

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Justin Matthews

District or Office: NC House District 110

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Order filler/desk clerk

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?

I think child care centers need to be a central focus of our state policy. I also believe that every parent should have at least 12 paid weeks of leave to care for their children. These are two things that can be achieved through appropriate legislation.

I also think that kids should be limited in their exposure to the internet at such a young age. I think parents should be encouraged to limit screen time.

We also need to better compensate our teachers for the work they do.

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 believe there needs to be more funding to these programs so that working parents can afford them without going broke.

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?

I believe ALL educators deserve better pay. Even though the general assembly raised the wages for educators by 7% it is still well below the national average 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?

I feel that failure to help working class parents causes job turnover. People are going to put their children first and I think that policy should reflect that fact. Once again, I advocate here for better funding. But also for policies in the work place that are more lenient to working parents such as paid leaves, and other benefits.

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?

I think we can and should expand this funding. There has been much talk of a budget surplus, so I think that these funds should be invested in programs and things that benefit us all in the future—and that includes our children. I also believe in supporting funding for extra-educators in order for students to be successful and to help cut waiting lists down.

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

1. Working on affordable housing
2. Defending public education
3. Working to raise NC teacher pay to the national average
4. Working to further the fight against the opioid epidemic.
5. Support programs that benefit the working class and lead to a healthy economy.