



...ensuring affordable, accessible, high quality child care for all young children and families.

Child Care WAGE\$® Project Popular Misconceptions

Misconception: The paperwork required to participate in WAGE\$ is too time consuming for it to be worth pursuing.

Fact: While the application may appear long (11x17), it is actually quite simple and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The questions are basic. For example, we ask about name, address, education to date, and employment information. The most time consuming step in applying is likely to be obtaining the education documentation that is necessary to complete an application. We attempt to make this easier: we can take copies of grade reports or transcripts and in some cases, a copy of your degree may be acceptable. While we do not require a sealed transcript, please make sure that the education documentation has your school name and your name and/or social security number.

Misconception: You cannot apply until after you have been employed six months at your center.

Fact: We encourage potential participants to apply as soon as they are hired and have pay stubs that reflect the hours claimed on their applications. They will not be eligible for money until after they have completed six months, but if they apply early, they can verify that we have everything we need well before the commitment period is over and can avoid any possible delays in payment. Often people wait until after six months to apply, but they miss our deadline (applications must be postmarked by the 1st of any month to be processed for that month) and end up having to wait an extra month for money. Apply early! We cannot guarantee payment since all supplements are contingent upon funding availability, but the sooner your application is in the system, the better.

Misconception: We pay back to the person's original start date no matter when s/he applies.

Fact: The Child Care WAGE\$® Project can pay for only six months retroactively (if eligible). Additionally, the initial six month commitment period is not tied directly to a person's start date. Commitment periods run mid-month to mid-month and are assigned by the WAGE\$ team based on when the applicant started, when s/he applied and/or when s/he became eligible. An applicant may NOT be eligible for a check if s/he leaves exactly six months after her/his hire date. In order to receive the first payment from WAGE\$, an applicant must not only complete the assigned commitment period, but must still be employed at the time funding becomes available and employment is confirmed. To verify the time you must complete, call a WAGE\$ counselor.

Misconception: The Child Care WAGE\$® Project funds only early childhood education.

Fact: The WAGE\$ supplement scale has eight total levels and reflects research stating that the education of child care professionals in general makes a difference for children. While early childhood/child development is awarded at higher levels than education in other fields, the scale *does fund* education in other fields beginning with level four on the teacher scale. You can have a combination of early childhood coursework and coursework in other fields, or you can be awarded for having a degree in another field (2 year or 4 year). We advise any one in a participating county who has formal education beyond high school to apply rather than assume eligibility status. If you are not yet eligible, we can tell you how close you are to a fundable level and what education would be needed. Please see a Child Care

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WAGE\$® fact sheet for additional information.

Misconception: If a copy of the diploma states that a degree was earned in Early Childhood Education, the applicant will automatically be funded at the highest level for a bachelor's degree in the field.

Fact: To award for a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education (the highest level on the teacher/home provider scale) or a graduate degree in the field (the highest level for directors), WAGE\$ looks for specific types of coursework, including fifteen semester hours focused on children ages birth to preschool five. This coursework is required regardless of the title of the degree. Some degrees are called Early Childhood but the coursework is primarily focused on school-age children. A transcript is required to verify the early childhood coursework.

Misconception: WAGE\$ accepts education from any institution.

Fact: WAGE\$ accepts education earned from *regionally accredited* schools. International education will be researched, but may require an official assessment by an evaluation agency to find out the U.S. equivalency.

Misconception: The school and/or T.E.A.C.H. automatically submit(s) grades to the Child Care WAGE\$® Project.

Fact: Participants are responsible for getting updated education documentation to the Child Care WAGE\$® Project, and for verifying that the documentation is received. A school will not send verification of completed coursework to WAGE\$ without the written consent/request of the participant. While many child care professionals participate in both T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$, not all do. Due to the large populations in both programs, it is not practical to automatically duplicate information for each participant. If an applicant is a participant on both, however, s/he can send one copy of her/his education documentation to CCSA *with instructions to share with both programs*. If the request is made by the participant, a copy of any documentation will be made for both T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$. Please remember that your education documentation must have the school name and your name and/or social security number.

Misconception: T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ are the same program.

Fact: T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ are both statewide programs administered through Child Care Services Association (CCSA) in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. CCSA created both programs to address high turnover, the need for education, and low compensation in the child care workforce. While the programs work hand in hand to help improve the quality of care provided to North Carolina's children, they are independently running programs implementing different strategies.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project provides comprehensive scholarship assistance to child care teachers, directors and family child care providers pursuing coursework in early childhood education. The project offers scholarships at all 58 community colleges across North Carolina and at several bachelor degree granting universities. The program provides assistance for school, increased compensation based on increased education and requires participants to agree to remain in child care for a year following completion of the scholarship contract. The Child Care WAGE\$® Project provides education-based salary supplements to individuals based on six month increments of time already completed in the same child care program. T.E.A.C.H. helps child care professionals attain education, and WAGE\$ helps to keep these educated providers in their child care programs.

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Child care professionals can utilize the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project to help pay for the education necessary to become eligible for a WAGE\$ supplement. In addition, we *encourage* participants of the Child Care WAGE\$® Project to take advantage of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship opportunities so that they can move up the supplement scale. The more education they obtain (perhaps with scholarship assistance), the more supplement money they can earn. Participants can access the benefits of both programs at the same time.

Misconception: Directors are responsible for getting the application and/or necessary documentation for staff to the Child Care WAGE\$® Project.

Fact: While directors may be willing to help staff apply to WAGE\$, it is ultimately the responsibility of the *applicant* to send information and make sure it arrives. If you leave this responsibility to the director and it is not done for any reason, it does not change the policies that the WAGE\$ staff must use to process your application. You should not assume that the director will automatically send in an application or updated documentation, or that they should be held responsible if it doesn't arrive on time.

Misconception: WAGE\$ funds only people who work full time.

Fact: We fund for part time and full time employment. You must work at least 10 hours per week with preschool children (birth to preschool five) in a licensed child care facility to be eligible, and awards for applicants working fewer than 35 hours are prorated out of a 40 hour work week.

Misconception: Because the starting education on the teacher scale is the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential, you must have the Credential to be eligible, regardless of what education you have earned.

Fact: WAGE\$ funds for any level of education on the supplement scale. You do not have to begin with the Credential. See the Child Care WAGE\$® Project supplement scale for more information.

Misconception: You can receive an award for completing either Credential course, even if that is all the formal education you have attained.

Fact: An award is issued only after both courses (or the single *combined* course -- EDU 119) are completed with a grade of "C" or above. Continued funding is dependent upon verification that the Credential certificate was issued by the Division of Child Development.

Misconception: You can be funded for the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential even if you tested out and did not complete the coursework.

Fact: The Child Care WAGE\$® Project awards formal course credit only, with the possible exception of the Child Development Associate credential. In addition, the Division of Child Development does not issue the Credential certificate to individuals who test out of the coursework. Continued funding at this level requires verification of the certificate. However, if you do choose to test out of the Credential and still want to participate on WAGE\$, you may begin at level one on the teacher/home provider scale by having six semester hours of early childhood (birth to preschool five) coursework.

Misconception: When you increase your education from one level to the next, you add the awards for both levels to get your new annual supplement.

Fact: When you increase your education from one level to the next, the new award amount is the amount for the new education level only. It may be prorated to reflect the schedule worked during the six month commitment period.

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Misconception: Because several levels on the supplement scale are funded temporarily, you have two years to move all the way to the Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Fact: All levels below the Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education and its equivalent on the supplement scale are funded temporarily, but teachers and directors have two years to move from one level to *any* higher level on the scale. Family child care providers have three years to advance a level. Once the participant reaches a new level, a new deadline will be established for the next step up.

Misconception: Directors cannot apply.

Fact: Directors can apply. They are awarded on a different scale than teachers and home providers, but if they meet all eligibility requirements and funding is available, they will receive a supplement. If a director also has time in the classroom, her/his award will be calculated using both scales for the time worked in each position (up to 40 hours). A director must regularly work at least 10 hours per week in the classroom to be funded for time on the teacher scale.

Misconceptions: Checks are or should be issued immediately following the completion of a six month period.

Fact: Checks are issued in the seventh month, after completion of the six month commitment period. All of our six month periods end on the 14th of any given month. After the 14th, we call all confirmation contacts to verify that the individuals completing commitment periods at that time are still working and still eligible. Appropriate adjustments are made to the records, and the check request is printed and submitted to our internal accounting department. The WAGE\$ team mails the checks immediately following receipt. This whole process takes *at least* two to four weeks of time, and can vary based on the difficulty in obtaining confirmations. WAGE\$ strives to get through the process as quickly as possible each month, but checks should go out no later than the last day of the seventh month.

Misconceptions: You are eligible for a portion of your award if you leave your child care program before completing the full six month commitment period.

Fact: No portion of the award is issued if a participant leaves her/his program prior to completing the full six month commitment period. Even if someone leaves the day before the commitment period was scheduled to end, s/he is not eligible for any portion of the supplement. Those due to receive their first WAGE\$ supplement must not only work through their established commitment periods, but must work until funding is available and a final employment confirmation has been completed.

Misconceptions: Participants are paid for leave time if they are still considered employed by their child care programs.

Fact: The Child Care WAGE\$® Project funds for six months spent *with children* in the same child care program. We are unable to fund for time spent on leave. If participants are out for the summer (or extended leave for any reason), their six month commitment periods are put on hold until they return from leave. Thus, a participant does not have to begin a new six month period, but s/he will not receive a supplement until a full six month commitment period has been completed in the program. Even if the center pays for leave, if the participant is away from the children/program for more than two weeks, this policy takes effect. If the participant's leave exceeds six months, a new commitment period will be established for her/him after her/his return and time worked prior to the leave will not be counted.

Misconceptions: If an applicant states verbally that a document was mailed or faxed at a specific time, we can use this date in processing for an award even if we did not get the document on the

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date in question.

Fact: WAGE\$ cannot process an application without the necessary documentation. Even if an applicant does mail or fax the needed information, if it is not received by the WAGE\$ team for any reason, we will not be able to process the application. For this reason, we suggest calling the WAGE\$ staff to verify that the documents have arrived if you are concerned about a specific deadline. Additionally, WAGE\$ must use the postmark date or the faxing date for determining commitment periods. Even if the applicant claims to have faxed an earlier copy, for example, we can only use the date for the document that actually reaches the WAGE\$ team.

Misconception: The post office automatically sends address changes to the Child Care WAGE\$® Project.

Fact: The United States Postal Service does NOT notify the Child Care WAGE\$® Project of address changes. It is the responsibility of each participant to update any contact information with WAGE\$. If you move and WAGE\$ is not given the new information, your check will likely be mailed to the previous address. It may be necessary for you to pay the charge associated with stopping payment on the original check in order to issue a new one.

Misconception: Time with schoolage children can be funded.

Fact: Smart Start funding supports projects designed to help give children from birth to preschool five a healthy start and a better opportunity to succeed in school. Although we recognize the value of the education and care provided to schoolage children in the early childhood system, since the Child Care WAGE\$® Project is funded largely by Smart Start, the supplements are provided to teachers working with preschool-aged children. If teachers have any children from birth to preschool five in care, and they meet all other eligibility criteria, they would be eligible for an award.

Misconception: Funding is guaranteed.

Fact: The funding for the Child Care WAGE\$® comes from two primary sources. Local Partnerships from participating counties provide Smart Start funding for the supplements and the North Carolina Division of Child Development provides funding with Child Care and Development Block Grant dollars for the administrative costs. The continuation of the project depends upon funding availability and the ongoing support of local Partnerships and statewide decision makers. The best way to ensure the continuation of the Child Care WAGE\$® Project is to let your local partnership and your legislators know that you appreciate the program: share why you think the program is important and provide examples of how the WAGE\$ Project has impacted your life and the lives of children in your care. Contact information on legislators and the local partnership is mailed to each participant.

Misconception: There is no reason to apply if my county has a waiting list for supplement funds.

Fact: It is possible that WAGE\$ may not have funds available to pick up new applications in any given county at times during the fiscal year. However, funds may become available at any time, so it is to the advantage of any potential applicant to have her/his information already on file with the Child Care WAGE\$® Project. The sooner your application is complete and in our system, the greater the chance that you will be picked up from the waiting list when funds become available. We encourage individuals to apply regardless of the waiting list status since we address the waiting list on a first come, first serve basis, using commitment period dates and the date your application was complete. In addition, if we have applicants in our database, it helps us know how much money is really needed to cover the interested population and we can provide better data to our funding partnerships.

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