



2026 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Information

Tom Downing

Running for NC Senate 50

Candidate Responses

Q1: *In your view, what is the purpose and value of public education for North Carolina?*

A1: Provide at the minimum a sound basic education for ALL students. The investment for public education pays dividends to every citizen, every business, and every visitor. A well-educated population is better equipped to participate in our communities and our state. A strong and vibrant public education system shows our students that their state cares about them and is interested in making an investment in their future. What are students left to assume when we are at the bottom of public school spending?

Q2: *Do you believe that the state is adequately funding our public schools? What changes, if any, would you propose related to funding for education in order to ensure that every child has the opportunity to receive a sound basic education?*

A2: Presently I believe that we are not adequately funding our public schools. I would propose that no public funds are given to private schools. School personnel should be paid appropriately so that we are not at the bottom of national rankings. We should reconsider how we fund our public schools and explore ways to make our corporate and individual tax rates reasonable and fair across the board. Everyone benefits when we have excellent public schools so everyone should pay their fair share.

Q3: *As a member of the North Carolina General Assembly, what policies would you champion in order to ensure that all students have access to a qualified, diverse, dedicated educator workforce?*

A3: We should do the following things: significantly raise the pay of teachers and school employees; revisit the salary steps for our teachers so that experienced teachers are rewarded for their longevity instead of being punished; restore additional pay for advanced degrees; assist low-wealth counties and counties with a high percentage of public lands in paying teacher supplements; ensure that all teachers have adequate planning periods and duty free lunch time; pay our school staff and paraprofessionals so



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they may take advantage of training opportunities during the school year and over the summer; pay all school personnel who attend IEP meetings after school hours; provide an excellent health insurance program for all public school employees (the same one that's offered to the legislators;) reach out in multiple formats to accept public comments from public school teachers, paraprofessionals, staff, parents, community members and school board members every time the General Assembly proposes legislation that impacts their schools; ensure that public school retirees receive timely cost of living adjustments; fund school infrastructure programs so school buildings aren't left to have leaky roofs, non-working HVAC, unsafe/unsavory playgrounds because who wants to work in a derelict and dilapidated building?

Q4: *Do you support the recent expansion of North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship voucher program? What accountability measures should private schools receiving public tax dollars be held to?*

A4: No. Private school should receive no public funding at all.

If we are going to siphon off public funds to private schools they should be held to the same accountability measures as the schools receiving public tax dollars.

Q5: *What do you think the General Assembly should do to ensure schools are equipped to address student well-being and mental health needs?*

A5: Ensure that all students have access to the resources that they NEED rather than the resources that are available.

Students and their caregivers need to have the resources provided to them when they need it for as long as they need it rather than having to jump through hoops to qualify, which delays necessary services and puts a cap on the amount of assistance that is provided.

Students and their caregivers need assistance when their issues FIRST arise instead of waiting for years until they exhibit extreme behaviors in the school, the home and or the community.



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Every school building needs an adequate number of school nurses and the number of trained mental health professionals that are needed for that building (it's not a formula situation it should be based on the need.)

Reconfiguring the way we feed our students would go a long way to helping them learn. Free breakfast and lunch programs that provide healthful, delicious meals should be the goal. We should serve the kind of meals that when visitors have lunch in the school they should ask if they can come back again for another meal sometime!

Every elementary student must have access to free recess period(s) each day.

Art, music, physical education, foreign language, and other "special" classes should be required for the lower grades and available for upper grades so that students have a well-rounded experience in the public school.

Generally when the school day is over students should not leave the school building and enter their lives -- their school experience should be an exceptional one so that their schooling is one integral and beloved part of their whole life.

The public school can and should be the bedrock of the community.

When elected officials denigrate public schools through intentional policies, lack of funding, extraneous statutes, and overall disdain for teachers they demean and diminish the whole local community. We must not let this war on public education continue.
