

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 64

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Public School Teacher

Questions for 2024 Candidates for State Office in North Carolina

1. The most rapid period of brain development happens in the first five years of life, laying the foundation for all future learning, health, and success in school and life. What are your views on the needs of young children (prenatal to age 5) and what steps would you take to address these needs?

As the father of a 2 year old, I know how critical it is for brain development to happen and laying a foundation of success for her. Her mother and I are both educators and know that she needs a multi-faceted approach that integrates education, nutrition, emotional support, quality healthcare and positive community interactions that will offer the best chances success in her life. We are fortunate to be able to provide these things for her but only because of the support we receive from family. I'm very well aware that many of the families I serve don't have that option

2. Every county in North Carolina is considered a "child care desert" with not enough supply to meet the demand. When parents do find child care, the average cost is nearly \$10,000/year, which is higher than the cost of public college tuition. What steps would you take to ensure that families have access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs for their children?

With the cost of child care continuing to be more and more unaffordable for families regardless of whether there are two parents with full-time jobs or a single parent, we must do better. No parent should have to choose who works and who stays at home to help raise and educate their child because of a lack of resources and places for child care. The following should be done and that I will strongly advocate for once in office: However, no one legislature can change this and there has to be agreement from across the aisle to make this a focal point. The things listed will require not only state funding but also federal funding.

1) Increase our child care subsidies from 607 million annually to 850 million annually. This increase will help to provide more families with the opportunities to afford child care. Eliminate or cap the amount of co-payments a family can pay if they are at 100% or higher of the FPL.

2) Higher Wages and Training for child care workers. Why should the person who's teaching your child not be able to afford the child care they work at. That makes no sense. We need to place more value to these positions which help with job satisfaction and expand more opportunities for workers to get professional development to improve education for our young minds.

3) Investing in child care learning centers including home and kinship care. We need to be flexible in providing provisions and stipends for these cares because it's not always going to be accessible and equitable to find quality care.

4) Flexibility in hours when a care center is open. Not everyone is able to work a 9am-5pm job. First responder families are working 12 hour shifts, parents who have to work a 2nd or 3rd shift job should be presented with opportunities that meet their needs as well.

5) County to County partnership. As it becomes more and more impossible to find affordable housing where you work, the trends are heading towards living in a different county. Parents should be able to choose who watches their child. They should be able to receive the same credit if their child attends a day care closer to where they work. We need to make the process easier not harder for parents who are already stressing.

3. Currently, child care teachers in North Carolina earn an average of \$14/hour, less than most retail or service workers. Since 2021, federally-funded Child Care Compensation Grants have provided higher wages and bonuses to more than 40,000 North Carolina early educators, but that funding has expired. This summer, the NC General Assembly appropriated funds to extend the grants for a short time, while also recognizing the need to explore long-term solutions to attract and retain a qualified early childhood workforce. What steps would you take to stabilize and sustain North Carolina's early education system and child care workforce as we approach the end of Compensation Grant funding?

Early child care teachers are teachers. We need to raise the state minimum wage to over \$17 an hour and we should look too specifically invest increasing reimbursement rates to providers who accept subsidies. Other states have invested hundreds of millions in retention by increasing salaries up to \$400 for full-time workers and \$150 for part-time. North Carolina has to be intentional during the budgeting process and make this a priority.

4. Working parents depend on child care, and businesses in nearly every sector have identified child care as a critical factor in their workforce challenges. A new study from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that insufficient child care is costing North Carolina about \$5.65 billion each year. What are your views on how the issues facing our state's child care system impact the state's economy? What specific steps would you take to ensure that our child care system can keep up with the demand as more working families need child care?

North Carolina sits a #1 in the country for business, #38 in teacher pay and #49 in what the state allots for public schools. North Carolina is sitting on 4.4 billion in reserves, so that means we have the money to fund not just early childhood education but also our pre-k through 12th grade public school education. In the previous questions I have answered we need to raise the annual budget spending to 850 million which will help close the child care deserts we have, expand opportunities for low-to moderate income families to afford child care and also provide the training and increase salaries for our workers to deliver a quality education.

5. North Carolina currently spends approximately 1% of the annual state budget on early childhood programs, including Smart Start, NC Pre-K, and Child Care Subsidy Assistance. Nearly all early childhood programs in every county of the state have waiting lists and only serve a fraction of eligible children and families. What are your goals for overall early childhood funding and/or what types of early childhood programs would you support making an investment in at the state level?

We have a constitutional obligation to ensure every child has a fair and funded education. The investment in early childhood needs to be on the same level in every county regardless of zip codes. There is nothing more important than an education and our money and actions need to match.

6. If elected, what would be your top 5 priorities for 2025?

Fully Fund & Protect our Public Schools
Protect and Strengthen a woman's right to body autonomy without government interference
Raise the state minimum wage
Bring accountability, transparency and respect back to Raleigh