



Federal policy priorities for kids & families

A briefing for voters & candidates in 2010 federal elections

In addition to electing a governor and members of the state's General Assembly in November, Illinoisans will choose among a variety of hopefuls for federal office: candidates for Congress, including a new U.S. senator.

In the years ahead, these federal leaders will shape policies with potential for enormous impact on communities throughout Illinois and our nation. It's critical that these leaders – and the voters who elect them – understand the issues of greatest importance to the well-being of children and families. And it's vital that they act on that knowledge.

Voices for Illinois Children's federal policy priorities include ensuring that:

- **Working families can continue to rely on policies that work for them.** Among other things, Congress should vote to maintain tax breaks targeted to families who need help the most, and retain job-creation efforts that help struggling families get back on their feet. Effective policies that expire by the end of 2010 include:
 - **Improvements in the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.** These aspects of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provide tens of thousands of low- and middle-income working families with extra help in meeting their most basic expenses, from groceries to rent to utility bills.
 - **“Middle-class” tax cuts** for families earning less than \$250,000 a year, who are battered the most in this economic downturn. We simply cannot afford the hundreds of billions of dollars it would cost to extend other tax breaks that are exclusive only to the wealthiest 2 percent of households.
 - **Job-creation efforts** funded through the Emergency Contingency Fund of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. This ARRA measure has helped more than 26,000 unemployed people find jobs through “Put Illinois to Work” efforts, which have been extended for only a few months beyond their initial, Sept. 30 expiration.
- **Our youngest learners can count on strong early childhood services to thrive.** There are a number of federal-level initiatives to improve early learning programs' quality and access for young children and their families, including:
 - **Creation of an Early Learning Challenge Fund** to support new investments and advancements in preschool and other early childhood efforts.



- **Child Care and Development Block Grant growth**, to boost child care assistance, an important job support for working parents as well as a vital component of our network of early learning programs.
- **Greater Head Start and Early Head Start investments**, to shore-up a variety of educational supports and other services that strengthen the learning and healthy development of low-income kids.
- **Continued focus on home-visiting programs** that provide “parent coaching” and other resources for the moms and dads of very young, at-risk children – services such as Healthy Families Illinois and Parents Too Soon.
- **Our students can receive a high-quality, well-rounded education** to put them on a path toward success in life. As Congress considers reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Voices recommends the law more closely reflect a “whole child” approach to meeting students’ social and emotional developmental needs, as well as prioritizing their physical and cognitive development. Congress should give greater focus to:
 - **Early learning opportunities.** ESEA should designate high-quality preschool as an option for “turning around” low-performing schools, and include early childhood teachers in professional-development initiatives.
 - **Social and emotional learning (SEL).** Through SEL, kids learn to manage emotions, establish positive relationships and make responsible decisions. Research shows teaching these skills along with core academic subjects raises test scores and graduation rates. SEL standards, and resources to support them, should be included in ESEA reauthorization.
 - **The needs of English-language learners.** Latino children represent the fastest-growing population of youngsters in Illinois and throughout the nation. Many of these and other children need extra help with tackling challenges in learning English. Greater investments in bilingual and English as Second Language programs are needed.
 - **Measuring progress and accountability.** This work should start with reducing the emphasis placed on high-stakes testing for students, and focusing greater attention on alternative ways of gauging student and school progress.
- **Ensuring children have access to a variety of nutritional supports** to help them grow up healthy and strong. That’s why reauthorization of the childhood nutrition act is important, to help kids can have greater access to healthy foods through schools and other places where they gather.



October 2010

Voices for Illinois Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit group of children’s advocates and neither endorses nor opposes candidates for elected office. For more information on election-year issues and advocacy, visit our 2010 Election Advocacy Page at www.voices4kids.org, or contact:

- Sean Noble, director of government relations (snoble@voices4kids.org, 312-516-5566) or
- Dawn Melchiorre, director of policy (dmelchiorre@voices4kids.org, 312-516-5557).