

Child Care
WAGES[®]
Program

2022-2023
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY



The Child Care WAGE\$® Program was created in response to research-based evidence showing that the quality of care children receive is lowered by high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education. The combination of a lack of resources and efforts to maintain affordability for parents means many early childhood teachers are often severely underpaid and leave the field for better paying jobs, and others never consider the profession as an option.

WAGE\$ provides tiered education-based salary supplements to teachers, directors and family child care home providers working with children from birth to five with the goal of improving the retention, education and compensation of this workforce. While supplements alone cannot solve the compensation crisis, they are a critical strategy until early educators receive the base pay, benefits and respect they deserve for the important work they do. As child care programs struggle to attract and retain staff in the current employment climate, WAGE\$ can help turn the tide on turnover and decrease the financial stress experienced by an essential workforce.

In North Carolina, WAGE\$ is made possible through a funding collaboration between local Smart Start partnerships that elect to participate and the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Child Care Services Association administers the program for participating counties across the state and extends gratitude on behalf of the participants to these supportive funders. Please see page 08 for a 2022-2023 funder list.



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Directors see WAGE\$ as an important strategy to help meet the needs of their staff and their programs, and staff feel valued by their employers when information about WAGE\$ is shared

Anecdotally, turnover continues to be a problem for early childhood programs. Employers are challenged to find teachers at all, let alone keep them for extended periods of time. One director, for example, said, “We used to see a lower turnover but these days, turnover is bad. No one wants to work without a high pay rate on the spot. ... The workforce is a challenge right now.” The stabilization grants temporarily provided by the state have been used to provide compensation and/or benefits to try and curb turnover and make the field more attractive. WAGE\$ is another strategy that can help make it possible for committed teachers to stay despite the trend. One director stated, “With the shortage of teachers and/or people entering the field of early childhood, I believe the supplements will encourage those that are currently in the field to remain there and can attract new people. Also, it shows an appreciation for those that are currently in the field.” Another said, “In a field where the wages are incredibly low, this type of supplement is crucial to attracting and retaining staff.” Having compensation strategies like these will be an essential part of the solution to rebuild and stabilize the workforce going forward.

Offering WAGE\$ supplements to qualified staff as part of their overall compensation package can be an important strategy for employers. As one director stated, “I tell them about WAGE\$ when I orient them right off the bat. ... They have longevity here. I tell them about WAGE\$ and encourage them to get education, using the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Program. I encourage them to participate. WAGE\$ is extra income for my staff. It has been a blessing through the years. I support this program and what it does 100%. It enhances my staff’s ability to stay here on top of what we try to do to support them.”

Participating teachers also explained that they feel valued by their directors when they share information about the WAGE\$ opportunity. For example, one teacher said, “Child Care WAGE\$® has been a financial blessing. I feel appreciated and recognized for my work by my director. Child Care WAGE\$® is one way my director shows appreciation for my work. I worked at another child care facility and was not told about WAGE\$.”

According to directors, the additional compensation makes a difference for staff and their families, the children in care and for their programs overall.



*“This supplement is important to our staff because child care professionals are undervalued and underpaid. This is a **great encouragement for teachers** who further their education, which benefits the children in our centers and gives confidence to parents who know that their children are being **taught by well-informed teachers.**”*

Participants experience less financial stress and are more satisfied with their jobs

Economic insecurity impacts teacher well-being, and can have consequences for the quality of interactions they have with the children in their care. Studies continue to highlight how stress and adversity can affect the health of teachers and thus how effective they can be in promoting the supportive environments and engaging interactions children need. Especially now, easing financial stress is critical for the participants, their families and for the children they serve. WAGE\$ enhances their compensation and recognizes their achievements.

\$1,219

Average six-month supplement = \$1,219 (an increase of approximately \$1.17 per hour for full-time employment)

4,122

4,122 paid in 63 participating counties

98%

98% of the WAGE\$ participant survey respondents said WAGE\$ helps ease financial stress and 95% said WAGE\$ helps them feel more satisfied with their jobs



*“The WAGE\$ Program has **made it possible to take some stress off** feeding my children and paying my rent. It also has **inspired me to continue my education.**”*

*“WAGE\$ **helps me in too many ways to count!** Mostly **it helps me feel comfortable in my life** when it can get very stressful!”*

WAGE\$ encourages, supports and rewards continued education

While a new workforce study is underway, 2019 data shows that 62% of the early childhood teaching staff had at least an associate degree in any field and 40% had earned these degrees specifically in early childhood education. (*Working in Early Care and Education*, Child Care Services Association, 2019) WAGE\$ plays a role in encouraging, supporting and rewarding educational pursuits.

“Being educated is power, and WAGE\$ makes it possible.”



The education required to receive a supplement ranges from 12 semester hours of early childhood coursework all the way to a doctorate degree. Participants with education below an associate degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours are awarded temporarily and must make educational advancements in order to retain their eligibility. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships may be available to provide financial assistance with the coursework needed. The programs work hand-in-hand to make a difference with education.

WAGE\$ participant Christina Perdue has a bachelor’s degree in another field but she took early childhood courses so she could be better prepared to teach children, and possibly to move into administration one day. Christina said, “Early childhood teaching is not just instinct, you really do have to learn how to do it. Kids don’t come with a handbook. Education is important.”

Christina is grateful that the WAGE\$ supplements are available in her county. She said, “Due to the financial help, my stress level is reduced and this is a benefit for the children in my care. I can more effectively do my job with a lower stress level. This supplement is vital to people in the child care industry by providing them with much needed support. As we all know, the wages one earns in child care are not very competitive with other jobs and this supplement helps to make that more even.”

“WAGE\$ helped me to succeed in getting my degree, and I feel great about my accomplishments in school.”

Children need stable and engaging relationships with educated professionals

WAGE\$ participants must work at least six months in the same child care program to be eligible for a supplement. These financial awards make it more feasible for teachers to afford to work in an undercompensated field. As a result, children benefit in the years when these stable and engaging relationships are most critical.

14% turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants, well below what might have been expected during this time of flux

96% of the WAGE\$ participant survey respondents said that WAGE\$ encourages them to stay in their current programs



*“The WAGE\$ Program is important to **keep dedicated child care professionals like me in the field**. It has inspired me to seek higher education in early childhood development. Perhaps most importantly, the program **makes me feel needed**, which in turn shows when I enter the class each morning.”*

Early educators deserve recognition for their accomplishments

WAGE\$ and its funders know how important it is to have an educated teacher who stays in the field. WAGE\$ participants often juggle work, family and school all while trying to make ends meet on a minimal salary. As the essential workforce behind the workforce, early educators make it possible for parents to go to work and are the foundation upon which the nation can build economic success. Their dedication is recognized and rewarded through the WAGE\$ supplement.

97% of survey respondents said that receiving WAGE\$ made them feel more appreciated and recognized for their work.

Participant Wendy Boozer believes that WAGE\$ helps her do what she is meant to do because of its financial impact and because it recognizes her contributions. She said, “Child Care WAGE\$® has helped me not lose focus on my ‘why.’ I am constantly asked why I won’t go into the school system to make more money. Money cannot buy happiness and purpose! My purpose is in early childhood education. I have no doubt that it is my calling. ... WAGE\$ has really mattered because the pay in early childhood is so low. I don’t do it for the money, no one does. I do it for passion, but the money helps. It ignites a fire. It’s a thank you. I am noticed. I matter.”



“WAGE\$ helps me feel like I’m important and my job matters. ... It’s important to let early childhood teachers know their job is noticed and they make a difference in the community.”

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF WAGES

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 Alleghany Partnership for Children
 Alliance for Children (Union County)
 Blue Ridge Partnership for Children
 Buncombe Partnership for Children, Inc.
 Burke County Smart Start, Inc.
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 Craven Smart Start, Inc.
 Down East Partnership for Children
 Durham's Partnership for Children
 Franklin Granville Vance Smart Start, Inc.
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 Halifax-Warren Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.
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 Lee County Partnership for Children
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 North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education
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 Stanly County Partnership for Children
 Surry County Early Childhood Partnership
 The Partnership for Children of Cumberland County
 The Partnership for Children of Wayne County, Inc.
 Wilkes Community Partnership for Children
 Wilson County Partnership for Children

*Henderson County

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