

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: John Ager

District or Office: NC Senate District 46

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Land Manager, Former Legislator

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?

These early years are the best opportunity to give any child, but especially a child with few family resources, a chance at a successful 'pursuit of happiness.'

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?

Early learning programs have a difficult business model to follow, especially if they want a high quality program with high quality teachers. Because stimulation at this age is so critical, finding the money to subsidize the programs will be a key to success. I would much rather see a robust voucher program for pre-school than the current private school voucher program.

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?

As a NC Senator, I will do whatever it takes to find the money to make child care compensation viable on a long term basis to keep as many programs operating as possible. My own grandchild Lyle had a great experience at a local center, and entered kindergarten with confidence and anticipation. After his first day, he announced the two biggest rules were no poop talk, and no kissing (but hugging is OK)!!!

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?

What a great statistic! Clearly, child care has a huge impact on the ability of parents to hold a full time job. Americans are having fewer children because of the expense of child care. This is even more of an issue for lower income families. Clearly, to have a robust work force we will have to subsidize a robust child care system.

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 need to fund these programs so that there are no longer wait lists. It is easy to imagine that allowing more participants in the work force could pay for the early childhood financial gap, and strengthen families, make sure young students are ready for kindergarten and give working parents peace of mind.

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

Full support of our public schools, including salaries. Making farming and taking care of NC soils profitable. Fighting climate change. Funding pre school programs and cleaning our air and water.