

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Mark Burrows

District or Office: NC House District 119

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Retired

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?

We know that the most important period of time for a child's development is birth to approximately age 5. Helping ensure that working class families have the opportunity to support their children during this time period is essential. North Carolina can do a better job funding the Child Care Compensation grants and improving the Child Care subsidy rates, and increasing funding for Smart Start.

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 know what the needs are and how to increase high-quality care that will help families and children. The challenge is to find the financial resources needed to pay for the needed programs. Another way to say this is that we need to be investing in our children and their families.

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?

Steps to help stabilize and sustain NC's early education system include recognizing the value that federally-funded Child Care Compensation Grants have provided and the need to expand and/or enhance them in the future. North Carolina is one of the wealthiest and most diversified states in the nation - we simply have to prioritize what we want to focus our energies and financial resources. I think it should be on our children and those in the workforce helping them.

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 prompt above says it well. From a perspective of supporting working class families, it is important to make sure that we invest in our youth (0-5 in age). From tax policies to supporting our educators to advocating for and empowering parents, there are many things that we can be doing to support our children and ultimately the health of our families and North Carolina.

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?

We know that there are not enough childhood programs to support our children. This is particularly true for the counties in NC House District 119 (Transylvania, Jackson and Swain). I would see greater collaboration between existing early child care providers/programs, the State of NC, and non-profit funding sources. Key to this would be working with our existing schools, including community colleges, as well as our businesses. From an economic development perspective, having a strong work force requires that workers know that their children are being cared for and can thrive.

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

Supporting working class families (affordable and accessible health care, affordable housing, creating sustainable and living wage-jobs), prioritizing public education (at all levels), supporting a woman's freedom of choice, and promoting transparent government.