



INVESTING IN OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN.

My Vision for Vermont's Youngest Children and Their Families

WE CAN build a present and future for our state in which the care, health and education of our youngest Vermonters is a top priority. We must continue to give our children an excellent chance to develop their own potential and thrive in our state. *The most important task of any society is to nurture, educate and inspire its children.* Vermont's future depends on it.

My Principles for Investing in Vermont's Young Children and Their Families

- **Family and Community:** We need to help our children grow as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, and secure in their sense of belonging. We must provide an environment that fosters children's learning and development. We need to find new ways to help our young children thrive in their earliest years as Vermonters deal with changes and new pressures in their family and work environments. Much of a child's future success depends on these early years.
- **Opportunity:** I strongly believe that if our children are safe, nurtured, and provided with quality early care, health and education, these investments will improve their opportunities for success throughout their school years and in life. We can preserve the best of Vermont's traditions- independence, self-reliance, resourcefulness, a knowledge that our contribution matters ; and a willingness to lead on critical issues while building healthy communities for the future.
- **Cost Effectiveness:** Investments in our children must be made early and be sustained to be effective. Early childhood is the classic "spend a little now and save a lot later" investment. The success of efforts to improve our schools, build a world-class workforce, and reduce our social welfare burden depends in significant measure upon our ability to support young children and their families. We can do better than destructive cutbacks and spending caps. With a clear focus on our objectives and a commitment to continued improvement, we can provide quality early care and education services that are accessible to all young children in Vermont.

The Douglas Record on Young Children

Jim Douglas is approaching the challenge of supporting our youngest children in this millennium as he has done with other issues—with empty rhetoric. Too often he says supportive words that are not accompanied by constructive action. He claims to support quality early education, yet he did not support legislation that would have strengthened public support for quality early education. Douglas said that he feared the bill would result in “adding two more pre-kindergarten grades to the already stressed K-12 education system.”

In reality, the bill simply would have maintained the current state policy, which permits schools to use public education funds to support quality pre-K programs based in schools and in the community. This is a practice that has been going on in our communities and our education funding system for over a decade. Moreover, demand exceeds the current number of pre-kindergarten programs that meet quality requirements.

Unfortunately, Jim Douglas’ rhetoric has raised unfounded fears rather than advancing the discussion of a vital issue affecting all Vermonters – particularly Vermonters with young children.

Jim Douglas also proposes to cap school spending from the top, dramatically limiting local control and overriding the democratic process that towns now use to decide their school budgets. The state needs to help towns manage their budgets, not issue unilateral mandates.

Nationally, the average rates charged by child-care providers have increased faster than the overall rate of inflation. Despite Douglas’ claim to care about affordability, he has failed to ensure adequate funding for a crucial, under-funded program that helps low and moderate income working parents pay for child care. Vermont’s 2002 household median income was \$43,623. National experts recommend that families pay no more than 10% of their household income on child-care, yet the market cost for good-quality child care in Vermont ranges from \$8,000-\$10,000 annually for *one* child. This represents a significant percentage for middle-income families in particular because they do not qualify for state childcare assistance.

Jim Douglas points to the Building Bright Futures initiative as his way of supporting early care, health and education for children. We need the planning infrastructure of a public-private partnership like Building Bright Futures, but this is something that had been in the works for almost ten years, not something new with this administration. Indeed, the revolving door of agency secretaries and department commissioners under this administration has slowed progress on Building Bright Futures to a standstill.

Vermont’s children cannot afford to have a governor who is focused on election-year posturing. We cannot afford Jim Douglas’s approach any longer.

Investing in Our Youngest Children = Investing in Our Future

Albert Einstein once said that “no problem can be solved by the same consciousness that created it. We need to see the world anew.” We need to prepare our children, and their children, to see the world anew so that they can turn challenges into opportunities and make the world a better place. We can lead the way, giving our children the tools they need to make this difference - creating new opportunities and blazing a trail for the generations that follow.

WHY WE NEED TO SUPPORT OUR YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES:

- Our democratic society depends on a well-educated citizenry. That education begins at birth.
- Our society has shifted to one where the majority of children spend their early years in the care of many others besides their parents and family members. We must make sure that children are having quality experiences outside the home.
- People have a very difficult time paying for childcare (a year of quality care can cost as much as a year of college tuition.). Lack of childcare tuition assistance means many working families are forced to choose among basic needs when paying their bills.
- Early years are critical in the brain development of a child. We as a society have to make sure our children have quality care and we all have to help each other do this.
- Vermont ranks 30th out of 50 states for per-child education spending during preschool years.

I will work hard to strengthen early childhood care and education. We need to recognize the importance of early childhood care and education and invest in it. We know that investing in roads, bridges, job training, and housing is good for our economy, but researchers tell us that investing in young children benefits us in much the same way. In fact, economists have even argue that our economy would benefit by investing in quality early childhood programs, in children better equipped for school and jobs later in life. Some studies suggest their earning potential may even be greater.

It is vital to support our families with young children. We must support parents as they fill invaluable and irreplaceable roles as caregivers and teachers. However, no matter how good parents are, most families need help of some kind at some point in time. Childcare may be needed because both parents are working. Or, a single parent may need help with a child with special education or healthcare needs.

According to the organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, “In Vermont, 63 percent or 23,456 children under the age of six have both parents or their only parent in the workforce, and are, therefore, in the care of someone other than their parent(s) during the work day. Too

often, they are in “child storage” (for instance, parked in front of a TV set), instead of in a quality early learning environment.”¹

Between 70-80% of Vermont women with children under six are in the workforce—one of the highest rates in the country. Yet, state-regulated child-care programs can only meet 65% of estimated child-care need. In an effort to keep parent fees as low as possible, 31 states require no training in early childhood care and education and few have comprehensive health and safety regulations.

Child-care providers themselves are underpaid and most lack health and pension benefits. As a result, many low- and middle-income families have no choice but to place their children in lower cost, and often, lower quality care. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this statistic holds for Vermont as well. Early educators cannot afford to stay in the profession because of low wages and lack of benefits. Access to early childhood services is particularly limited for infants, children with special needs, children whose parents work evenings and weekends, and the working poor.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Child-care is a \$426 million industry in Vermont. Approximately 5,000 early childhood educators care for and teach 40,000 children ages 0-12. This number includes children ages 8-12 who attend summer and after-school care. 37,489 working parents use childcare.

- Working parents spend \$1 billion (in wages) per year in Vermont and pay \$100 million in taxes.
- Childcare programs purchase goods and services.
- Stable, good quality, affordable childcare enables employers to attract and retain employees and increases productivity.

Estimates based on Chittenden County data indicate that the average cost for a preschool child has increased 15.1% since 2000. Adjusted for inflation this increase is only 1.5%, but still more than double what median household income has grown in that same time period.²

Child care is a huge expense for moderate income families who don't qualify for subsidies. Child care accounts for 16% of household expenses for a family of four earning \$62,000 (behind only food, transportation & rent).³

¹ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids- Preventing Crime with Pre-kindergarten: A Critical Investment in Vermont's Safety, www.fightcrime.org

² Based on data collected on Chittenden County, December 2005, by Child Care Resources. Median household income has increased 0.6% in same time frame.

³ Based upon the Basic Needs Budgets prepared by the (VT) Joint Fiscal Office.

- High-quality early childhood education helps prepare young children to succeed in school and become better citizens; they earn more, pay more taxes, and commit fewer crimes.
- Every dollar invested in quality early care and education saves taxpayers up to \$13.00 in future costs.
- The early care and education industry is economically important—often much larger in terms of employees and revenues than other industries that receive considerable government attention and investment.
- Failing to invest sufficiently in quality early care and education shortchanges taxpayers because the return on investment is greater than many other economic development options.
- Access to available and affordable choices of early childhood learning programs helps working parents fulfill their responsibilities.
- Quality early education is as essential for a productive 21st century workforce as roads or the internet; investing in it grows the economy.”

Early Childhood Education for All: A wise investment- Recommendations arising from “The Economic Impacts of Child Care and Early Education: Financing Solutions for the Future” a conference sponsored by Legal Momentum’s Family Initiative and the MIT Workplace Center

If all child care providers worked for one employer, it would be larger than Fletcher Allen, IDX or C & S Wholesalers, three of the largest employers in the state. Based on the available wage and salary data, it is estimated that the total annual payroll for all regulated child care providers is \$72.5 million.

“The evidence is in: **quality early education benefits children of all social and economic groups.** There are both short- and long-term economic benefits to taxpayers and the community if early education that meets high standards is available to all children, starting with those who are most disadvantaged. Indeed, universally available quality early education would benefit everyone and be the most cost-effective economic investment.”⁴

Every dollar invested in quality early care and education saves taxpayers between \$7-13 in future costs. Failing to invest sufficiently in quality early care and education shortchanges

taxpayers because the return on investment is greater than many other economic development options. Access to available and affordable choices of early childhood learning programs helps working parents fulfill their responsibilities. Quality early education is as essential for a productive 21st century workforce as roads or the internet; investing in it grows the economy.

⁴ Early Childhood Education for All: A wise investment- Recommendations arising from “The Economic Impacts of Child Care and Early Education: Financing Solutions for the Future” a conference sponsored by Legal Momentum’s Family Initiative and the MIT Workplace Center

MAKING YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES A TOP PRIORITY

I will focus on early childhood education as an important step toward addressing the problems faced by thousands of working parents. Working with the state legislature, the early childhood providers, workforce, advocates, school administrators, and parents, **I will help build more excellence into early child care, and education by:**

Supporting Quality Child Care - Quality child care is essential for our working parents and their children. Quality child-care requires teachers with adequate pay and proper training. Child-care providers must be supported to continually strengthen their skills, and they must be compensated adequately for the important work they are doing. I will expand access to professional development opportunities for providers, as well as improve the capacity of many parents to pay for quality care. Vermonters are by nature creative and resourceful. We must provide an environment that fosters innovative child care and education practices.

Improving Early Education Opportunities - Because early learning is critical to future academic success, I will improve on preschool education opportunities. We must support those efforts, as well as continue the planning and implementation of voluntary pre-school with collaboration between school districts and private providers.

Reducing Child Care Operating Costs - I will find ways to implement programs that control the costs that are driving up budgets, such as energy and health care. We need to invest in energy efficiency for our buildings and heating systems. Improving the health care system and reducing health care costs benefits everyone. We will explore opportunities for child-care professionals to obtain group insurance. If teachers, accountants, lawyers and other professionals and trade groups can do this, there must be a way for child-care providers to do the same.

Building on Successful Community Models — Bennington is successfully delivering needed family social services in its school buildings. Child-care providers in Burlington partner with local schools to provide after-school child care programs. There are Tooth Tutor programs delivering preventive oral health services in 46 schools across Vermont. I will support these innovators — and the Building Bright Futures initiative — to replicate successful models in every corner of the state.

Helping Employers Who Help Families — Many of Vermont's small businesses are trying to help their employees with young families. I will work with the legislature to identify ways to recognize and support employers with practices such as offering child-care support, healthcare insurance, or paid family leave. The power of state purchasing, for example, could be used to give contract and grant preference to small Vermont-owned companies with family-friendly policies.

Exploring Paid Family Leave for Vermont: Parents are our children's first and most important teachers. Let's begin the dialogue necessary to explore how we can ensure that parents have the time they need with a newborn or newly-adopted child, while at the same time reducing the demand for infant care, which is in terribly short supply. Increasingly, paid family leave is needed by Vermont workers caring for an older generation as well. Other

states and countries have figured out how to support families during such times. Vermonters are practical and resourceful. With good leadership, we can figure out what will work for Vermont's families.

There is no one answer to funding a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system that meets the needs of Vermont families and their young children. I will find creative ways to pay for the care and education of our children in their early years, with a combination of resources from parents, business and the public sector, such as tax credits to employers or families.

Research and experience show that certain targeted investments in programs that give kids a good start in life will prevent children from engaging in later crime and violence. These investments include quality early education and care, child abuse and neglect prevention, after-school programs, and programs that help troubled kids get back on track. Increased educational attainment is likely to improve long-term health outcomes, personal financial decisions, and the economic prospects of the next generation.

As Governor, I will help empower Vermonters with a future that cares for our children, fosters excellence, creates good jobs, strengthens our economy, and prepares our young people to succeed in education and in life. If you share my vision and support these ideas, or would like to share your ideas, join us by signing up at www.scudderparker.com. Please tell me what can be improved or modified to make these programs more effective. Remember, it's your state, and it's your government.