

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 59

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Educator

### 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?**

As an educator, I have witnessed firsthand the critical need for both affordable childcare and early literacy exposure for children from birth to age 5. To address this, our state must implement a subsidy to reduce out-of-pocket childcare expenses for families, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to succeed. Additionally, making prekindergarten universally accessible is essential to dismantling systemic barriers and promoting equity, particularly for Black and Brown students who are disproportionately affected. By taking these steps, we can support every child's potential and contribute to a more equitable education system.

**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?**

Addressing the issue of childcare deserts and high costs requires a multifaceted approach. Here are several key steps I would take to ensure families have access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs: Increase Funding and Subsidies, Support Child Care Providers by providing financial incentives and support to child care providers to improve the quality of care and make it more affordable, Expand Access to Prekindergarten we should work to make prekindergarten universally available, ensuring that all children have access to early learning regardless of their family's financial situation. By taking these steps, we can work towards ensuring that all families have access to affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their children, helping to close the gaps created by childcare deserts and high costs.

**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?**

To stabilize and sustain North Carolina's early education system and childcare workforce as the Compensation Grant funding nears its end, a comprehensive and strategic approach is needed. Secure Long-Term Funding We need to establish a permanent funding stream dedicated to early childhood education and childcare worker compensation. Increase Wages and Benefits We have to push for a wage increase for childcare teachers that reflects their vital role in early childhood development. This should include competitive salaries, health benefits, and retirement plans to make the profession more attractive and sustainable.

**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 issues facing North Carolina's childcare system have profound implications for the state's economy. Insufficient child care strains working families and hinders economic productivity and growth. Increase Public Investment We must advocate for increased state and federal funding for childcare programs. Expand Access to Child Care and implement strategies to increase the availability of childcare options, particularly in underserved areas. Ease of Access Partnerships which means that we begin to cultivate collaborations between businesses, non-profits, and government entities to address child care needs. Companies could be incentivized to offer on-site child care or provide subsidies for employees' child care expenses to eliminate care access from working families.

***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?***

A goal would be to Increase Funding Proportion: Aim to substantially raise the percentage of the state budget allocated to early childhood programs. A target of 3-5% of the annual state budget would more accurately reflect the importance of early education and help meet the growing demand. Eliminate Waiting Lists by expanding capacity to ensure that no eligible child or family is placed on a waiting list. Enhance Quality and Access through improving the quality of early childhood education programs and ensuring that they are accessible to all families, regardless of geographic location or income level. Programs I support investment in NCPREK, SMARTSTART, Child Care Subsidy Asst, Early Intervention Programs, and Infrastructure Investments.

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

Public School Funding

Universal Pre-K

Funding for Early Childhood Education and it's providers

Increased State and Federal funding for small town municipalities to ensure healthy growth

Redefining Affordable Housing and action steps for working families.