

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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Party Affiliation: Democrat

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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?

The needs of young children can be a determinant of their development past age 5 and early childhood care can greatly improve the outcomes of young children as they grow and develop. We need to invest in quality prenatal and postnatal care. Without access to quality prenatal care, complications can go unseen and untreated. New parents, in addition, need to have enhanced access to postnatal care to address early concerns and work to address any delays in development. Not all parents have access to quality and affordable childcare, putting an extra burden on these new parents. Funding for pre-k and Head Start programs needs to be increased to ensure that all parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, have access to quality care that will allow their children to thrive. In addition, we need to address the problems of food insecurity so that children receive the proper nutrition necessary for development. Disparities among care and education for children from varying socioeconomic backgrounds must be researched and addressed to ensure that underserved communities have access to the same quality care.

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?

Having access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs helps our children develop and learn as well as helps working families because they can count on reliable childcare. Properly funding education and expanding access to high quality pre-K, will improve children's readiness for academic success. Livable wages for early childhood educators and ongoing opportunities for professional development would help keep and retain early childhood educators, increase the number of these educators and enhance the quality and reliability of care.

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?

With the imminent expiration of the Compensation Grant funding, it is imperative that the General Assembly prioritize reinstating financial support in 2025 for North Carolina's early education system and child care. Without additional investment, up to 20% of child care programs could close within the year, exacerbating the existing child care deserts present in every county in North Carolina.

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?

A lack of access to reliable and affordable childcare costs the state and local businesses money because workers cannot do their jobs when they do not have child care. It is imperative that the General Assembly prioritize reinstating financial support in 2025 for North Carolina's early education system and child care.

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?

1% of the annual state budget being allocated for early childhood programs is simply not enough if we want to be fully investing in our state's future. As mentioned in NC Early Education Coalition's 2024 legislative goals, we need to create a statewide floor for funding childcare subsidies through grants. Regardless of socioeconomic status, all families deserve to have access to quality early childhood care and education. Increasing the annual funding to early education programs and subsidies would enhance children's outcomes and take a financial burden off of working families. Through the plan established by Leandro, we need to ensure that all children have access to "a sound, basic education," beginning in the early childhood developmental stages.

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

1. Protect reproductive freedom and expand access to reproductive healthcare. Ensure that all North Carolinas have access to affordable healthcare.

2. Fund public education, pay teachers as the professionals they are, get nurses and guidance counselors full time in all of the schools. Ensure that our children have the food, supplies and support they need to be successful in school. All children, regardless of their socioeconomic status and location need to have access to a sound public education.

3. Fund the Department of Transportation. Currently, NCDOT is funded through the gas tax which varies causing projects to be delayed, postponed or canceled. With the rapid growth in North Carolina, we need DOT to have reliable funding so that projects can be completed, and we can build infrastructure to support and sustain our growth. We need to protect our waterways and ensure that runoff is not infecting our drinking water and ecosystem.

4. Ensuring that tax dollars are being spent improving the lives of North Carolinians and not to special interests. With families struggling to pay for the high costs of goods and services, the supermajority has chosen to allocate almost 50% of a billion-dollar surplus to special interests and taxpayer funded vouchers to unaccountable private schools. We need to break the supermajority so that the government can go back to serving its citizens, not special interests.

5. End partisan gerrymandering and protect voting rights. HD 35 was heavily gerrymandered in 2023. Every voter deserves equal access to the ballot, but partisan redistricting threatens this fundamental right. I am committed to ensuring that all voters, regardless of their location, have fair and equal access to the ballot box. My top priority will be advocating for an independent redistricting commission to create fair maps that truly represent the diversity of North Carolina.

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