



# Who's for Kids and Who's JUST KIDDING?

July 2008

## Ask Questions and Make Your Vote Count For the Children of North Carolina

On November 4, North Carolinians will go to the polls to elect all 170 state legislators, 13 U.S. Representatives, a U.S. Senator, and the entire Council of State including the Governor. These officials will make decisions that shape our children's lives today and well into the future. But children can't vote. It is up to us to make sure children's issues, from public schools to health care, are an important part of the political debate.

### Ask Candidates for their Positions on Children's Issues!

North Carolina ranks near the bottom of the nation on many conditions for children.

- One in five children grows up in poverty.
- Nearly nine in 1,000 babies are born with low birth-weight.
- Nearly nine in 1,000 babies die before their first birthday.



The decisions made by elected officials can provide families with tools for success or can erect barriers to that success.

Adults need to ask candidates to make **children a priority** by investing in solutions that improve conditions and opportunities for North Carolina's children and their families. Let candidates know that your support for them hinges on their support for children. Ask the questions to determine *who's for kids and who's just kidding?*

### Remember to Register and to Vote!

The general election is **Tuesday, November 4**. The voter registration deadline is **5 p.m. Friday, October 10**.

Voter registration forms are available online from the State Board of Elections at: <http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/>. (Click on "Voter Registration" and then "Registration Forms.") The form must be mailed to the board of elections office in your county. Forms may also be obtained from public libraries and high schools. To determine where to mail your voter registration form and where to vote, visit: <http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/>.

You may also register to vote while conducting official business with or applying for benefits at other government agencies, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, county Departments of Social Services, and the Employment Security Commission.

**One-Stop Registration & Voting** - A North Carolina resident who is qualified to register to vote may register In-Person and vote at a one-stop site in the person's county of residence during the *One-Stop Absentee Voting* period. One-stop registration and voting will begin on October 16, 2008 and end on November 1, 2008. For more information on One-Stop Voting, visit: <http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/>. (Click on "Voter Registration" and then "How to Register.")

The State Board of Elections also provides information on where to vote at: <http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/>. Click on "Voting in North Carolina" and then "Locate Your Polling Place."

## KNOW THE FACTS:

North Carolina's children are growing up with immediate barriers to achieving well-being that directly impact the economic growth and social cohesion of our state. Issue by issue, voters need to know how children are doing and candidates must be asked about their plans to improve outcomes for all of North Carolina's children.

### Health and Safety

- **One-in-nine children in North Carolina lacks health insurance coverage.**<sup>1</sup> These 260,000 uninsured children would fill over 10,400 classrooms. North Carolina is second only to Missouri in the loss of private health insurance, a trend that especially affects children (who often receive health insurance through the insurance policies of their working parents).<sup>2</sup>
- **One-in-five entering kindergartners has untreated tooth decay.**<sup>3</sup> Not enough dentists and lack of dental insurance leaves these children unprepared to learn. Access to dental care and healthy foods are important preventive steps to ensure that children are able to learn free of pain.
- **Nearly one-third (30 percent) of children aged 12 to 18 are overweight.**<sup>4</sup> Children who are overweight are more likely to have high cholesterol and high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.

### QUIZ THE CANDIDATES:

**QUESTION:** What are your plans for sustaining and improving health coverage for North Carolina's children?

**QUESTION:** What strategies would you adopt to prevent high levels of tooth decay among school-aged children?

**QUESTION:** What is the appropriate role of state and local government in reducing childhood obesity?

**Question: What will you do to make North Carolina the best place to be and raise a child?**

### Early Care and Education

- **One-in-six low-income parents in North Carolina in 2003 had to quit or change a job due to problems with child care.**<sup>5</sup> Child care subsidies are an important resource to help working parents afford safe, reliable child care. However, due to inadequate funding, in 2008 nearly 28,000 children whose families qualify for child care subsidies are not receiving services.<sup>6</sup>
- **It is estimated that up to half of school problems and eventual school dropout start with children entering school developmentally behind.**<sup>7</sup> In North Carolina, of the children under age six enrolled in early care and education centers, 58 percent of them are in high-quality programs.<sup>8</sup> However, only 40 percent of children receiving subsidies are in high-quality care.<sup>9</sup>
- **One-in-ten North Carolina students gets suspended from school – a rate 45 percent higher than the national average.** African American males and females are three times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts.<sup>10</sup> Fewer than 2-in-3 students complete high school in four years.<sup>11</sup>

### QUIZ THE CANDIDATES:

**QUESTION:** What would you do to make sure that children have safe, reliable care when their parents go to work?

**QUESTION:** What strategies do you support to reduce suspensions and dropouts and improve student achievement?

**QUESTION:** How should state policies and funding help more children start school ready to succeed and graduate ready to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy?

1 Action for Children North Carolina, *2006 North Carolina Children's Index*, April 2006.

2 Economic Policy Institute, *Prognosis Worsens for Workers' Health Care*, October 2005.

3 Action for Children North Carolina, *2007 Child Health Report Card*, October 2007.

4 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *State Differences in Rates of Overweight or Obese Youth*, March 2006. Physical exercise data from the State Center for Health Statistics, Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Program, 2005.

5 Action for Children North Carolina, *Profiles of N.C. Children: Outcomes by Income*, December 2005.

6 Action for Children North Carolina, *Putting the Pieces in Place: A North Carolina School Readiness Report*, June 2008.

7 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative*, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.gettingready.org/matriarch/d.asp?PageID=303&PageName2=pdfhold&p=&PageName=Getting+Ready+%2D+Full+Report%2Epdf>.

8 Calculation by Action for Children North Carolina, July 15, 2008. Data from N.C. DHHS, Division of Child Development.

9 Action for Children North Carolina, *Putting the Pieces in Place: A North Carolina School Readiness Report*, June 2008.

10 Action for Children North Carolina, *One Out of Ten: The Growing Suspension Crisis in North Carolina*, September 2005.

11 Graduation Rate: Action for Children N.C., *The 2006 North Carolina Children's Index*, April 2006; Dropout Rank: A.E. Casey Foundation, *2006 Kids Count Data Book*.

## Child Abuse and Neglect

- Every day in North Carolina, over 300 cases of child abuse and neglect receive assessment, and 47 cases are confirmed by Child Protective Services (CPS). Additionally, CPS connects more than 10,000 families a year with extra support or services to help ensure that children remain safe while in their own homes.<sup>12</sup>
- From 2001 to 2005, the Division of Social Services oversaw many improvements to the Child Protective Services program, resulting in a decline in repeated maltreatment, an increase in adoption, and more foster children in stable placements.<sup>13</sup>
- Even so, almost 11,000 children in North Carolina do not have permanent homes.<sup>14</sup> They are in the custody of a county's Department of Social Services due to abuse, neglect or dependency, or because their parents voluntarily placed them for adoption. Almost 1,400 children were adopted in North Carolina last year.<sup>15</sup>

### QUIZ THE CANDIDATES:

**QUESTION:** What is the role of government and the community in preventing or detecting child abuse and neglect?

**QUESTION:** What strategies do you support to recruit, train, and retain foster and adoptive parents?

**QUESTION:** How should government support and help parents with their parenting responsibilities?

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**Ask the tough questions and let candidates know that your support for them hinges on their support for children!**

## Juvenile Justice

- North Carolina has experienced a decline in juvenile crime and YDC commitments. Since Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils (JCPCs) began funding programs and services in 1999, commitments to Youth Development Centers (training schools) have declined over 67 percent.<sup>16</sup>
- About 23,000 youth annually receive locally-provided juvenile justice services, but funding has not kept pace with demand or inflation. Funding for JCPCs is lower now than in 2002.<sup>17</sup> Local law enforcement, parents, schools and social services comprise local JCPCs across the state, and distribute funds to community-based services for youth in the juvenile system or at risk of delinquency, and their families. Services include restitution to victims, therapies, education, parent and family counseling, punishment and rehabilitation.
- Most youth entering North Carolina's juvenile justice system have encountered numerous difficulties during their lives, including abuse/neglect (21 percent), domestic discord (24 percent), serious school problems (59 percent), substance abuse (43 percent), and/or mental health needs (75 percent).<sup>18</sup>
- Children are nearly 34 times more likely to commit additional crimes if placed in the adult criminal system rather than the juvenile system, yet North Carolina is one of only two states in the U.S. that automatically prosecute all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults, with no exceptions.<sup>19</sup> Sixteen and seventeen-year-olds are tried, sentenced and incarcerated just like adults in the N.C. criminal justice system with very few accommodations for their developmental level.

### QUIZ THE CANDIDATES:

**QUESTION:** What policies do you support to ensure that more troubled teens have access to preventive services, quality education and other community supports to avoid or minimize interaction with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems?

<sup>12</sup> Action for Children North Carolina, *The 2007 Child Health Report Card*, October 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Action for Children North Carolina, *The 2006 North Carolina Children's Index*, April 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Action for Children North Carolina, *The 2006 North Carolina Children's Index*, April 2006.

<sup>15</sup> N.C. Kids' Adoption and Foster Care Network. Available online at: <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/adopt/aboutchildren.html>.

<sup>16</sup> N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *2007 Annual Report*. Available online at: <http://www.ncdjjdp.org/statistics/reports/ar2007/>.

<sup>17</sup> Calculation by Action for Children North Carolina, June 9, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *2007 Annual Report*. Available online at: <http://www.ncdjjdp.org/statistics/reports/ar2007/>.

<sup>19</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Task Force on Community Preventive Services. "Effects on Violence of Laws and Policy Facilitating the Transfer of Juveniles from the Juvenile System to the Adult System." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, April 2008, p. 14.

## Juvenile Justice (cont.)

**QUESTION:** Do you support raising the presumptive age of adult criminal prosecution to 18 to better protect and treat youth? What do you view as the advantages and disadvantages of such a change?

**QUESTION:** How will you ensure that the N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is adequately funded to provide safety, treatment and education to the youth they serve?

## Economic Security

- **Nearly half of all children in North Carolina (44 percent) live in low-income households.**<sup>20</sup> North Carolina ranks 36th in child poverty, with 1-in-5 children living in households below the Federal Poverty Level—\$20,444 for a family of four.<sup>21</sup>
- **Children growing up in families with incomes above 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and above N.C.'s median household income have better outcomes.** These children are more likely to enjoy excellent physical and dental health, more likely to be read to as young children, more likely to participate in afterschool activities and sports and less likely to repeat a grade than their lower income peers.<sup>22</sup>
- **It is estimated that nearly 40,000 children will be directly impacted by the foreclosure crisis in North Carolina.**<sup>23</sup> Rising food and fuel costs are affecting a significant proportion of the children in the state as well.

## **QUIZ THE CANDIDATES:**

**QUESTION:** What state policies are appropriate to make sure that struggling, working families have the tools they need to succeed and provide for their children?

## Economic Security (cont.)

**QUESTION:** What investments will you make to ensure that all children have the opportunity to be financially stable adults?

**QUESTION:** In this time of economic slowdown, how will you work to ensure local economies are not hard hit and families are supported?

## Invest in What Works

- **Evidence-based programs, like early childhood development programs, have demonstrated their return on investment.** Studies show that every \$1 invested in high-quality early care and education returns \$7 or more to families and society.<sup>24</sup>

**QUESTION:** What are your criteria for investing state dollars?

## ACTION FOR CHILDREN NORTH CAROLINA

The **VISION** of Action for Children North Carolina is that our state will be the best place to be a child and raise a child.

The **MISSION** of Action for Children North Carolina is to advocate for child well-being by educating and engaging all people across the state to ensure that our children are healthy, safe, well-educated and have every opportunity for success.

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20 Action for Children North Carolina, *Child Poverty in North Carolina: A Preventable Epidemic*, April 2008.

21 Annie E. Casey Foundation. *2008 KIDS Count Databook*, June 2008.

22 Action for Children North Carolina, *Profiles of N.C. Children: Outcomes by Income*, December 2005.

23 Lovell, Phillip and Julia Isaacs, "The Impact of the Foreclosure Crisis on Children," May 2008. First Focus: Washington, D.C.

24 Schweinhart, Lawrence J., "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project Through Age 40." Available online at: <http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/perrymain.htm>.