

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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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?

The early years of a child's life, from prenatal to age 5, are crucial for brain development and overall growth. During this period, children form the foundational skills and abilities that influence their lifelong learning, health, and success.

I would take the following steps:

- (1) Provide access to prenatal care and education about healthy lifestyles during pregnancy.
- (2) Support policies that ensure pregnant women receive necessary medical attention and proper screenings.
- (3) Promote programs that support new parents, such as parenting classes and home visitation programs.
- (4) Support and fund early childhood education programs, including preschools and child care centers.

Addressing the needs of young children requires a holistic and coordinated approach involving families, communities, healthcare providers, educators, and policymakers. Investing in early childhood development lays the groundwork for a healthier, more successful future for all children."

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?

Addressing the issue of "childcare deserts" and the high cost of early learning programs requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy changes, increased funding, community engagement, and public-private partnerships.

To ensure families in North Carolina have access to high-quality and affordable early-learning programs I would (1) Support the expansion of existing public programs like Head Start and Early Head Start, which provide comprehensive early childhood education and support services. (2) Advocate for increased state and federal funding for early childhood education, including subsidies and grants for low- and middle-income families. (3) Encourage partnerships between the government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to fund and develop child care centers and offer incentives to businesses to provide on-site child care or partner with local providers, making it easier for working parents to access affordable care and (4) Advocate for policies that address the broader socio-economic factors affecting access to child care, such as paid family leave, living wages, and affordable housing.

Ensuring access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs requires a collaborative effort from all sectors of society. By prioritizing early childhood education and making strategic investments, North Carolina can provide families with the support they need to give their children the best start in life.

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?

Stabilizing and sustaining North Carolina's early education system and childcare workforce requires a strategic and comprehensive approach that addresses immediate needs and establishes long-term solutions.

I would (1) Work with policymakers to create a permanent fund for early childhood education, similar to those established for K-12 education, to provide consistent financial support. (2) Create clear career pathways for early educators, including opportunities for advancement into leadership and administrative roles within the early childhood education system. (3) Advocate for the reauthorization and expansion of federal programs that support early childhood education, such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start.

By taking these steps, North Carolina can build a more stable, sustainable, and high-quality early education system that supports both early educators and the families they serve.

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?

The challenges facing North Carolina's childcare system have significant implications for the state's economy. Insufficient childcare options hinder workforce participation and limit economic growth and productivity. When parents, particularly mothers, cannot find affordable and reliable child care, they are often forced to reduce their work hours or leave the workforce entirely. This results in a loss of talent and skills that could contribute to economic growth.

(1) Advocate for sustained and increased public funding for child care, including subsidies for low- and middle-income families. This can help make child care more affordable and accessible. (2) Mobilize businesses, community leaders, and policymakers to advocate for increased investment in the childcare system. (3) Regularly assess the supply and demand for child care across the state to identify gaps and adjust strategies accordingly.

North Carolina can create a robust and sustainable childcare system that supports working families, drives economic growth, and ensures that all children have access to quality early learning opportunities.

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?

To effectively address the current challenges and ensure that every child in North Carolina has access to high-quality early childhood programs, my goals for overall early childhood funding and the types of programs to support at the state level would include the following:

(1) Advocate for increasing the percentage of the state budget allocated to early childhood programs from the current 1% to at least 3-5%. This increase would help to significantly expand the reach and impact of existing programs and support the development of new initiatives. (2) Invest in making NC Pre-K universally available to all eligible 4-year-olds in the state. This includes increasing the number of available slots, improving infrastructure, and ensuring that programs are accessible to families in all regions. (3) Invest in the creation of community-based early learning hubs that provide a range of services, including early education, health care, family support, and workforce development. These hubs can serve as centralized resources for families and help coordinate services across different sectors.

By setting these goals and investing in a comprehensive range of early childhood programs, North Carolina can ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive and succeed, ultimately benefiting the state's economy and society as a whole.

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

Increase Teachers Pay

Goal: Ensure that North Carolina's teacher salaries are competitive nationally to attract and retain talented educators.

Enhancing Early Childhood Education and K-12 Schools

Goal: Ensure that every child in North Carolina has access to high-quality early childhood education and robust K-12 schools.

Investing in Infrastructure and Transportation

Goal: Develop a modern, efficient, and sustainable infrastructure system that meets the needs of all residents.

Fostering Economic Growth and Job Creation

Goal: Create a thriving economy with diverse job opportunities and support for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Civil Rights and Social Justice

Goal: Promote equality and protect the civil rights of all residents.