families will go a long way to ensuring the development of strong families.



BRANSTAD: As governor, I would provide incentives to improve the level of quality. I would promote recognition of excellent child care provider programs and encourage

continuing education for child care workers. I would encourage partnerships between the state and local businesses to provide day care centers for their employees.

Early Childhood (Preschool)

High quality early childhood/preschool programs for three- and four-year olds have been shown to improve children's readiness for success in school. Comprehensive programs have been effective in substantially reducing (although not closing) the gaps in school readiness for low-income and otherwise vulnerable children. Iowa supports preschool for all four-year old children through Preschool for All, as well as providing support for preschool through Shared Visions, special education (Part B), and Early Childhood Iowa funding, while the federal government supports comprehensive preschool services through Head Start. Still, only an estimated 60% of all Iowa four-year olds participate in publicly-financed preschool, and preschool often does not operate for the amount of time that working parents need for child care.

As Governor, what will you do to strengthen early childhood services for preschoolers, including access to preschool, and improve Iowa children's readiness for success in school overall?



BRANSTAD: A good preschool experience is valuable in preparing a child for school. In Iowa children receive a quality preschool experience through a wide diversity of private preschools, as well as pre-schools which represent public-private partnerships. This diversity of preschool choices for children is good because a one size fits all solution does not fit every community. To ensure that all children have access to preschool regardless of income or geographical location, we should move forward to increase the number of scholarships or financial aid to assist families who cannot afford pre-school for their children to receive assistance. This could be achieved through a line item—however small—which could be matched by local business partners to be used for scholarships for students. The business community would be investing in their future workforce.



CULVER: I am proud that I created the State Voluntary Preschool Program and invested more than \$60 million in this program, which will lead to over 21,000 students enrolling in preschool through this program in the coming fall. A study by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve has demonstrated that preschool and early childhood education is one of the most effective investments we can make. Preschool lowers educational costs, improves long-term educational outcomes and decreases crime and other social costs in the long run. During my second term, I pledge to make the state voluntary preschool program available to any parent who wishes to send their children to the program. My opponent opposes this program and would seek to end it.

Afterschool and Community Services for School-Aged Child and Youth

Currently, eight in ten children between six and seventeen live in households where all parents work. On school days, the hours between three and six p.m. are the “danger” hours, when younger children are most likely to be unsupervised and to engage in risky behaviors leading to crime, substance abuse, and adolescent pregnancies. High quality, affordable and accessible afterschool programs have been shown to reduce these risk behaviors and also support educational development and success. Still, the number of afterschool programs available to children meets less than half the demand for them from parents.

As Governor, what will you do to support afterschool and community services for school-aged children and youth?



CULVER: Afterschool programs play an important role in increasing students’ interest in school, preventing juvenile delinquency and improving educational and

social outcomes. After the across-the-board cuts were implemented in Fiscal Year 2010, I made sure to work with state agencies and the General Assembly to backfill funding for the state Before and After School Grants. I look forward to working with stakeholders such as school districts, teachers, parents and community groups to examine possibilities for expanding before and afterschool programs.



BRANSTAD: Again, public-private partnerships provide the best avenue for providing success in tough economic times, as well as providing solutions that are designed to accommodate the

specific needs of each community.

Child Health

Through both state and federal actions, Iowa has expanded its health coverage for children and is one of the leading states in ensuring all children have health coverage. Federal health reform provides additional expectations and opportunities for states to expand primary and preventive child health services, and Iowa has been a recognized leader in promoting comprehensive health services for children. Iowa still faces challenges in providing developmental health and oral health services to children, however, and ensuring that all children have medical homes (consistent, ongoing health care providers) that meet their needs. As responsibility turns to states to implement federal health reform, Iowa will be expected to work to ensure that both public and private health care coverage provides services children need for their healthy development.

As Governor, what will you do to create a child health delivery system – building on or changing Medicaid, hawk-i, and IowaCare – that ensures children receive primary, preventive, and comprehensive health services they need, including oral health?



BRANSTAD: As governor I would promote education to parents and guardians on the importance of taking an active role in obtaining health care for their children. This could

be achieved through various venues and methods, but the goal would be to identify the best way to reach parents, then use best practice strategies to deliver the message.



CULVER: Iowa leads the nation in children's health insurance coverage and the quality of our delivery system. Today, there are 57,000 more Iowa children with health insurance

than there was when I took office. Through state-led healthcare reform initiatives, Iowa is preparing to implement the medical home concept. In addition, we made sure to protect funding for the dental-only carve out, the I-Smile program, by backfilling funds following the across-the-board cut.

Healthcare for children has been and always will be a priority for my Administration. In my second term, I will work to provide health insurance to every Iowa child. In addition, when the state budget permits, I will work to expand the I-Smile program. In contrast, my opponent has promised to cut Medicaid and hawk-i funding, which would deprive children of needed healthcare.

Child Mental Health

National studies show that 8-12% of children and youth have mental health concerns and 3-6% have serious emotional problems. Parental depression also contributes to children's mental health. Studies have shown that addressing children's mental health requires different approaches than addressing adult mental health; and that there is a particular need to develop systems that help and support parents in responding to their children's mental health needs. Iowa is one of few states that rely substantially upon property taxes for mental health services, and there is wide variability in the availability of mental health services for children across the state.

As Governor, what will you do to improve access to quality mental health services for young children and adolescents, across Iowa?



CULVER: Under my Administration's leadership, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) has worked with stakeholders to improve the children's mental health system through the redesign of Remedial Services program. We have also increased funding for the children's mental health waiver through the Medicaid program so that families can keep children with serious mental illnesses at home with supportive services. When children are not able to remain at home, continuous one-year Medicaid eligibility for children has helped to ensure continuous care at PMICs as well as provide traditional services when the child moves home. We have also increased PMIC rates and improved the manner in which they are reimbursed. During my second term, I will continue to guide state government towards a policy that promotes at-home mental health treatment for children when possible.



BRANSTAD: When I was governor before, I shifted mental health services from being solely funded by property taxes to state funding. Over time variability in the level of services from county to county has developed. As governor I would attempt to provide greater equity of services from county to county.

Food Security and Obesity

Good nutrition and exercise in childhood are keys to lifelong healthy growth and development. Currently in Iowa, however, studies show that a significant portion of the child population suffers from food insecurity and even malnutrition. At the same time, childhood obesity rates have skyrocketed. While some steps have been taken, such as establishing school nutrition standards, much more needs to be done to reduce both malnutrition and obesity. In part due to these threats, for the first time in Iowa's history, children face the prospect of being less healthy and living less long than their parents.

As Governor, what will you do to improve child nutrition and combat the twin threats of malnutrition and obesity?



BRANSTAD: Changes in lifestyle and interests have created a greater number of obese children. When I was President of Des Moines University we became the nation's first

university or college to earn the highest recognition granted by the Wellness Councils of America because of our comprehensive wellness offerings and operating plans. Some private companies in Iowa desire to partner with the public sector to encourage and send a message to our children about the importance of exercise and healthy lifestyles. A key component is to educate parents and to provide incentives to low-income families to purchase healthy foods.



CULVER: Adequate and appropriate childhood nutrition is a key component in developing Iowa's children into successful students and working adults.

A child will not be able to concentrate well in school if they have not had breakfast. Likewise, childhood obesity threatens to cause serious health problems later in life and place additional burdens on our health care system. I am proud to have signed the Healthy Kids Act into law: this legislation requires a minimum amount of physical activity by students and limits junk food sales in our schools. I was also proud to create the Governors' Council on Physical Fitness, which has partnered with nonprofit entities to promote Live Healthy Iowa Kids, a wellness program. During my second term I will continue to focus on these wellness programs and other nutrition programs in order to promote wellness amongst Iowa's children.

Child Safety and Welfare

Parents have the primary responsibility for raising their children, but society also has the responsibility to ensure children are safe and receive necessary care. The Iowa child protective service system (including investigations of abuse and neglect, provision of family-centered services, and provision of foster care and adoptive services) has been under increased financial pressure. Children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems often become “systems children,” without supportive ties to their communities. As a result, they experience poor educational, social, economic, and justice system outcomes as they transition to adulthood.

As Governor, what changes will you make to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to better achieve the goals for those systems of child safety, permanence, and well-being?



CULVER: One of the top predictive indicators of whether a child will enter the adult correctional system is their experience, if any, with the juvenile justice system. Through

Executive Order, I have made reducing ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system a priority and my Administration is working, with measurable success, with the Casey Foundation to tackle these challenges.



BRANSTAD: If elected I pledge to work with child welfare advocates and juvenile justice systems to hear their ideas and alternatives to improve the current climate to improve child

safety and well being for those children whose lives are unstable for one reason or another.

Making improvements to the child welfare system is a process that has begun at DHS and needs to continue. DHS has implemented the Parent Partner model in six sites across Iowa. This program partners parents in the child welfare system with those parents who have successfully overcome their troubled pasts. Iowa’s First Lady has also worked hard to promote funding for shelter care.

The budget climate has put a strain on Iowa’s community providers. If the state budget continues to improve as projected, I would support a provider rate increase.

Family Economic Stability

Iowa's welfare reform efforts have reduced the number of families on the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program by more than one-half, with many of those families now in the workforce. At the same time, many of these families have moved from being on welfare to being among the "working poor," still struggling to make ends meet. Children continue to be the age group in Iowa most likely to be poor, and even temporary poverty has been shown to have long-term impacts upon children. One in seven children live below the poverty level and one in three below 185% of the poverty level (a more realistic measure of child financial security). Although Iowa has a small earned income tax credit, over 70,000 low-income working families (below 185% of poverty) owe state income taxes, which contributes to their financial stress, although they are not taxed at the federal level.

As Governor, what will you do to address child poverty, including further changes to Iowa's welfare system, its supports for working low-income families, and its tax treatment of families with children?



BRANSTAD: One of the goals of my campaign is to raise the incomes of Iowa families by 25%. Crucial to this goal is to support retraining programs for those Iowans who have lost their

employment in these challenging economic times. It will also be my goal to provide some financial assistance to encourage low-income adults to gain additional post-secondary education at any level to gain skills to allow them to better support their families.



CULVER: The Culver/Judge Administration expanded Iowa's earned income tax credit in 2007, making the state tax credit available to more than 85,000 additional Iowans. This credit,

along with the increase I signed to Iowa's minimum wage, has helped working Iowa families pay their bills and save for the future. Other changes such as expanded eligibility for hawk-i and the dental-only carve out help struggling families provide their children with the healthcare they need. Similarly, the state voluntary preschool program, which I have pledged to expand, and the state Empowerment program provide educational opportunities for the children of Iowa families. In my second term, I will continue to work to address poverty by making sure that every Iowa child has health insurance and by expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit to further assist working families.

Diversity and Equity

Iowa is becoming more diverse as a state, and children are leading the way. Children of color now represent 15% of all Iowa children, and these numbers continue to rise. At the same time, children of color fare significantly worse on many measures of child well-being – poverty, low birthweight, child abuse and neglect, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency. Educators and service providers themselves generally do not reflect the diversity of the children they serve, which makes developing cultural competent services (as well as a more diverse workforce) important to closing disparities that exist by race, language, and culture.

As Governor, what actions will you take to address current disparities in outcomes for children of color, ensure culturally competent services, and support Iowa's diverse child population?



CULVER: I have made reducing the racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system a priority for my Administration. State agencies, in collaboration with local agencies, and the Casey Foundation have launched pilot projects to reduce disparities in the juvenile justice system in Woodbury, Polk and Black Hawk counties. Similarly, DHS has taken efforts to reduce racial disparities in foster care placement. Through culturally sensitive strategies and community collaboration, DHS has reduced the disparity in out-of-home foster care placement among Native American families in Woodbury County by 28 percent. A similar initiative geared towards African-American children in Polk County has cut the disparity in half. During my second term, I will work to expand these pilot projects statewide and apply the lessons learned to other fields, such as education.



BRANSTAD: Like all children, children of color respond to high education expectations. With clear, articulated state standards, local schools will be encouraged to find strategies that will motivate their students to achieve the goals. With uniform assessments we will closely monitor successful models which can be replicated and promoted statewide. Again, I believe we should reinstate funding to reward our highest achieving teachers.

Role of Government in Valuing and Strengthening Families

Parents are their children's most important teachers and strong communities are needed to support families in this role. Government cannot and should not serve as a substitute for a child's family and community. At the same time, too many families struggle to provide the nurturing and stable home environment all children need. Through poverty, parental stress, depression, addiction, or mental illness, too many children are vulnerable to a host of poor child outcomes and an ability to themselves become contributing adults and parents as they develop. Increased mobility and family stress also have produced what some have called a "breakdown of the family" in America. The media and negative role models among some celebrities has contributed to risky and negative youth behavior. Government cannot solve these issues, but leaders within government can set a vision and direction for government in strengthening and supporting families and family life.

As Governor, what leadership role will you take to strengthen families and family life in Iowa?



BRANSTAD: A key component to strong families is to make sure the family breadwinners are employed. My goal to create 200,000 new jobs in Iowa, jobs that can be obtained by those

already in our state and those coming from other states. With the current unemployment rate of 6.8%, many families are approaching or have reached poverty. This puts undue strain on a family. My proposals to reduce property taxes on commercial property and to cut the corporate income tax will spur existing and new businesses to bring more jobs to Iowa.



CULVER: As a father I know that parents and other family members are a child's first and best teachers. But as a former teacher and coach I also know adult role models can come

into a child's life many ways. While parents are and should remain the people primarily responsible for raising their children, society can play a role in strengthening and supporting those families and assisting children who fall through the cracks. We must use creative programs that incorporate public/private partnerships, partnerships with community nonprofits and faith-based partners to address child poverty and safety issues. While personal responsibility has always been a strong Iowa value, the people of Iowa have no desire to stand aside and allow children to go without a quality education or essential medical care.

For more information, contact:

Sheila Hansen
Every Child Counts
505 5th Avenue, Suite 404
Des Moines, Iowa 50309
515-280-9027
shansen@cfpciowa.org

A limited number of copies are available through Every Child Counts. This Guide is also available for download in PDF format at www.itsaboutourkids.org



Every Child Counts
505 5th Avenue, Suite 404
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

