

NH's children can't vote, but next governor shares their concerns

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By Amanda Osmer Grappone

Granite Staters can agree that our future depends on whether all children in New Hampshire have equal opportunity for healthy development. How best to support young children and families was the topic of a recent forum hosted by Spark NH, the Governor-appointed early childhood advisory council.

The forum allowed community leaders to ask important questions of six of the major candidates for Governor, and gave the candidates the opportunity to offer some insight into their perspectives and approaches to issues impacting New Hampshire children and families.

As the New Hampshire primary campaign ends and the general election races get under way, the fact that the major candidates for Governor gathered to talk about how public policy can help improve the lives of young children in NH offered a positive tone for the 2016 election and hope for New Hampshire's children and their families.

At the forum the candidates answered questions from the Spark NH Framework for Action, grounded in the science of what children need for good health and well-being. The Framework includes the core domains of children's development - health, learning, and family economic stability – as well as the systems that serve children and their families. The discussion focused on the importance of affordable child care costs, the NH Health Protection Plan, Medicaid, and CHIP, and the impact of the opioid crisis.

Councilor Colin Van Ostern, who has since been elected Democratic nominee for Governor, stated: "We are 49th in early childhood education. If we strengthen families and workforce we can keep our state moving forward. NH is a special place and we are making progress in these areas, but we need to keep moving NH forward and that is why I am running."

The Republican nominee for Governor, Chris Sununu, also focused on the importance of education for all children: "Education is everything at every level and in every community. But we have to have someone leading the state who has a first-hand perspective on these issues, and as the father of three young children, I have that. I am passionate about early childhood education, but we need to break down the walls of bureaucracy and put the best ideas on the table."

Fred Kocher, one of the Forum's sponsors, noted: "As we watch developments in the world around us, it becomes clear that the next generation of citizens and leaders will need to be both educated and engaged in their world. That's why early childhood health, education and family support are so important now."

While this Forum was a great opportunity to hear from the candidates for Governor, and children's issues are clearly on the agenda for all of the candidates, we cannot allow the conversation to end with this Forum. Because our children can't vote, it's our responsibility to ensure that our elected leaders follow through on their commitments to NH's children.

Amanda Osmer Grappone, of Concord, is owner and CEO of Grappone Automotive Group.