

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Kate Compton Barr

District or Office: NC Senate District 37

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Behavioral scientist

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?

Children need, and deserve, a safe, stable, and nurturing environment to allow their brains to grow. That looks like:

- Enough healthy foods
- Developmentally appropriate body and brain activities
- Empathetic care providers

Families need access to all of those in order to support their children. So, we need to

- Expand our food access programs to make healthy foods affordable
- Offer state-funded, high quality early childhood education
- Pay teachers like the experts that they are

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?

Our state should be subsidizing early learning program costs for any family that makes less than \$150,000/year. We must also pay early learning professionals well so that more folks will want to go into that field. Taking care of children well is HARD. Folks should be compensated appropriately for that.

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?

I was the Board President of my community's only nonprofit early childhood education center when the Child Care Compensation Grants came in. They were a game changer for hiring and keeping high quality staff.

We must reinstate funding for those bonuses and salaries immediately.

Then, we must invest our state dollars in subsidizing high quality early childhood education. People will be attracted to a job that pays them well for their work.

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?

Again, it starts with subsidizing the costs for families and ensuring that teachers can get paid well. Yes, that will cost money. But it costs less than the lost economic opportunity cited in the US Chamber of Commerce study. We can do this, we just have to decide to make early childhood education a priority. (And it should be.)

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 must expand access to child care subsidies - that means extending them to higher earners AND offering larger subsidies. I would also like to see us expand access to food programs (children can't learn when they're hungry) and make sure early childhood educators have quality benefits. The number, scope, and support for early childhood learning programs must grow by leaps and bounds.

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

1. Fair maps (Independent Redistricting Commission)
2. Teacher pay raises
3. Gun violence prevention
4. Increase access to abortion
5. Make high quality childcare accessible to everyone

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