

## **2022 North Carolina General Assembly Candidate Questionnaire**

**Name:** Ben Massey

**District:** House District 93

**Party Affiliation:** Democrat

**Current Occupation:** Retired physical therapist

### **1. What are your views on the needs of young children (prenatal to age 5) and what specific steps would you take to address these needs?**

Young children benefit from the security of consistent and loving care and attention provided by family and caregivers. They need safe housing, nutritious food, healthcare, fresh air, opportunities to explore, exposure to language, and plenty of opportunities to play, learn, and be challenged. Mothers and babies need consistent prenatal and post-natal care to promote both physical and behavioral health. And families with young children need a support system and the security that comes with a stable income, and community resources. I am prepared to support Medicaid expansion including services for parents and children, funding for children's services, and public education at all levels. I will reach out to stakeholders who care about families and children for guidance about the steps state government might take to support the needs of families and young children and act on those initiatives that will have the greatest impact. I will work with communities to find solutions to the affordable housing crisis, and I also will work with community agencies to build and strengthen collaboration and cooperation among agencies and organizations seeking to serve young children and their families.

### **2. What steps would you take to ensure that children birth to age five have access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs?**

We need to prioritize excellence in education, including early childhood education, so that all residents of the state regardless of who they are, where they live, or what level of education they are pursuing, are given an equal chance to receive what they need from our public education system. In my opinion, public education at all levels is woefully underfunded. I will support:

- Fully funding Leandro to begin addressing the constitutional requirements of providing academic resources and support for our poorest students, guaranteeing their academic success.
- Expansion of funding to expand preschool programs and to hire additional teacher assistants, school nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists and other related staff.
- Provide easily accessible training and programs to foster quality of care and learning opportunities provided in child care centers.
- Medicaid expansion to increase capital expansion of medical support for exceptional children, low-income family members, and North Carolinian's most vulnerable citizens.

**3. 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 the federal child care relief funding?**

Solving the current child care crisis will not be easy and will require a multi-faceted approach. The cost of child care is beyond affordable for most of our workforce, wages for childcare workers are too low, and the cost of operation of a child care facility or in home care service is unsustainable. The District 93 counties of Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga could easily be described as a child care desert. Yet, to build our economy and stabilize major sectors of our state workforce, we desperately need accessible and affordable child care and early childhood education options for families. Any viable solution will require a cooperative effort of business, industry, government, non-profits, families, and communities working together to identify and implement creative options. I will support a combination of progressive increases in the minimum wage, careful assessment of child care regulations to balance our obligation to assure safety and quality, and consideration of measured state subsidies to replace federal relief funding. I also invite employers, both small businesses and major industries, to consider child care and family friendly policies as a positive step in recruitment and retention of a quality workforce.

**4. What are your views on how to provide all children with access to a sound, basic education beginning in early childhood?**

Every family is unique and the needs of individual children are also unique. We need to find creative ways to offer a variety of options for early learning to meet the needs of all children and their families. I will reach out to early childhood advocates, educators, families, and community leaders to develop an action-oriented agenda to build the infrastructure needed to secure a sound, basic education beginning in early childhood.