

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?

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?

Increase Funding: Advocate for increased state funding for early learning programs. This could involve expanding budget allocations for existing programs or creating new funding streams. Continue to advocate with federal programs, private sectors, and philanthropic organizations to leverage additional resources including to address the wage gap as well. Subsidies and Vouchers: Increase funding for child care subsidies and voucher programs to make them more accessible to low- and middle-income families.

Early Childhood to School Alignment: As a Wake County school board member and a board member of the NC Partnership for Children, aligning early childhood education with K-12 schooling has been a priority. My goal is to ensure that all early childhood education programs and providers are informed about the standards and programming available at each school. This effort aims to enhance parental awareness of these requirements and programs while fostering shared experiences between early childhood and elementary schools. This alignment is crucial for improving academic success for every child by creating a more cohesive educational journey from early learning through elementary school.

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?

In order to stabilize and sustain the early education system and child care workforce requires a multifaceted strategy. 1) Funding-Reoccurring State Budget Allocation: Advocate for increased state funding for early education and child care programs. Work with legislators to prioritize these areas in the state budget. 2) Increased Wages and benefits: Advocate for higher wages for early childhood educators through state or federal funding increases or dedicated wage supplements. Support the creation of comprehensive benefits packages, including health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave, to make the profession more attractive and sustainable similar to educators.

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?

Subsidies and Vouchers: Expand child care subsidies and voucher programs to make early education more affordable for families and to support program sustainability.

Support for Low-Income Families: Increase financial assistance for low-income families to ensure they have access to quality child care.

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?

My goals for overall early childhood funding would center around ensuring that every child has access to high-quality, equitable early education opportunities that support their development and lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Here are specific goals and types of early childhood programs I would support investing in at the state level:

Subsidies and Vouchers: Expand child care subsidies and voucher programs to make early education more affordable for families and to support program sustainability.

Support for Low-Income Families: Increase financial assistance for low-income families to ensure they have access to quality child care.

Professional Development: Invest accessible and affordable curriculum and training for not only the classroom teachers but for family engagement specialists as well.

I am committed to advocating for universal Pre-K and firmly believe that every child deserves access to high-quality early child care.

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

- 1) Education
- 2) Healthcare (including behavioral health)
- 3) Economy
- 4) Prevention- violence against women and children
- 5) Housing