

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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Current Occupation: Caregiver

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?*

Public Health Initiatives:

Nutrition Programs: Implement or enhance programs like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) to ensure nutritional support for mothers and young children.

Healthcare Access: Improve access to prenatal and postnatal care, ensuring all children receive necessary vaccinations and health screenings.

Parental Education and Support:

Parenting Classes: Offer free or subsidized classes focusing on child development, nutrition, and emotional support techniques.

Support Groups: Establish community groups where parents can share experiences and learn from each other.

Early Childhood Education:

Universal Pre-K: Advocate for and fund universal pre-kindergarten programs that focus on play-based learning, social skills, and cognitive development.

Quality Childcare: Ensure childcare centers meet high standards for safety, nutrition, and educational stimulation.

Community and Environmental Safety:

Safe Housing: Policies to ensure housing is safe for young children, free from lead paint, and other hazards.

Public Spaces: Develop child-friendly public spaces where children can play safely.

Technological and Educational Resources:

Educational Tools: Provide low-cost or free access to educational toys, books, and digital resources that promote learning and development.

Parental Apps: Develop apps that guide parents on child development milestones and activities.

Social Programs:

Playgroups and Community Centers: Establish centers where children can engage in supervised play, fostering social skills and emotional development.

Mental Health Services: Integrate mental health support for both children and parents, recognizing the impact of parental mental health on child development.

Policy Advocacy:

Legislation: Support policies that protect child welfare, including maternity and paternity leave, flexible work hours for parents, and subsidies for low-income families.

Research Funding: Invest in research to continuously update best practices in early childhood development.

Cultural and Media Influence:

Positive Media: Encourage media content that promotes positive messages about child development, health, and education.

Cultural Shifts: Promote a cultural understanding of the importance of early childhood, encouraging community involvement in child-rearing.

By addressing these needs through a combination of policy, community action, and education, society can significantly enhance the developmental outcomes for children in their critical early years, setting a strong foundation for their future.

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?

1. Increase Funding for Child Care Subsidy Programs:

Expand Eligibility: Raise the income threshold for child care subsidies to include more middle-income families, reducing the financial burden and increasing accessibility.

Eliminate or Reduce Co-Pays: For families at or below the poverty line, consider waiving co-pays entirely, and cap co-pays for others at a reasonable percentage of income.

2. Invest in the Early Childhood Workforce:

Salary Increases: Use state funds or federal grants to increase the wages of early childhood educators, making the profession more attractive and sustainable.

Professional Development: Offer scholarships or incentives for child care workers to pursue higher education or professional certifications, which could be tied to salary increases.

3. Enhance Infrastructure for Child Care:

New Facilities: Provide grants or low-interest loans for building new child care centers, especially in underserved areas.

Retrofitting: Support programs that help existing facilities meet high-quality standards through renovations or upgrades.

4. Support Family Child Care Providers:

Grants and Subsidies: Directly support family child care homes, which are crucial in rural areas, by offering subsidies or grants for equipment, training, or home modifications.

Network Development: Create or expand networks where family providers can share resources, reducing costs and improving quality.

5. Implement Universal Pre-K Programs:

State-Funded Pre-K: Advocate for and fund universal pre-K programs, which can alleviate some pressure on the child care system by providing a free or low-cost option for 4-year-olds.

Quality Standards: Ensure these programs meet or exceed national quality benchmarks for early education.

6. Legislative and Policy Reforms:

Tax Incentives: Offer tax credits or deductions for families spending on child care, or for businesses that provide on-site child care facilities.

Regulatory Relief: Streamline regulations to reduce the administrative burden on providers while maintaining quality, potentially reducing costs passed onto families.

7. Public-Private Partnerships:

Corporate Sponsorships: Encourage businesses to invest in or sponsor child care facilities as part of their corporate social responsibility, benefiting their employees directly.

Non-Profit Collaboration: Partner with non-profits to expand services, leveraging their expertise in community outreach and program management.

8. Community Engagement and Awareness:

Parental Advocacy: Empower parents through advocacy groups to push for better child care policies.

Public Campaigns: Run campaigns to highlight the economic and social benefits of investing in early childhood education, building public support for policy changes.

9. Technology and Innovation:

Tech Solutions: Use technology for better matching of parents with available child care slots, or for educational tools that can be used in various settings.

Flexible Models: Support innovative models like part-time or shared care arrangements that might reduce costs for both providers and parents.

10. Data-Driven Decision Making:

Research and Analysis: Continuously gather data on child care needs, costs, and quality to inform policy decisions and resource allocation.

By implementing these steps, North Carolina could significantly improve access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs, addressing the immediate needs of families while also investing in the future workforce and societal well-being. This multi-faceted approach would require collaboration across sectors, significant policy changes, and sustained commitment from both public and private entities.

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?

1. Legislative and Funding Reforms:

Increase State Funding: Advocate for a permanent increase in state funding for early childhood education, aligning with the actual costs of providing quality care. This could include direct funding to providers or subsidies for families.

Tax Incentives: Introduce tax credits for businesses that offer on-site child care or contribute to child care facilities, and for families spending on child care.

2. Wage and Compensation Enhancements:

Salary Standardization: Establish a minimum wage for early educators that is competitive with other sectors requiring similar education levels, potentially tied to cost of living adjustments.

Performance Bonuses: Implement performance-based bonuses or grants for educators who achieve high ratings in quality assessments.

3. Professional Development and Career Pathways:

Scholarships and Grants: Offer scholarships for early educators to pursue higher education or specialized training in early childhood education, potentially tied to service commitments in underserved areas.

Career Ladders: Develop clear career progression paths within the early education sector, with corresponding salary increases for higher qualifications or roles.

4. Workforce Support and Retention:

Health and Retirement Benefits: Ensure that early educators have access to health insurance and retirement plans, which are often lacking in the sector.

Mental Health Support: Provide resources for mental health support, recognizing the emotional labor involved in early education.

5. Infrastructure and Facilities:

Facility Grants: Offer grants or low-interest loans for building or renovating child care facilities, especially in child care deserts.

Safety and Quality Upgrades: Subsidize upgrades to meet or exceed safety and quality standards, which could include technology for educational enhancements.

6. Public-Private Partnerships:

Corporate Sponsorships: Encourage partnerships where corporations sponsor child care facilities or programs, benefiting their employees directly.

Non-Profit Collaborations: Work with non-profits to expand services, leveraging their expertise in community outreach and program management.

7. Policy and Regulatory Adjustments:

Regulatory Simplification: Streamline regulations to reduce administrative burdens on providers while maintaining quality, potentially reducing costs passed onto families.

Flexible Care Models: Support innovative care models like part-time or shared care arrangements that might reduce costs and increase accessibility.

8. Community Engagement and Advocacy:

Parental Advocacy Groups: Empower parents through advocacy to push for better child care policies.

Public Campaigns: Run campaigns to highlight the economic and social benefits of investing in early childhood education, building public support for policy changes.

9. Data-Driven Solutions:

Research and Analysis: Continuously gather data on workforce needs, retention rates, and quality outcomes to inform policy decisions and resource allocation.

10. Emergency Stabilization Funds:

Buffer Funds: Establish a state fund for emergency stabilization to prevent immediate closures of child care centers during funding gaps or crises.

Implementing these steps would require a collaborative effort across government, private sectors, and community organizations. The goal would be to create a sustainable model where early educators are valued and compensated appropriately, ensuring high-quality care for children, which in turn supports economic growth by enabling parents to work or pursue education without the burden of unaffordable child care.

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 impact of North Carolina's child care system on its economy is profound, reflecting a broader national issue where the availability and affordability of child care directly influence workforce participation, economic productivity, and future economic potential. Here's an analysis based on the information provided:

Economic Impact:

Workforce Participation: The lack of affordable child care directly affects workforce participation, particularly among women and low-income families. When child care is unaffordable or unavailable, parents, especially mothers, might reduce work hours or leave the workforce entirely, which reduces household income and economic productivity.

Business Operations: Businesses face challenges in recruiting and retaining employees due to child care issues. This can lead to higher turnover, reduced productivity, and increased costs for training new employees.

Economic Loss: The estimated \$5.65 billion annual loss due to insufficient child care underscores the economic stakes. This loss represents not just in missed workdays but also in reduced consumer spending power, lower tax revenues, and decreased economic activity.

Future Workforce Development: Early childhood education is crucial for developing future skills, health, and social outcomes, which in turn affects the quality of the future workforce.

Steps to Address Child Care Demand:

Funding and Subsidies:

Increase State Funding: Allocate more state funds to subsidize child care, reducing costs for both providers and parents. This could include direct subsidies, tax credits, or vouchers for child care expenses.

Federal Partnership: Advocate for and leverage federal funds to support child care, especially in underserved areas.

Wage Support for Child Care Workers:

Salary Increases: Implement policies or funds to increase wages for child care workers, making the profession more sustainable and attractive, thus reducing turnover and improving quality.

Infrastructure Development:

New Facilities: Support the construction or conversion of facilities into child care centers, especially in child care deserts.

Retrofitting: Provide grants for existing facilities to meet higher standards or expand capacity.

Regulatory and Policy Reforms:

Simplify Regulations: Streamline administrative processes for child care providers to reduce costs without compromising quality.

Flexible Care Models: Encourage innovative models like part-time care, shared care arrangements, or mobile child care services.

Workforce Development:

Training Programs: Offer scholarships or incentives for individuals to enter or advance in the early childhood education field.

Career Pathways: Develop clear career ladders with corresponding salary increases for higher qualifications or roles.

Public-Private Partnerships:

Corporate Sponsorships: Encourage businesses to sponsor child care centers or provide on-site care, benefiting their workforce directly.

Community Involvement: Engage community organizations and non-profits in expanding child care services.

Community and Employer Support:

Flexible Work Policies: Promote employer policies like flexible hours, remote work options, or emergency child care leave to support working parents.

Community Child Care Networks: Develop networks where families can share or exchange child care responsibilities, reducing individual costs.

Data-Driven Solutions:

Research and Analysis: Continuously analyze data on child care needs, workforce issues, and economic impacts to inform policy and resource allocation.

Public Awareness Campaigns:

Advocacy: Increase public and political awareness of child care's economic importance through campaigns and advocacy groups.

Emergency Stabilization:

Buffer Funds: Establish state funds for emergency support to prevent child care closures during economic downturns or funding gaps.

By implementing these steps, North Carolina can not only address the immediate child care crisis but also build a robust system that supports economic growth, workforce participation, and child development, ensuring a stronger economic future. This requires a collaborative effort across government, private sectors, and community organizations, focusing on both immediate relief and long-term sustainability.

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?

Given the current scenario in North Carolina where early childhood programs are underfunded relative to need, here are strategic goals and investment types for enhancing early childhood education:

Funding Goals:

Increase to 3-5% of State Budget: Aim to gradually increase the allocation to early childhood education to at least 3% of the state budget within the next five years, with a long-term goal of reaching 5%. This adjustment reflects the economic and social returns on early childhood investment, as seen in various studies where every dollar invested yields significant economic benefits.

Universal Access to Pre-K: Target funding to ensure that all eligible children have access to pre-K programs, reducing or eliminating waiting lists. This could be phased in, starting with the most vulnerable populations first.

Affordability and Accessibility: Ensure that child care and early education are affordable for all families, with sliding scale fees or subsidies that cover costs for low and middle-income families.

Types of Investments:

Quality Enhancement Grants:

Teacher Salaries and Training: Increase funding for salaries to attract and retain qualified educators. Support continuous professional development through scholarships or training programs.

Facility Upgrades: Grants for centers to meet higher quality standards or expand capacity.

Expansion of NC Pre-K and Smart Start:

Full-Day Programs: Transition from part-time to full-day programs where beneficial, recognizing the needs of working parents.

Rural and Underserved Areas: Special focus on expanding programs in rural or economically challenged areas.

Child Care Subsidy Program:

Broader Eligibility: Expand eligibility criteria for subsidies to cover more families, reducing the financial burden on middle-income households.

Co-Pay Reduction: Lower or eliminate co-pays for the lowest income families.

Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) Network:

Support and Expansion: Increase funding to support and expand FCCHs, which are crucial in rural areas or for flexible care options. This includes training, subsidies, and quality improvement initiatives.

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

Education Funding and Reform:

Increase Funding for Public Education: Address the concerns over diverting funds from public to private schools by ensuring robust funding for public education, focusing on teacher salaries, classroom resources, and infrastructure. This includes supporting programs like Smart Start and NC Pre-K, emphasizing early childhood education's long-term benefits.

Economic Development and Workforce Training:

Programs for Entrepreneurial Development: Especially targeting underrepresented groups, like Black male entrepreneurs, with grants, training, and support networks to foster economic growth within the community.

Vocational and STEAM Education: Enhance vocational training and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) programs in high schools to prepare students for the workforce or higher education.

Affordable Housing and Urban Development:

Incentives for Affordable Housing: Implement policies that encourage the development of affordable housing units, possibly through tax incentives or direct funding for developers who commit to affordability standards.

Healthcare Accessibility and Cost Reduction:

Prescription Drug Prices: Advocate for legislation that caps or regulates the cost of essential medications like insulin, addressing health disparities highlighted in the community.

Elder Care Programs: Support initiatives where family members can receive compensation for caring for elderly relatives, reducing the financial burden on families and improving elder care quality.