

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Kanika Brown

District or Office: NC House District 71

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Healthcare habilitation worker

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?

Studies show that if you do not provide a strong educational foundation for children at an early age, they will struggle to remain competitive with their peers for the duration of their time in the education system.

Unfortunately, these studies are often not heeded by law and policymakers, leaving early intervention in education by the wayside. While this is both a funding issue, existing programs are often not given the resources they need, it is also an outreach issue. Often parents and families are not aware of the resources available to them, and unknowingly pass up opportunities that would benefit them and their child. We need a more proactive approach from lawmakers in working to guarantee that we not only fund these programs to the level required, but that we make an effort to let constituents know what their options are.

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?

I am a strong believer and advocate for any program that expands access to child care and early learning programs for children. The state needs to give early learning programs significantly more attention and funding - the money we invest in allowing children to get a quality early education and in allowing parents to go back to work pays significant dividends in the long term. I hope that we can adopt a legislative focus that prioritizes long term growth and wellness over short term gains that sacrifice our future.

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?

We need long standing and solidified solutions to increasing the wages of our child care workforce. It is not fair for us to keep child care workers in limbo while they wait to see if the state will step up and do its job to guarantee them the wages and benefits they deserve. North Carolina has the resources needed to provide adequate compensation to workers, we're just refusing to allocate those resources in a way that makes sense. I'm in strong support of reorienting where and how we allocate our resources to provide better outcomes for all North Carolinians

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 Chamber's study illuminates how much money we're leaving on the table. That's something I like to emphasize when talking about funding early childcare development and education - it's not only the morally right thing to do, it's also what makes financial sense! It again comes down to ensuring that our child care system has the resources and visibility required for it to reach families in every corner of our state. I think our past budgets have done a poor job at addressing these concerns on a long-term basis, and will be strongly advocating for these programs in next year's budget.

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?

My overall goal for early childhood funding is to ensure that every family has access to a high-quality early childhood program for their children. The math is the math - investing more today gives us incredible returns in the future, and so we should be bold and decisive in our decisions today. Our future generations will thank us for it. On the individual program basis, I think there are multiple paths that we could take that would produce a positive benefit, and so I would want to consult with leaders in the field and constituents for what the best path forward would be.

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

Supporting our public education system. Putting North Carolina back on strong fiscal ground. Protecting women's healthcare. Ending gerrymandering. Bridging the partisan gap.