

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.