What’s different about it?

GORE’S PRESCHOOL AND CHILD CARE PROPOSALS

The presidential campaign this year is unusual in that both Al Gore and George W. Bush are placing so much emphasis on improving education. Proposals from both candidates could significantly change the federal government’s role in education. This is one in a series of issue briefs intended to help people understand how each candidate’s major proposals differ from what the federal government already does in the field of education. To analyze these proposals, the Center on Education Policy drew from information on each candidate’s web site and from news reports as of June 15, 2000. These briefs are not meant to judge the merit of these proposals.

How do Gore’s preschool proposals differ from current federal actions?

Al Gore has proposed that all four-year-old children have access to preschool programs, with the federal government and the states sharing the costs. He has also proposed federal assistance to improve the quality of child care programs. The major current federal efforts funding these activities are the Head Start and Child Care Development Block Grant programs and a federal tax credit. Gore’s ideas are different from what is being done now in these ways:

1. **Universal access to preschool programs**
   Universal access to preschool programs would be provided to all four-year-old children, regardless of their family’s income. Current federal programs are focused on children from low-income families.

2. **New state grants for preschool**
   Fifty billion in federal funds would be spent over ten years for Gore’s new state grants for preschool, which would be matched in funding by states. This year, $5.3 billion was appropriated for Head Start and $3.55 billion for the Child Care Development Block Grant, which also has a state matching requirement. Gore would continue those programs at higher funding levels, while creating these new state grants.

3. **Improve the quality and accountability of child care**
   Gore would establish a Ready to Learn fund to improve the quality and accountability of child care centers and home day care programs. Participating states would be required to ensure that child care programs meet basic health and safety standards, including background checks of child care workers. States would also have to establish efforts to ensure that children will start school ready to learn and develop a plan to increase the number of accredited child care centers.

4. **Tax credit for families with child care expenses**
   Gore proposes several changes to the federal tax credit now available to families with child care expenses. First, the tax credit would be refundable so that families who have little or no tax liability could receive funds to offset...
their child care costs. Second, Gore would increase the amount of child care expenses a family can claim toward the tax credit from 30% to 50% of their total costs for day care. Finally, families with one parent who stays at home to raise a child under the age of one would be newly eligible for a $500 tax credit.

5. **Tax credit for private employers**
Private employers that expand or operate child care facilities for employees would be eligible for a new tax credit.

**What are some questions that can be asked about Gore’s proposals?**

- **How will this new federal preschool grant program mesh with what the federal government and the states are already doing in this area? Is this just layering another program on top of what is already there?**

- **What happens if funds are not provided to serve all eligible children in the preschool grant program? Will the poorest children have priority for service?**

- **Will all four-year-old children be able to participate in the preschool grant program free of charge, or will there be a tuition cost based on family income?**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, contact John F. (Jack) Jennings, director, Center on Education Policy

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