



# Caring for Our Children

Sophia's comprehensive plan to care  
for North Carolina's future leaders.



# Platform of Care

## An Overview



Sophia Chitlik is driven by a vision to make North Carolina the best state in the country for working families and the businesses they power.

**How do we do that?** By caring for children, caregivers, and communities.



**Our Children**



**Our Caregivers**



**Our Community**

**In this document we focus on Our Children.**



# Caring for Children

## Sophia has spent almost half of her career working in workforce and education.

Sophia dedicated most of her early career to working in workforce education, first for a network of schools and then at the US Department of Labor, working to get our nation back on track during the economic crisis. Eventually, she joined [The Future Project](#), an organization that was piloting something totally new: the [Dream Director](#), part coach and part educator. Dream Directors were representative of the schools they were placed in, and their job was to support students in finding their passions and purpose. Sophia visited dozens of schools all over the country and met and supported hundreds of high school students.

## Our schools aren't always living up to their promise as places of purpose and possibility.

Every time Sophia walks into an elementary school, she is transported right back to her own neighborhood public school and the feelings of joy and safety it evokes. However, not every student feels that way about school. Our public schools are not living up to their potential, and that is because we have chronically starved them of the resources they need to thrive. According to Education NC, North Carolina's cost-adjusted per pupil funding level was 48th in the nation out of 50 states. Public education is under attack in Raleigh, where the General Assembly has voted in favor of privatizing education and defunding public schools by diverting increasing resources to charter schools.

## We need to get our schools back on track.

Funding schools the same way we've been doing it since Sophia was a child isn't going to prepare our children for success. That's why Sophia's platform reflects her understanding that education is about more than just academics: it's about ensuring the social and emotional wellbeing of students, supporting families, training the next generations of workers and empowering educators and staff. The vast majority of North Carolina's children will be educated in our public schools. Our children can excel if we support them. If we fail them, our families and our economy will be weakened. We can't let down entire generations.

## Sophia's top three priorities to create opportunity and education at every age are:

### 1. Public schools.

Ensure every child age three and older has access to high-quality publicly funded education.

### 2. Career readiness.

Expand affordable access to community college and job training programs like apprenticeships.

### 3. Healthy kids.

Support the mental and physical health of children beginning before they are born and throughout their adolescence.



# 1. Public Schools

**Sophia would work hard to ensure every child ages three and older has access to high-quality publicly funded education.**

## **As State Senator, Sophia would champion:**

- **Expanding access for 3 and 4 year-olds:**

Sophia strongly supports increasing public funds to make NC Pre-K a universal option for all of North Carolina's four year-olds. She also supports expanding the program to reach three year-olds, beginning with public-private pilot programs. Early childhood care is an economic issue, and a workforce issue: investing in preschool saves

taxpayers money over time, which is why the Chamber of Commerce is such a strong supporter of expanding early childhood options. Sophia supports the [tri-share](#) cost-sharing model and is eager to expand these pilot programs.

- **Making teacher pay competitive:** Sophia went to public schools for most of her life and knows that teachers aren't in it for the money. Even so, Sophia believes that we must make teacher pay

competitive with private sector employment that requires the same credentials and time commitment. Sophia sees the way that other purple states like Texas have successfully boosted teacher pay, and believes we can, too. She believes teachers must be paid a starting salary of at least \$45,000 a year for their hard work. Sophia also believes in replicating successful incentive programs for teachers, including tuition reimbursement and mortgage assistance. Sophia believes that there are no high-performing schools without high-performing teachers.

- **Investing state money into public schools only:** Sophia is against the current voucher program, which diverts over one hundred million dollars away from public schools that need this money to pay and retain teachers and maintain existing school buildings. School vouchers blur the lines between church and state, increase segregation, and burden cities and counties with the cost of maintaining the physical plants of public schools while stripping money from their budgets.
- **Increasing equity in our schools by ending inequitable discipline policies, expanding access to APs, and recruiting BIPOC teachers:** Sophia is strongly against bills like HB 188, which expands suspension criteria and will disproportionately keep Black kids out of school. We need to hold our education system accountable for equity across the board, including with AP and IB classes, which are so often less available in majority Black schools. Most critically, we need to expand the number of BIPOC teachers and create strong incentives that make it more attractive for BIPOC North Carolinians to become educators. The data around culturally appropriate educators is overwhelming, including reports that [“after having two Black teachers, Black students’ likelihood of enrolling in college increases by 32%.”](#)

- **Strengthening our public schools and keeping charter schools accountable:** Sophia believes that we must protect our students by cracking down on low-performing charter schools by not reauthorizing them, especially the [17% of charters that are continuously low-performing](#) and aren’t serving our kids. She would not have voted to reauthorize these chronically low-performing charters, which Senator Woodard did earlier this year.
- **Increasing local control of schools:** Sophia is in favor of letting local districts decide their curriculum and professional development requirements for teachers. Sophia is also in favor of allowing schools to control their school safety budgets so that they can bring in restorative practices instead of SROs. There is not a one size fits all approach.
- **Eliminating the arbitrary cap on special needs funding:** North Carolina is one of only a handful of states that caps funding for special needs students. [These caps haven’t changed since 1993](#)—but the numbers of children who qualify for special needs funding have skyrocketed. We need to stop arbitrarily punishing districts and kids who need extra support. Sophia is in favor of a weighted model for funding Exceptional Children.
- **Meeting the needs of children with autism:** Right now in our state the unmet needs waiting list for children with autism is [16,000 people](#). We need to be offering families greater support. North Carolina’s autism rate for eight year-olds is almost [double the national average](#). Sophia has multiple cousins with autism and understands the value of early intervention. SB 103 was a great start, but families need more help, and our state needs more trained professionals to meet those needs. As State Senator, Sophia would work to create legislation that creates incentives for more people to become ABA therapists, including student loan forgiveness.



## 2. Career Readiness

**Sophia would work hard to expand affordable access to community college and job training programs like apprenticeships.**

### **As State Senator, Sophia would champion:**

- **Expanding apprenticeship programs:** Expand affordable access to direct entry and community college and job training programs like apprenticeships. According to the nonpartisan National Governors Association, apprenticeship programs have a [\*\*“44 percent return on investment for employers.”\*\*](#) If elected, Sophia would work

with her colleagues to introduce legislation modeled after a program in Alabama that creates increased employer incentives for new registered apprenticeship programs.

- **Expanding trade school education:** Sophia was frustrated that HB 282, which will study current and future opportunities for North Carolinians to enter the trades, stalled in the Senate. Sophia is still hopeful that a potential study will yield

important lessons for our legislators on how to expand trade education, including to our most vulnerable youth.

- **Building up the early childhood education workforce:** We need to continue stabilizing our early childhood workforce and incentivizing more people to go into the field. With just [61 people for every 100 early childhood jobs](#), nothing should be off the table. We need tuition assistance, state emergency funding, and massive public-private partnerships to fill this gap.
- **Helping community college students graduate:** In Durham, the community college graduation [dropout rate is about 40%](#). If elected, Sophia would work to help replicate the successful ASAP program, which provides comprehensive support to community college students and [increases graduation rates by 11-15%](#).
- **Creating a green jobs pipeline:** In order to meet the demands of the energy transition, we're going to need workers with new skills. Our community college system is well designed for this task, and Sophia believes in providing it with increased resources to train and graduate workers who are prepared to build our clean energy future.
- **Doubling the size of our Career and College Promise Program:** North Carolina currently has an excellent program that allows for students to dually enroll in high school and college simultaneously, empowering them to graduate high school with college credit. We must provide state funds to enrolled students to cover the costs of books and other student fees.
- **Expanding AP Course Enrollment:** Sophia believes that all students should be able to enroll in AP courses and believes in dropping the prerequisite requirements. We are trending in the right direction as a state, but we can do more, especially to encourage young people of color to enroll at the rates of their white peers.
- **Expanding summer job programs:** At the Department of Labor, Sophia learned about the enormous benefits of summer job programs, which offer young people the chance to earn and learn. Sophia would fight hard to expand summer jobs in the budget process and believes this is an area of bipartisan potential as summer jobs have been [shown to reduce crime](#).
- **Piloting for-credit internships for high school students:** Leveraging the power of private-public partnerships, Sophia envisions creating and funding a pilot program where high school juniors and seniors can gain exposure to the workforce and earn credit at the same time. This would be nearly revenue-neutral for the state and a result of robust private-public partnerships.



## 3. Healthy Kids

**Sophia would work hard to support the mental and physical health of children beginning before they are born.**

**As State Senator, Sophia would champion:**

- **Making sure no kid goes hungry:** Sophia believes we should make school lunches free, healthy, and accessible. She is in favor of eliminating all school lunch debt and ending this cruel practice. Sophia believes in expanding the summer feeding program to include off-site locations. During COVID, we proved that this could happen,

and we must do it again. No child should go hungry in our state. Sophia supports HB 844, The Free Meals for Schools Act.

- **Supporting the mental health and wellness of our school-aged North Carolinians:** We have a massive mental health crisis post-COVID, and Sophia believes that schools should be central resource centers for students, staff, and families. Sophia believes in creating state versions of the



the Improving Mental Health Access for Students Act, the Improving Mental Health and Wellness in School Act and the Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Act to address these challenges head on. She wants to make North Carolina a leader in supporting our young people's mental health and wholeness.

- **Supporting LGBTQIA+ youth:** We know that LGBTQIA+ youth are already at risk of suicide at [four times the rate of their peers](#). In spite of this, our legislature continues to bully these vulnerable young people with bills that keep them out of sports and limit their access to life-saving health-care. If elected, Sophia will stand up for our LGBTQIA youth in the Senate. Sophia believes gender-affirming care is a critical component of healthcare, and that families and their medical providers should be trusted to make decisions without government interference.
- **Keeping our parks safe:** Sophia is deeply alarmed by the levels of lead and PFAS in our local parks. As State Senator, Sophia would pioneer legislation authorizing the Department of Health to monitor and abate lead in our parks the same way it already does with dangerous lead paint.
- **Expanding access to midwifery care:** Sophia is strongly in favor of making it legal for Certified Professional Midwives to practice in North Carolina (as they do in 36 other states) and supports creating a Senate companion to House Bill 751. This will create a critical expansion of the birth workforce and make it more accessible for Black and Brown people to become practicing midwives.
- **Passing the North Carolina MOMnibus Act:** Sophia is proud to support Senator Natalie Murdock's Senate Bill 467. This bill would specifically address core drivers of Black maternal mortality, including investing in a more diverse birth workforce.
- **Expanding Medicaid to cover home birth and birth center birth:** Currently, these services leave those who receive Medicaid footing massive bills, meaning choice is only available for those who can afford it. District 22's nearest birth center is 120 miles away. This is unacceptable, and it's a major driver of maternal mortality. As State Senator, Sophia would champion legislation to make sure that Medicaid covers the true cost of out of hospital birth. This will save money, and, most importantly, it will save lives.
- **Making doulas accessible to people who receive Medicaid:** Sophia supports the revival of legislation such as House Bill 421 and Senate Bill 732. Doulas are proven to reduce maternal mortality, especially for women of color.



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