

## 2024 North Carolina Congressional Candidate Questionnaire

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Congressional District: House of Representatives District 8

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Entrepreneur

### 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, particularly those from prenatal stages to age five, are in a critical period of brain development and foundational learning. During these early years, children's experiences significantly shape their cognitive, emotional, and social development, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning and well-being.

#### Importance of Universal Pre-K and Early Exposure

Universal Pre-K is vital in ensuring that every child has access to quality early childhood education, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Research consistently shows that children who attend high-quality pre-kindergarten programs demonstrate better outcomes in language, math, and social skills. This early exposure not only enhances cognitive abilities but also fosters curiosity, creativity, and a love for learning.

Furthermore, early exposure to diverse experiences—ranging from language and arts to nature and social interactions—plays a crucial role in developing a well-rounded understanding of the world. These experiences stimulate neural connections, support emotional regulation, and enhance social skills, which are essential for navigating future academic and life challenges.

#### Addressing the Needs of Young Children: Key Steps

##### 1. Universal Access to Quality Pre-K Education:

- Implementation: Invest in public and private partnerships to expand access to quality Pre-K programs. This includes training educators, developing age-appropriate curricula, and ensuring that facilities are safe and conducive to learning.

- Outcome: Early education can bridge achievement gaps and provide a strong start for all children, fostering a more equitable society.

##### 2. Parental and Prenatal Support:

- Implementation: Provide comprehensive support to expectant parents, including access to prenatal care, parenting classes, and nutritional guidance. Early parental engagement and education can lead to better health and developmental outcomes for children.

- Outcome: Healthy prenatal environments and informed parenting contribute to better physical, emotional, and cognitive development in children.

##### 3. Holistic Development Programs:

- Implementation: Develop programs that focus not only on academic skills but also on emotional and social learning. Activities that encourage play, exploration, and social interaction are crucial in this stage.

- Outcome: Balanced development ensures children are not only academically prepared but also emotionally and socially equipped to handle future challenges.

##### 4. Early Health and Nutrition Interventions:

- Implementation: Ensure that all children have access to regular health check-ups, vaccinations, and nutritional support. Programs like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) should be strengthened and made universally accessible.
- Outcome: Good health and nutrition are foundational to a child's ability to learn and grow, preventing developmental delays and fostering overall well-being.

#### 5. Community and Environmental Enrichment:

- Implementation: Create opportunities for young children to engage with their community and environment. This includes safe parks, museums, libraries, and cultural centers where families can explore and learn together.
- Outcome: Exposure to a variety of environments and cultures enriches children's understanding and appreciation of the world, promoting empathy and global awareness.

#### Conclusion

Meeting the needs of young children requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that includes access to education, health care, and enriching experiences. By investing in Universal Pre-K and early exposure programs, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. The benefits of such investments extend far beyond individual children; they contribute to a healthier, more educated, and socially cohesive society. In recognizing the profound importance of these early years, we take a crucial step towards a brighter and more equitable future for all.

***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?***

Similar to my answer for the first question, universal pre-k if added to the public education system would significantly level the playing field regardless of income or background, making child care highly accessible and even spurring economic activity through the activation of entrepreneurship and the ability to increase workforce participation of the 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. Without additional funding, child care providers have said that they will have to reduce teacher wages, raise parent tuition, or close their programs. 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?***

If temporary funds are needed prior to shifting to a public system, I'd recommend utilizing a windfall profit tax on the state's largest and most profitable corporations to plug the gap. Mainly looking at Big Pharma, Big Banking & Insurance industries.

***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 in North Carolina?***

There's no denying the connections between a healthy economy, no-cost childcare, and thriving families in NC. If as a society we've agreed that public education is available to all for K-12, then it's time to agree that we are in a

new age where access to a pre-k system would not only benefit the child, but the family, and the local economy. Only if we have the courage to act can something like this come to fruition.

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

1. Remove Corruption from Politics - multipoint approach.
2. Lower tax burden on lower 90% and Raise on Corporations and top earners.
3. Move towards Universal Healthcare.
4. Reform K-12 system.
5. Address immigration reform.