

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?

Young children need enriching lives during this period of rapid brain development because this is the point in life when they are most able to absorb and learn.

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?

We have to develop a business model that includes state government and business assistance so that we have high quality programs with enough slots to serve the community.

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?

We must extend the Compensation Grant funding until we have a sustainable long-term system in place.

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?

Affordable child care is essential for a good business climate. We need to fund the compensation grants in the near term and then work to connect child care providers with spaces to operate where the rent is free or very low. If we can eliminate the need for providers to pay high occupancy rates we can significantly reduce costs and allow funds to pay for quality teachers.

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?

I think we need to increase the budget percentage allocated to early childhood education to at least 5%. Money spent on early childhood education has the highest return on investment and we need to begin to shift funds in that direction.

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

Long-term sustainable child care funding, increased public school resources, improving incentives for sustainable farming practices, eliminating gerrymandering, and improving the lives of state workers and retirees.