

2017 NJ GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Where the Candidates Stand on Child Care

Question: Each year, New Jersey provides subsidies to help pay for child care for approximately 60,000 children from low-income families, enabling parents to participate in the workforce. For the ninth year in a row, funding for the state child care subsidy rate has remained flat, forcing child care programs to cover the cost of doing business in 2017 with the same rate they received in 2008. This harms both the quality of programs and access to care, especially for infants. At \$4.00/hour per infant, the rate has been so low, for so long, that fewer providers can afford to accept our youngest children.

If elected, what will be your short- and long-term plans for improving access to quality child care for low-income families in New Jersey?

Kim Guadagno, Republican Candidate

As a working mom who used flexible child care credits to help defer cost of child care, I know affordable and reliable child care is critical for all working families.

Too many families in New Jersey are struggling because of high taxes and a high cost of living, so my goal as governor will be to make New Jersey more affordable for everyday working people. While my opponent has promised to increase taxes if elected, I will lower property taxes during my first term or I won't run for a second. Additionally, I believe we need to pass child care and dependent tax credits to make high-quality child care more important.

Phil Murphy, Democratic Candidate

The budget is a statement of our priorities. For the last eight years, we have handed out billions of dollars in tax breaks to millionaires and large corporations while ignoring the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. I will look at all options to expand child care for low-income families, and I support the creation of a child and dependent care tax credit. Right now, the average New Jersey family with a preschooler and an infant pays \$21,000 in child care costs. That figure is simply unaffordable for most low-income families, and a child care tax credit can help alleviate these burdens and allow parents to work outside the home.

Seth Kaper-Dale, Green Party Candidate

The theme of my campaign is "the last are first." I do not believe a society can thrive unless it is prioritizing the needs of those who are most vulnerable. Children are the most vulnerable population, and they can't cast a vote. We must, as a society, cast votes with our eye toward which candidate will help our children thrive. The best kind of society is one where nobody is 'last' because we all have what we need.

We know that brain development in very young children is fostered by experiencing nurture and safety. In order for the mind and the body to grow to full potential, a child needs real protection and stimulation. For the sake of children, the state needs to find the money to dramatically increase the subsidy rate for child care for financially eligible families.

The rate of reimbursement needs to go up per child. We should be basing our reimbursement rate not on a slight increase from the \$4 rate, but rather by comparing our rate to other states that have not had a stagnated number for the past 9 years. I would propose an immediate 50% increase in the subsidy per infant—raising it to \$6/hour—while we consider going even higher if our research shows that we are still lagging. This rate, \$6/hour, should only be for those licensed child care centers and for registered family child care providers.

The benefit of excellent and plentiful child care in NJ is good for children during the hours they are in the program, but it is also good for the rest of the hours of their day. Children in subsidized child care are children whose parents are able to work and raise money to support the family's needs. A family with less economic stress is one where there is likely more stability—and stability is essential to a child's brain development and social development.

There should also be a concerted effort, with DCF and the Department of Labor, together, to encourage the creation of strategically located child care centers and identification of new registered care providers. I'm glad to see here the 'access' part of the question from ACNJ.

As I have toured some of our financially strapped regions of the state parents have told me, time and again, "the reason I can't get a job is that there is no child care near where I live. I have to pay for 2 buses just to get my kid to daycare."

Caring for children is a profession that should be encouraged as the state has a vested interest in seeing that children thrive.

It is also important that every town in New Jersey have at least some child care centers that accept a child on a subsidy if the child is from that town—even if the subsidized rate is below market rate. In the same way that some towns are too expensive to live in, some towns are too expensive to send your child to daycare.

This year I resettled 2 refugee families in a town in NJ and found that most of the child care centers in the town did not accept kids on state subsidies. Their rates far exceeded the subsidies. We need to find a way to more fairly compensate child care providers and we need to make sure that any family, regardless of family income, can be cared for in the town where he/she resides.

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Where the Candidates Stand on Preschool Expansion

Question: For nearly 20 years, thousands of 3- and 4-year-olds in 31 of New Jersey's poorest communities have benefited from a high-quality preschool. Research has shown that children who attend high-quality preschool have significant gains in academics and social and emotional skills. In 2008, the state Legislature approved an expansion of high-quality preschool throughout New Jersey as part of the School Funding Reform Act, but the state never funded this critical mandate. However, this year, the 2018 state budget approved \$25 million for preschool expansion. It is a positive step forward, but in the meantime, high-quality preschool remains out of reach for more than 35,000 3- and 4-year-olds.

If elected, what specific steps will you take during your first year in office to ensure that more New Jersey preschoolers have access to a high-quality learning experience?

Kim Guadagno, Republican Candidate

If the school funding formula could be reformed to ensure millionaires in Hoboken and Jersey City pay their fair share for preschool and school construction, I believe we could expand free preschool to more low-income families across the state. Additionally, my lieutenant governor will lead an audit of all aspects of state government, and force an audit of all school districts in the state to ensure money is actually being used efficiently to improve education in the classroom. If it's not, we could reinvest those savings in education, including preschool. At the very least, pre-K should be means tested.

Phil Murphy, Democratic Candidate

I have been a strong supporter of pre-K dating back to when I chaired a national task force on public education in 2005. New Jersey has historically offered free universal pre-K in a number of low income cities and towns, and studies have shown that it leads to improved long-term educational outcomes. I would support the expansion of pre-K statewide and work to move towards universal access.

Seth Kaper-Dale, Green Party Candidate

Key to my platform is that the state of New Jersey, before it critiques the School Funding Formula, must fund it and see if it works! It is more than an insult—it is downright damaging to the next generation—that the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 has never been fully funded. The shortcoming in services, especially for 3-4yr olds, can be felt in our communities today. As I develop my first budget my eye would be firstly on securing funding for children's education—especially early education. There is still a mindset out there that early-ed is somehow a 'fringe extra' for a privileged society. No—preschool is the foundation upon which a child's brain develops in ways that makes her ready for a lifetime of learning. In addition to using the finally fully-funded education budget to pay for expanded preschool I would encourage communities to consider using NJ's new public bank to fund school expansion programs to build additions to handle preschool classes. NJ's public bank is a way for the state to generate funds at extremely low interest rates that help municipalities meet goals that are good for the public—such as expanded pre-school.

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Where the Candidates Stand on Preventing Lead Poisoning

Question: Lead is a powerful toxic metal that permanently affects child brain development and is especially harmful for infants and young children. According to the Center for Disease Control, there is no safe level of lead in a child's body. Even small levels of lead have lifelong effects on children's brains and bodies. Yet almost 25 percent of newly tested New Jersey children have at least some lead in their blood, with 3 percent above the level where state law requires intervention. Although New Jersey has made strides in fighting lead poisoning, progress has slowed.

If elected, what direct action steps will you take to permanently end lead poisoning for New Jersey's children?

Kim Guadagno, Republican Candidate

When it comes to clean drinking water, there is no balance. Every citizen in this state has the right to turn on their tap and know that their water is safe to drink. As governor, I want to ensure we have one of the best water programs in the nation that ensures that our drinking water is safe to drink. While I know that the DEP is rightfully moving forward with recommendations to set standards for additional contaminants, I think more can be done, faster.

First, I want to focus on preventing our waters from being polluted by continuing to support our hazardous waste cleanup program. While we cannot set standards for every one of the thousands of unregulated chemicals in the environment, we need to ensure we have the best scientists available and act quickly on their recommendations when they propose to add a new contaminant to the list. Second, we must insist our water companies deliver clean water for everyone and utilize new, modern treatments to ensure the public's health and safety.

On lead, it is important to realize that the biggest threat is from lead paint, and I fully intend to fund the lead detection and remediation programs. No child in this state should suffer from lead poisoning. I also support the continued testing for lead in our schools and the requirement that all schools be required to provide clean water.

Phil Murphy, Democratic Candidate

In 2014, 11 cities and two counties in the state had a higher percentage of children with elevated lead levels than Flint did in 2015. Despite this crisis, Governor Christie and Lieutenant Governor Guadagno raided the Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund, which funds lead remediation efforts, to make up for their own lack of fiscal discipline. I will end this practice. I am also open to all ideas on how to ensure that lead remediation efforts are funded over the long term.

I also believe that we need to address the root causes of lead poisoning, which includes lead in our water supply and lead paint exposure. On the issue of water, we must address our water infrastructure, as the corrosion of aging pipes causes lead to leak into the water. I will update our state's water supply plan, which hasn't been updated since 1996, so investments in water infrastructure can be targeted appropriately. And with respect to lead paint, I am supportive of efforts that would require more frequent lead paint inspections to ensure that our children aren't being exposed to lead.

Seth Kaper-Dale, Green Party Candidate

Addressing the lead crisis in NJ has been a key issue to my campaign. In the past month I rallied in front of the DEP, handed out pamphlets around the state, and have been in the newspaper demanding that the findings of the June 30th, 2017 Lead Assessments be taken more seriously. The Lead in 2 NJ towns, in this year's small pool of results, exceeded levels in Flint, MI. It is an abomination for this to be happening and for there to not be a public outcry. It is the responsibility of the Governor and Legislature, together with municipalities, to treat the Lead crisis as a public health concern. The answers that are put out there—that encourage a 'do it yourself' approach are very concerning. Telling people to 'run the water for a while,' as if that is guaranteed to keep their children safe is no kind of an answer.

NJ needs to immediately distribute and assist in installing Lead filters in every home in NJ that was built before 1987. The lead solder is corroding in those homes and things will only get worse. Also, NJ needs to utilize its public bank to help municipalities with high lead levels in their pipes—street side—to remove and replace those pipes. Finally, school buildings should be a first priority for public-bank funding for new water lines. The assessment from a couple of years ago showed that hundreds of New Jersey schools had elevated lead levels. It is unacceptable for kids to be getting poisoned while at school because the state has been negligent to raise the banner of concern about lead.

A Kaper-Dale administration will demand the DEP carry out more rigorous testing of homes and schools than is currently required. And, if a problem is found—action plans for remediation, and filtration, will be demanded. Public education campaigns about Lead that are forgotten, while the problem remains, are just not sufficient solutions.

Finally, the finding that 25% of kids have lead in their systems is terrifying. In the same way we test towns for lead, we should test children, by municipality, for lead. One wonders if towns would be as dismissive of the data if they were assessing kid lead-levels, and finding those levels elevated, rather than only assessing lead levels in buildings.

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Where the Candidates Stand on Helping Children in Poverty

Question: New Jersey ranks among the wealthiest states in median family income, but year after year, roughly 30 percent of the state's children live in low-income families (below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold or earning no more than \$48,000 annually for a family of four). For black and Hispanic children in low-income families, that percentage climbs to more than 50 percent. New Jersey is an expensive state to live in with high housing costs that strain family budgets, especially for those who are at an economic disadvantage.

If elected, what steps will you take to address the needs of New Jersey children living in low-income families struggling to make ends meet?

Kim Guadagno, Republican Candidate

As a mother of three, I will fight for all children in New Jersey as governor and work to make our state more affordable for families. First, I will lower property taxes during my first term in office or I won't run for a second. My plan specifically helps low to middle-income families who are struggling to pay their bills by capping school taxes at 5% of household income. This will save families up to \$3,000 a year and ensure that families won't be forced to choose between paying their taxes or putting food on their table.

Second, I will expand school choice. Children in every neighborhood of this state deserve the school program that best fits with their individual needs and life ambitions. Every child has a dream of what they want to accomplish in life and it is our job to give them the best chance to achieve those dreams. However, for thousands of school children in New Jersey, that educational opportunity does not exist. We can provide it to them if we give these students and their parents choices. Right now, those choices don't exist and these kids are stuck attending a poor performing neighborhood school that will ill prepare them for the challenges of college and careers.

Third, I will expand the Women Infants and Children (WIC) program to all families in underserved areas. As the head of the red tape commission, I worked hard to expand the WIC program but as governor, we will lift any obstacle to providing our children a healthy diet. Also, Breakfast at the Bell and farm to school programs will be maintained or expanded.

I will also work to make charitable contributions to New Jersey charities tax deductible so that the nonprofit sector can become a stronger partner as we work to strengthen New Jersey communities.

Phil Murphy, Democratic Candidate

As someone who grew up in a family that was working poor, this issue isn't abstract to me – I have lived it. If elected Governor, I will build a stronger, fairer economy in New Jersey that will ensure that all children have an opportunity to succeed. That starts with raising the minimum wage, providing earned sick leave for all, and guaranteeing equal pay for equal work to ease the burden of child care for working families. I will also create a child and dependent care tax credit, as described earlier, and expand the earned income tax credit. And I believe that we must address the crisis of housing

affordability by limiting the practice of diverting money from affordable housing funds, and ensuring that low-income families receive the maximum amount of federal funding possible under crucial programs such as SNAP – both of which are things that the Christie-Guadagno administration has failed to do.

Seth Kaper-Dale, Green Party Candidate

The key policy that I bring to low-income families, that could change their financial reality, is Medicare for All. Some wonder how this is so, since low-income people are already eligible for Medicaid—but that is to miss the point entirely. If we move to NJ Medicare for All the state of NJ will experience a level of economic freedom it hasn't experienced in years. This will be good for low-income people in particular.

Our municipalities are cash strapped largely because of the for-profit insurance industry that keeps jacking up the price of health insurance. If we move to a single-payer Medicare model this is what happens financially that will help low-income people.

Work will no longer be connected to health insurance. Therefore businesses can employ someone 40hrs a week, instead of cutting them off at 'part time' so as to avoid a costly health insurance plan. Businesses, now with a clear understanding of what they are contributing toward NJ Medicare for All (6% employer tax, as opposed to the approximately 13% they pay now to insurance plans) will be able to raise minimum wage. We can get to \$15.00/hr if we relieve businesses of unregulated insurance plans. Municipal budgets, that currently see 20% of their budget going to health insurance plans, will pay significantly less, and that will lower property taxes. Higher education, currently so expensive largely because of health insurance plans of employees, will go down for students. Workers in small businesses in local communities that are too small to offer insurance, would be more stable in their employment, because they wouldn't leave for 'jobs with health insurance.' Finally, a person would not be tied to a job because of health insurance. Currently lots of people stay in work they do not feel called to because they need the benefits. Let's disconnect the benefit of health insurance from particular work. They do not belong together.

Secondly, a major driver of poverty in NJ is prison. With so little economic opportunity in many urban centers prison becomes a reality for families—and families with a breadwinner away are families that struggle financially. I believe that while individuals are locked up they should be able to make a decent minimum wage. The state should give opportunity for those imprisoned to start jobs on the inside that can continue on the outside. Parents should be able to pay child support while locked up—participating in their family economy.

Thirdly, all residents of NJ, regardless of immigration status, should be able to drive if they are of legal age. If we care about children thriving we need to have parents working. A driver's license is a key to job prospects in NJ.

Fourthly, NJ dramatically needs to increase its rental assistance. In 2008 there was \$47 million in the SRAP funds. Now, there is \$40 million. Rents go up but subsidies in the budget go down. We have 438,000 kids living in households that bring in under \$30,000/year. This is truly troubling. We need to increase SRAP funding to at least \$70 million. With the increase in minimum wage, and with more people working 40hrs, and with less out of pocket medical expenses and more preventative care, it is likely that the average subsidized amount for any family will decrease. More economic opportunity means less need for dramatic help. But, until we totally right this ship, SRAP is a necessary thing.

Finally, any town that has not been faithful to its affordable housing requirements should be subject to an SRAP remedy—which will be given to a family with children. If towns are not going to step up and help keep NJ from being an apartheid state of cantons of poverty and wealth then SRAP could help force a level of integration. If every one of NJ's 565 municipalities had been faithful to the Mount Laurel Agreements in the mid-70's children in NJ would be in a much better place today—in terms of housing, education, economics and integration.