

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Mike Schietzelt

District or Office: NC House District 35

Party Affiliation: Republican

Current Occupation: Attorney

### 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 have four children—three under age five. These early years are critical to their development. Children this age need to feel safe in order to allow their brains to develop to their potential. I support pro-family policies and economic growth policies that will provide security for families, naturally raise wages, and provide a more secure environment for small children to grow and thrive.

**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?**

Childcare for my oldest son cost more than my house payment when I was a graduate student—it was our single largest family expense. These costs are inflated due in large part to regulatory burdens. Those same regulations create huge barriers to entry for new centers. We can eliminate red tape to open up the childcare market and drive prices down, and we can do that without sacrificing safety for our children.

**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 have to focus on market-driven solutions. Government grants are not the solution—as the question mentions, the federal grants expired and the state had to step in to replace those funds. If we lower the costs of operating a childcare center by eliminating red tape, that will lower tuition costs, lower barriers to entry for new centers, and create an environment in which centers can raise wages.

**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?**

Like most states, North Carolina faces a complex labor shortage. An insufficient number of child care centers and the high costs of child care undoubtedly contribute to that issue. Again—the solutions have to be driven by the market. Remove the red tape. Encourage growth in this industry by removing barriers to entry (while maintaining safety standards). That will cause a natural expansion of the number of child care centers. Increase supply to ease demand and drive costs down.

**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?**

Depending on the proposal, I would support certain investments at the state level to expand early childhood programs. The General Assembly's primary focus has to remain on K-12 programs, which are constitutionally mandated and the subject of an ongoing decades-old lawsuit. But if there was a reasonable proposal to make appropriations over a fixed period of time to kickstart the child care market, I would support it.

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

Combatting inflation; public safety; public education; infrastructure; and supporting small businesses