



2026 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Information

April Cook

Running for NC Senate 34

Candidate Responses

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

A1: Public schools are the foundation of opportunity for every child, regardless of income, ability, or zip code. They build our workforce, strengthen our communities, and are a public good the state has a constitutional duty to fund and protect.

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: No. North Carolina spends roughly \$5,600 less per student than the national average and ranks near the bottom nationally in funding effort. I support phased, sustained increases in per-pupil funding — including the \$3,000 per-student investment NCAE has called for — paid for by freezing tax cuts for corporations and billionaires rather than continuing to cut revenue the state needs to meet its constitutional obligation.

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: I would support competitive, market-based starting pay and step increases that at minimum match neighboring states like Virginia; restoring advanced-degree pay and compressing the flat years in the salary schedule to reward veteran educators; protecting pension and retiree health benefits, including restoring retiree health care for new hires; and a livable wage for classified staff so shortages across bus drivers, nutrition workers, and support staff don't compound the classroom teacher shortage.



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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. I support returning income caps to 2019 levels so vouchers target families who lack options, rather than subsidizing families already able to afford private school. Public dollars belong in public schools first. Any private school accepting public funds should meet the same transparency, accountability, and student-outcome standards public schools are held to.

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: Student mental health has to be treated as a core part of a sound basic education, not an add-on. Right now, most North Carolina schools fall far short of recommended ratios for counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses, and burnout combined with chronic underfunding has made it hard to recruit and keep the staff we do have. I would push the General Assembly to fully fund these positions to meet national best-practice ratios, with dedicated, sustained funding rather than one-time grants that disappear after a budget cycle. I also see student well-being as connected to basic needs. That's why I support universal school breakfast and lunch, especially as federal SNAP cuts put food assistance at risk for hundreds of thousands of North Carolina students. Finally, I'd direct savings from restoring voucher income caps and freezing tax breaks for corporations and billionaires toward these direct student services.
