

Child Care WAGE\$® Program Statewide Final Report Fiscal Year 2020

COVID-19

During FY20, North Carolina has suffered the repercussions and threats of a global pandemic. Early care and education has been deemed the essential service that it is, but the impact to the field from COVID-19 has been and will be significant. Many have expressed concerns about the ability of the field to rebound at all, and others have speculated that a large percentage of child care programs will be forced to close. While the long-term impact is not yet known, what is clear is that many programs have stepped up to the plate to provide services to other essential personnel and their families, putting their own lives at risk in the process. They are always the *workforce behind the workforce*, but that has never been more true than it is today. The frontline professionals that have worked to help people through this crisis, including doctors and emergency personnel, could not have done so without early educators. The growing awareness of the critical needs met by this workforce has resulted in calls for much-deserved increases in compensation. The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is one available option for getting these increases into the hands of early educators.

The Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) provided temporary monthly financial bonuses to support the early care and education workforce during this time of crisis. In addition, as the statewide contractor for WAGE\$, they approved temporary procedural and policy changes to ensure that WAGE\$ participants could receive their salary supplements. The key changes included:

- Employment confirmations for participants were suspended for the final quarter of the year. Payments were issued based on the most recent confirmation WAGE\$ had on file. New applicants received an early confirmation to verify the application information.
- Participants were held harmless due to impact from COVID-19 from March through June. For example, a participant working in a site that closed still received her/his salary supplement. WAGE\$ did not actively seek employment information, but if learned, the participant was not negatively impacted.

Child Care Services Association was honored to serve the field through the consistent implementation of the WAGE\$ Program and appreciates DCDEE's flexibility. The WAGE\$ staff were able to successfully and effectively ensure the program's continuation remotely with laptops funded and approved by DCDEE.

Due to the policy and procedural changes listed here, as well as the uncertain and fluctuating status of child care employment, the WAGE\$ report includes some temporary adjustments. Most tables reflect the "active" participants from July through June in order to include all new applicants that were picked up and paid, even during the special "COVID" period. It also allows the program to accurately reflect the education increases that were submitted throughout the full year. It is important to note, however, that WAGE\$ did not conduct confirmations in the last quarter. The active number for these tables includes all of those that were still eligible prior to

the suspension of confirmations and new applicants that were paid. Please note that if unsolicited confirmations were provided, information was updated on these tables.

The turnover table, however, is generated differently. The data from this table reflects only the period of time from July through March. This enables WAGE\$ to show turnover prior to the largest impact of COVID-19 on sites and reflects confirmed employment. Pulling the data through June would not provide an accurate reflection with our COVID-period adjustment.

REPORT CONTENTS

The Child Care WAGE\$® final report includes a detailed narrative, data tables to support many of the findings discussed and appendices that showcase participant feedback. Please see below for more information on the report's contents, which are listed in the order they are presented.

Program Description – Includes a brief overview of the program and its funding support.

Statewide Program Eligibility – Highlights primary requirements to participate in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

Program Overall Impact – Reviews the WAGE\$ impact by providing a summary and select tables for the following categories:

- Participation Overview (Table A: Tier and Income Cap Selections)
- Turnover (Table B: Turnover Rate Comparison)
- Compensation (Table C: Compensation by Tier)

Outputs – Includes the contracted outputs in table format with additional information on the activities that supported output achievement. (Table D: Outputs)

Outcomes – Includes the contracted outcomes in table format. (Table E: Outcomes)

Program Evaluations – Highlights results from the WAGE\$ surveys for recipients and their employers.

Program Challenges – Summarizes the primary challenges faced within the reporting year.

Smart Start – Describes the notification procedures for recipients regarding Smart Start's supplement funding.

Table 1 – Provides a demographic profile of active participants. Active participants are those who have been paid at some point in their participation and are still eligible based on their most recent employment confirmation. For the FY20 report, participants are considered active if they were still eligible as of their most recent employment verification prior to the March suspension of these confirmations.

Table 2 – Lists the participation results of active participants by the star rating or license status of employing child care facilities.

Table 3 – Identifies the number of participants funded on each scale and at each education level and indicates the percentage of participants at permanent levels *or* who have submitted coursework during the reporting period.

Table 4 – States the number of individuals paid, their programs and the number of children impacted. Please note that these individuals may or may not still be eligible at the end of the year, so this number will likely be different than the number of active participants represented on other tables.

Table 5 – Describes turnover reporting methods, summarizes turnover data and provides the demographic overview of those who left their programs. Information for FY20 is based on July

to March, prior to the significant impact of COVID-19. Employment confirmations were suspended for the final quarter of the year.

Partner Organizations – Lists funders for the reporting year.

Appendix A – Presents sample survey feedback regarding the WAGE\$ impact on retention.

Appendix B – Presents sample survey feedback regarding the WAGE\$ impact on education.

Appendix C – Presents sample survey feedback regarding the WAGE\$ impact on compensation.

Appendix D – Presents sample survey feedback regarding the WAGE\$ impact on recognition.

Appendix E – Presents survey messages for Smart Start partnerships.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is an education-based salary supplement program for teachers, directors and family child care providers. The education, position and work schedule for each applicant are assessed to determine the annual award. To encourage consistency, installments based on half of the annual award are issued after each six-month period the participant completes in the same early care and education program. Because these supplements reward teacher education and continuity of care, children ages birth to five benefit from more stable relationships with better educated teachers. In FY20, WAGE\$ was a funding partnership between Smart Start and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

STATEWIDE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for at least one six-month payment during the fiscal year, applicants must:

- work in a county that uses Smart Start funds to support the Child Care WAGE\$® Program
- work in a licensed child care program (center, home or public school site)
- work at least 10 hours per week with children birth to five
- earn at or below the income cap selected by the funding partnership (three options)
 - \$18 per hour
 - \$16 per hour
 - \$14 per hour
- have a level of education funded on the Child Care WAGE\$® scale (from regionally accredited schools)
- work at least six months in the same child care program
- be employed at this same child care program when funding is available and a final confirmation has been completed

PROGRAM OVERALL IMPACT

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program impacts the community by improving the quality of early care and education for young children. Most evidence suggests there are three primary factors associated with teacher quality: education, stability and compensation. WAGE\$ addresses all three. Through graduated salary supplements, the program helps decrease turnover and encourages the continued educational pursuits of the child care workforce. The compensation is critical, particularly now as North Carolina wants to rebuild its economy, but can only do so if early educators can afford to return to and stay in the field. As of June 2020, 3,292 child care professionals in 1,436 child care programs from 55 North Carolina counties were active participants in the statewide Child Care WAGE\$® Program. Of these individuals, 99% are women and 57% are people of color. Ninety-eight percent (98%) work at least part of their

schedules in the classroom with children (including all teacher positions, family child care providers and center directors who spend some time in the classroom on a regular basis). Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the participants work in four and five star licensed centers or homes.

As of June 2020, 458 of the active participants were reported by their employers as being NC Pre-K teachers and assistants. Of this group, 99 are teachers and 359 are assistant teachers in NC Pre-K classrooms. These individuals work in 314 different child care programs in 52 counties. Of these, 99% are women and 54% are people of color. Ninety-nine percent (99%) work in four and five star licensed centers.

Participation Overview

Smart Start partnerships were given options for their participation that included tier selection (award amounts increase with higher tiers) and income cap requirements (participants are eligible only if they earn at or below the selected cap). Nearly half (49%) of the counties funded the lowest tier for the full fiscal year. However, while 22% selected the lowest income cap of \$14 per hour to establish eligibility, several counties shifted to a higher income cap category for FY20. Seventy-eight percent (78%) selected either \$16 or \$18 per hour compared to only 64% in FY19. Income cap options for FY21 will be changing to \$15, \$17 and \$19 per hour.

Table A below depicts the breakdown of the partnership choices for their counties.

Table A: Tier and Income Cap Selections*

	\$14 per hour	\$16 per hour	\$18 per hour	Totals
Tier One	10	14	3	27
Tier One/Tier Two Split	0	2	0	2
Tier Two	2	11	11	24
Tier Two HEO**	0	1	0	1
Tier Three	0	1	0	1
Totals	12	29	14	55

**Numbers represent unduplicated counties participating in each category.*

***HEO refers to tiers using the Higher Education Option.*

In order to help partnerships handle budget constraints and keep the WAGE\$ supplements a possible option for early childhood professionals in their counties, the Education and Compensation Advisory Committee approved several county-level eligibility and/or payment options. Partnerships may:

- Fund only those working in sites with at least three stars *or* fund only those working in sites with at least four stars.
- Eliminate funding for administrator/director time. Directors who have classroom time are still eligible to receive full or partial awards on the teacher scale.
- Eliminate funding for participants at level two on the WAGE\$ scale (which includes, for example, 12 semester hours of birth to five focused coursework).
- Cut Tier One supplement awards by a percentage.

Thirty-one (31) counties implemented one or a combination of these strategies. Please note that tier decreases and reduced income caps are not discussed here; partnerships *must* choose a tier and income cap each year whereas the list above includes options to utilize if needed. See below for additional information on the cuts applied for FY20.

- Cut administrator time only – two counties
- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars only – 14 counties
- Cut administrator time and those working in sites with fewer than three stars – three counties
- Cut administrator time, those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – three counties
- Cut administrator time, those at level two on the scale and cut awards by a percentage – two counties
- Cut level two and those working in sites with fewer than three stars – two counties
- Cut level two – three counties
- Cut awards by a percentage – two counties

Seventeen (17) counties were able to fund a percentage *increase* in awards during the fiscal year and nine of these counties had implemented at least one kind of eligibility cut and are included in the list above.

Turnover

Turnover numbers for the Child Care WAGE\$® Program in FY20 reflect active participants who left their child care programs between July and March. Confirmations were suspended for the final quarter of the year due to the impact of COVID-19.

If a participant leaves her/his program and resumes eligibility at a new site, s/he will not be factored into the report at all until s/he has completed a full six-month period at her/his new site. Once s/he receives a supplement, s/he will again be recognized as an active participant. Only participants for whom WAGE\$ could have impacted the decision to stay or leave are factored into the turnover data. For example, participants who become ineligible for reasons other than leaving their child care programs (i.e. over the income cap due to raise, change of position within the program, center closure) are not considered turnover.

The turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants for the stated time period in FY20 was 12%, a significant overall improvement compared to the 31% full-time teacher turnover rate in North Carolina prior to WAGE\$ becoming a statewide opportunity (Child Care Services Association, 1998). This rate is also below the goal of 25%, originally established within Smart Start's Performance Based Incentive System, renamed Community Early Childhood Profile - Smart Start Measures of Impact. The turnover rate among WAGE\$ NC Pre-K teachers and assistants was even lower at only 7%.

The 19% turnover rate of full-time teachers in the state's early childhood workforce, captured in 2015 data, reflects both North Carolina's supports for the workforce, like WAGE\$, and the economy in recent years (Child Care Services Association, 2015). A new workforce study will

be available in 2020, with data prior to the catastrophic impact of COVID-19. CCSA and other partners throughout the nation will continue to monitor the ongoing changes in the field.

The WAGE\$ turnover rate covers all eligible positions, including part-time employees, and is not a straightforward comparison to the workforce study data in general. However, it is expected that the WAGE\$ population of educated professionals would typically have more job opportunities than the child care workforce at large. Without the WAGE\$ supplement, the turnover rate would likely be much higher. CCSA anticipates that having compensation through strategies like WAGE\$ will be essential for rebuilding and helping to stabilize the workforce going forward. A comparison of turnover data can be seen in Table B below.

Table B: Turnover Rate Comparison

	Statewide Workforce Pre-Program	Statewide Workforce 2015	Original PBIS Goal	WAGE\$ FY20 (July – March only)
Turnover Rates	31%	19%	25%	12%

So much remains unknown regarding how many centers will open and remain open, how many teachers they can employ as families struggle with the decision and/or ability to place their children in child care and how many teachers feel safe returning to the field. What is clear, however, is that with teachers earning on average only \$10.97 per hour in North Carolina, the ability to return to and stay in their positions is much more challenging. The Child Care WAGE\$® Program awards address retention and make it more possible for educated professionals to afford to teach young children, particularly in this current landscape.

Of all WAGE\$ participants statewide with an Associate Degree focused on early childhood education or higher, only 11% left their programs this past year. Of all participants with less education, 17% left their programs. This figure may differ for the workforce not receiving higher compensation through supplements, but it appears that if salaries are supplemented or teachers are more fairly compensated, those with higher education will not leave at a higher rate, which is a common belief. In fact, for the past several years, retention has been *better* among the more highly educated participants. Research makes it clear that children need stable and engaging relationships with the best-educated teachers to help facilitate their development during these most critical years. The higher retention of this educated group of WAGE\$ participants is key; the field must aspire to stabilize this group in order to provide children and families what they really need. With the confusion and uncertainty children have and will experience over COVID-19’s impact on their lives, having stable teachers who can engage in best practice will be more important than ever.

Equally important to note is that the turnover of these best educated teachers is comparable to the turnover rates of those teachers working in public schools, who earn significantly more and have benefits that most in the early childhood field do not. Over a recent five year period from FY14 through FY18, public school teachers left the *profession* at approximately 11% per year (rates ranging from approximately 8% to 15% over this time period). The best educated WAGE\$ participants have turnover rates (leaving their *programs*) ranging from 11% - 14% (12.6% average) over this same time period.

In addition to statistical data showing an impact on retention, WAGE\$ participants shared through evaluation feedback that supplements play a role in the decision and ability to stay in the field. See Appendix A for selected survey comments regarding retention.

“I have no words for how much the WAGE\$ Program has helped me, my family and my classroom. There are months that I was barely making ends meet, then the check of assistance showed up in the mail and helped me through the month. It allowed me to stay in the field of child care, which I love. Otherwise, I would have had to leave this field to find a job that supplied more money to support my family.” (Caldwell, teacher)

Education

The WAGE\$ population is well educated, with the bulk of participants having at least a two-year degree. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the active FY20 WAGE\$ participants whose counties have participated at least two years (and 94% of those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms) are being funded for having an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher based on the WAGE\$ scale *or* have submitted documentation during the year to verify their pursuit of additional coursework. The WAGE\$ Program has a number of temporary award levels, which require that participants with lower education advance up the scale to remain eligible.

A sample of participants at temporary levels was surveyed during the year to learn more about their educational plans and potential barriers. Out of 296 completed calls this year, 82% indicated that they do still intend to take coursework in order to remain eligible for their WAGE\$ supplements. When given a list of possible benefits resulting from WAGE\$, 88% of participants overall who responded to the annual survey, and 92% of those funded at temporary levels, agreed that the supplements provide an incentive to seek additional coursework or help make the pursuit of that coursework more financially feasible. Participants do recognize WAGE\$ as an incentive to pursue additional coursework.

Although sending in education documentation is encouraged so that participants may earn more supplement money, it is not typically required at any specific time. Thus, it is possible that additional participants have completed coursework but not yet submitted it to the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

When examining education by ethnicity across all participating counties, 76% of the participants of color have earned an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher on the WAGE\$ scale compared to 79% of the White/European American participants. WAGE\$ is encouraging a diverse population to pursue education. Given the diverse population of children attending child care in North Carolina, this educational equity is very important.

Through survey feedback, participants and directors with participating staff took the opportunity to express the importance of education and how WAGE\$ has made a difference in their educational pursuits. See Appendix B for samples.

“I have felt more confident and on board with our curriculum as my last college class covered it in depth! I believe it has also helped me financially, in that I was able to pay for some of my schooling and also pick up dinners on the nights that I had the college classes. I am very thankful that WAGE\$ has come into being because there are so many children that I would love to help more and having had this past college class, I can understand a lot more than I did before!” (Surry, teacher)

Compensation

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program increases the compensation of participants through salary supplements. Despite obtained education, compensation in the field continues to be low and is not competitive with many other professions. Forty percent (40%) of the active WAGE\$ participants earn less than \$12 per hour (38% of teachers, 80% of family child care providers and 25% of directors or those with partial administrative time earn less than \$12). The ongoing compensation plight of the field has been highlighted by the expectation that early educators continue to work through the pandemic despite dismal salaries. The state acknowledged this issue by providing \$950 in bonus pay for two months to those teachers who were making it possible for other essential personnel to work. Even in the best of times, early educators simply do not earn enough, which is illustrated by a comparison to the rate of \$24.73 that may be needed for one North Carolina employee with one child to meet basic, fundamental needs (Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020). Looking only at those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms, 14% earn less than \$12 per hour. Sixteen percent (16%) of the NC Pre-K teacher assistants and 13% of the teachers earn less than \$12 per hour. While this is dramatically better than the field at large, it is still higher than expected.

The poor compensation across the board highlights the need for salary supplements in order to attract and retain qualified staff. WAGE\$ survey results support this. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the respondents stated that WAGE\$ encourages them to stay with their current child care programs.

The average six-month supplement payment issued statewide during FY20 was \$993. The average payment amount includes all participating counties and all applicable tiers. Since the supplements are based on the education earned, the average will vary by county even within the same tier category. The average six-month supplements statewide ranged from \$610 to \$1,844. The average six-month supplement at each tier level can be seen in Table C below. In the Tier One category, four counties are included that issued at least one payment at a percentage cut. Seventeen (17) counties in both Tier One and Tier Two categories provided percentage increases; over 900 participants benefited.

Table C: Compensation by Tier

Tiers Funded FY20	Number of Participating Counties by Tier	Average Six-Month Supplement
All Tiers	55	\$993
Tier One	27	\$793

Tier One/Tier Two Split	2	\$989
Tier Two	24	\$1,160
Tier Two HEO	1	\$1,844
Tier Three	1	\$1,755

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of evaluation respondents statewide indicated that receiving a WAGE\$ supplement helps ease financial stress. When asked about the financial impact, recipients selected from a list of potential benefits. A sample of responses is below:

- 81% are better able to pay their bills
- 73% are more able to address the basic needs of their families (food/housing)
- 69% use the funds to provide additional resources for their classrooms or child care programs
- 69% rely on the supplements to help address transportation costs

In a separate question, a greater number of respondents (91%) stated that providing resources for their programs is a benefit of WAGE\$.

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.

Throughout the survey, respondents discussed the importance of this additional compensation. Please see Appendix C for sample comments.

*“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me get my home fixed after a hurricane in 2018. The WAGE\$ money will help me get a roof over my trailer and get me and my two girls out of the camper that we are calling home. And WAGE\$ helps me get food for my girls.”
(Craven, teacher)*

OUTPUTS

This section highlights the projected outputs of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program statewide for FY20 and the program’s effectiveness in reaching these goals. Primary results are shown in Table D below followed by additional detail as applicable.

Table D: Outputs

	Projected Output	Results
1	Approximately 3,050 eligible participants will receive WAGE\$ payments as of June 30, 2020.	Output exceeded. As of June 2020, 3,880 applicants had received WAGE\$ payments.

2	Child Care WAGE\$® staff will conduct 18 outreach opportunities to child care professionals to offer information about the program.	Output exceeded. WAGE\$ conducted 32 outreach sessions.
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WAGE\$ payments: Three thousand eight hundred eighty (3,880) participants were paid for completing at least one six-month period on the Child Care WAGE\$® Program during FY20. These participants worked in 1,571 facilities serving approximately 71,343 children. This number is an unduplicated count of supplement recipients. Of these, 539 were NC Pre-K teachers or assistants. Over 500 applicants are currently on the waiting list, either waiting for funding and/or completing their initial or reactivated six-month commitment period in FY21.

Outreach and recruitment: Thirty-two (32) outreach sessions were done upon request or as a result of WAGE\$ solicitation between June 15, 2019 and March 14, 2020. WAGE\$ representatives also discuss opportunities available through Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$®. Many sessions were completed in conjunction with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program, thus giving audience members an opportunity to learn about all three initiatives. These opportunities included presentations and informational tables directed toward early care and education professionals, site visits, trainings for technical assistants and presentations for DCDEE consultants. Field-based outreach was suspended in March due to COVID-19.

In addition to the outreach listed above, 5,471 recruitment emails or mailings were sent to 2,643 sites. WAGE\$ sent newly designed postcards to attract interest. WAGE\$ also sent recruitment information to Smart Start partnerships, resource and referral agencies, community colleges and Head Start grantees in participating counties. Follow-up calls were made to many of the non-participating sites to verify receipt of the email/packet, answer questions and encourage participation. During each employment confirmation completed with a participating site, the counselor inquired about any possible eligible staff not yet accessing a supplement. WAGE\$ continued to receive new applications despite the fact that in-person outreach measures were restricted.

OUTCOME

Table E below details the primary outcome of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

Table E: Outcome

Projected Outcome	Results
By June 30, 2020, the turnover rate of Child Care WAGE\$® participants will be less than 25% (the goal originally established within Smart Start’s Performance Based Incentive System).	Outcome met for the period prior to confirmation suspension. The turnover rate for WAGE\$ participants was only 12%, well below the benchmark of 25%. This rate represents data from July to March to assess routine turnover prior to the most significant impacts of COVID-19.

This outcome is measured through employment confirmations completed as each participant concludes a six-month commitment period on the program. In this report, the period covered is

July through March. The information regarding turnover is entered into a database that produces the percentage.

PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

The information below reflects the impact of WAGE\$ from the perspectives of participants and their employers. Salary supplement recipients and center directors who did not receive supplements but who had recipients among their staff participated in an annual evaluation of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program. The survey process began prior to the COVID-19 crisis in North Carolina, but individual participants may have responded after this became a reality.

Survey samples were created based on the number of potential respondents by position in each county. If the pool of participating teachers in a county was between 1 and 50, the entire teacher recipient population was mailed a survey. A 40% sample was drawn when the teacher recipient population was between 51 and 100 and a 25% sample was drawn if the teacher population was 101 or more. All participating directors were also surveyed. Directors in counties funding WAGE\$ who were not personally participating but who had staff members on WAGE\$ and/or Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® were sent a shared survey to assess the impact of salary supplements. These responses have been integrated into the director feedback.

All participants in the sample who had email addresses on file with WAGE\$ were invited to complete the survey online. Reminder emails were sent to encourage online response. Those who did not participate online or who did not have email addresses on file were also mailed surveys. One final attempt was made to secure non-respondent surveys via phone in counties with low response rates. All respondents were given the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for professional resources.

Overall, 71% of the sampled population completed surveys (1,697 of 2,399), which included the following:

- 70% of participating teachers/family child care providers (1,035 of 1,470)
- 81% of participating directors (155 of 191)
- 69% of non-participating directors with staff receiving salary supplements¹ (507 of 738)

Sample responses

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of responding WAGE\$ participants indicated that their receipt of a supplement had an impact on either their inclination to stay in the field or on their pursuit of further education. When asked to examine a list of possible benefits resulting from the Child Care WAGE\$® Program and indicate whether or not they are true for the respondent, 98% indicated that WAGE\$ either encourages them to stay in their current programs or to pursue further education. Responses to the individual options were as follows, with many providing additional examples of assistance:

- WAGE\$ helps me feel more satisfied with my job. – 96%
- WAGE\$ is an incentive for me to seek additional education and/or it helps make pursuing coursework more financially feasible. – 88% (92% of those at temporary levels)

¹ Non-participating directors in some cases may have responded about participants in WAGE\$ and/or AWARD\$.

- The WAGE\$ supplement helps ease financial stress. – 98%
- WAGE\$ encourages me to stay with my current program. – 96%
- My WAGE\$ supplement helps me to provide more resources for my program or classroom. – 91%
- Receiving the WAGE\$ supplement makes me feel more appreciated and recognized for my work. – 97%

Ninety-six percent (96%) of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGE\$ benefits the children in their centers in some way. When asked to select from a list of options explaining how participation may be beneficial to the children in their programs, including an option stating that no benefits have been noticed, 96% of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGE\$ benefits the children in some way. The two most popular examples of impact were that improved morale has created more positive child-teacher interactions and that staff members are seeking more education, which leads to higher quality care for children.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of all respondents stated that they are satisfied with the program and its administration.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of responding directors reported positive attitudes toward WAGE\$ in their child care programs.

While some respondents stated that they have not had the opportunity to speak with the WAGE\$ staff, nearly 100% of those who have had interactions found the staff to be pleasant and helpful. The bulk of the respondents were WAGE\$ recipients, and non-participating directors responded about the staff from both programs based on the participation in their sites. Many respondents took the opportunity to share additional comments about their interactions with staff. Not only did the respondents report that they received helpful and pleasant customer service, but many also talked about how important the encouragement from staff has been in terms of participation in the program and pursuit of education. A few examples of participant feedback are listed below:

“The WAGES staff has been there to answer any questions that I've had and are knowledgeable of the program. They processed my application swiftly, followed up about missing paperwork and processed my additional education in a timely manner.” (teacher)

“Any questions that have ever been asked of the WAGE\$ associates have always been answered expeditiously. It can be at the close of business, and they will always be there for me and the time of day is not important. They are awesome. I feel like they are family.” (teacher)

“Your quality of customer service has encouraged me to want to provide the best customer service possible to those who send their children to me for care.” (teacher)

*“They are really interested in helping, made me feel like they cared about my success, thanked me for my services and gave me encouragement to go further in my career.”
(family child care provider)*

“WAGE\$ staff are tremendously delightful, helpful, and encouraging.” (director)

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of responding participants indicated that, as a result of WAGE\$, they feel more appreciated and recognized for their work. Recipients and directors with participating staff continue to emphasize the importance of the recognition and appreciation associated with the receipt of the WAGE\$ supplements and the impact this has on self-esteem, professionalism and morale. Not only are these things significant in themselves, but they enhance the likelihood that participants will stay in the field and seek additional education. See Appendix D for a sample of their feedback.

“The WAGE\$ Program makes you feel like you are accomplishing something by working in the child care field. It makes you feel counted and appreciated. And now with the essential workforce needing child care in order to do their jobs, I hope this can change some attitudes to bring more to our workers and field as society sees how vital we are as a workforce. We are also essential!” (Durham, director)

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

COVID-19 has had a global impact, with long-term consequences. As stated above, the future of the early childhood field is largely unknown as employers, teachers and families struggle with complex decisions about health and finances. The Child Care WAGE\$® Program was challenged to determine the best ways to assist participants during this crisis and implement appropriate procedures and policies. With funder support and guidance, WAGE\$ held participants harmless due to COVID-19 impact from March to June. WAGE\$ will continue to hold participants harmless for March to June in commitment periods that end in FY21, but will otherwise be resuming standard procedures. As confirmations resume, it is expected that many participants will either not currently be working or may be working a reduced schedule. Either of these scenarios could impact their eligibility and/or award amounts. WAGE\$ will revisit plans as needed with DCDEE should the state fail to make progress with the coronavirus and close child care for families other than emergency personnel.

What remains clear is that early childhood professionals need compensation support now more than ever. Despite a suffering economy, it is important to sustain and increase this support as much as possible. It is hoped that local Smart Start Partnerships will continue to fund the WAGE\$ supplements on behalf of the workforce, and if funds become available within the approved allocations due to changes in the field, that those dollars can be put toward even higher compensation.

SMART START

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program works hard to publicize the collaboration with local partnerships and identifies the funding sources in a variety of ways. Special notices are sent with checks stating which specific Smart Start partnership, along with the Division of Child Development and Early Education, provides funding. The county/region partnership is listed on

the check stub and labels are attached to check envelopes to identify the funder. The Child Care WAGE\$® fact sheets, application-based program agreements and letters clarify the funding arrangement for the program and WAGE\$ representatives explain the funding for the program in field presentations across the state as possible. Finally, the program evaluations state that the funds for the Child Care WAGE\$® supplements are provided by local Smart Start partnerships and respondents are given the opportunity to share messages regarding the supplements with their local Smart Starts. See Appendix E for a sample of those messages for FY20.

“Please continue to support the WAGE\$ Program so that valuable, caring teachers are not forced to choose between loving/teaching other people’s children and being able to support their own.” (Randolph, teacher)



Table 1
Demographic Profile of the 3,292 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Ethnicity		
American Indian	19	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	12	0%
Biracial	27	1%
Black/African American	1669	51%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	90	3%
White/European American	1396	42%
Not Given	58	2%
Other	21	1%
Gender		
Female	3265	99%
Male	27	1%
Age Range of Participants		
15-19 years	5	0%
20-24 years	130	4%
25-34 years	732	22%
35-44 years	807	25%
45-54 years	804	24%
55-59 years	345	10%
60-64 years	289	9%
65 and over	177	5%
Not Given	3	0%
Position		
Teacher	1927	59%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	6	0%
Teacher (Assistant Director)	47	1%
Teacher (Director)	41	1%
Teacher (Director Owner)	32	1%
Assistant Teacher	724	22%
Director	42	1%
Director (Owner)	5	0%
Assistant Director	24	1%
Small Home Provider	258	8%
Small Facility (<13) Operator	32	1%
Split Position	154	5%
Ages of Children Served*		
Birth up to Three	955	29%
Three to Five	1591	48%
Mixed Ages	746	23%
Education Level		
12 birth to five sem. hours	42	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	51	2%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	102	3%

Due to COVID-19, employment status was not verified for the last quarter of the fiscal year. The active number includes all of those that were still eligible prior to the suspension of confirmations and new applicants that were paid. Please note that if unsolicited confirmations were provided, information was updated on this table.

Table 1 (cont.)
Demographic Profile of the 3,292 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020

	# of Participants	% of Participants
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	9	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	22	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	75	2%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	11	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	20	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	85	3%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	24	1%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	177	5%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	20	1%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	106	3%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	9	0%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	1532	47%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	87	3%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	13	0%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	182	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	69	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	578	18%
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	17	1%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	60	2%
PhD/EdD including 12 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
Wage Rate*		
Below \$7.25 per hour	166	5%
\$7.25 - \$8.99 per hour	163	5%
\$9.00 - \$11.99 per hour	1002	30%
\$12.00 - \$14.99 per hour	1394	42%
\$15.00 - \$18.00 per hour	567	17%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Report End Date		
0 to .99 Years	95	3%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	383	12%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	404	12%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	336	10%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	276	8%
5.00 or More Years	1798	55%

* Combination classrooms including two and three year olds are included in the category "Mixed Ages."

** The first category under Wage Rate reflects those earning below North Carolina's minimum wage, typically home providers or owners whose income is dependent upon revenue. Pay rates will also reflect bonus compensation if awarded by the employer.



Table 2
Child Care Center Profile for North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020



	Programs	Participants
Center	1,176	3,027
1 STAR	8	12
2 STAR	4	5
3 STAR	134	256
4 STAR	297	635
5 STAR	692	2,043
GS-110	26	37
PROB	4	8
PROV	3	8
SPPROV	3	10
Temporary	5	13
Family Provider	260	265
2 STAR	1	1
3 STAR	22	24
4 STAR	177	179
5 STAR	56	57
Temporary	4	4
TOTALS	<u>1,436</u>	<u>3,292</u>

Due to COVID-19, employment status was not verified for the last quarter of the fiscal year. The active number includes all of those that were still eligible prior to the suspension of confirmations and new applicants that were paid. Please note that if unsolicited confirmations were provided, information was updated on this table.



Table 3
Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,292 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020



The Child Care WAGES® Program funds the same levels of education regardless of position, but the award amounts may differ depending on role. Teachers and home providers are funded using the same award scale, but are shown differently below to highlight their positions in the field. Directors, or those funded solely for administration time, are funded on the director scale. Participants who have both roles and are funded on both scales are shown as "teacher and director" in the table below. The "% of Participants Out of Scale" shows the percentage funded at each level out of the total number for each role/scale. The "% of Participants Out of Active" shows the percentage funded at each level out of the total number of active participants as of the end of the reporting period.

89% have a permanent level on the scale (AAS ECE or above) or are continuing their education as documented by coursework taken since original application to WAGES submitted in the current fiscal year. *Participants need time to continue their education and move up the supplement scale, thus the percentage includes only those counties who have participated for two or more years.*

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Scale	% of Participants Out Of Active
Teacher Scale	2777	100%	84%
Two	81	3%	2%
Three	90	3%	3%
Four	100	4%	3%
Five	28	1%	1%
Six	99	4%	3%
Seven	178	6%	5%
Eight	1420	51%	43%
Nine	87	3%	3%
Ten	208	7%	6%
Eleven	454	16%	14%
Twelve	32	1%	1%
Teacher/Home Provider Scale	290	100%	9%
Two	4	1%	0%
Three	7	2%	0%
Four	2	1%	0%
Five	1	0%	0%
Six	5	2%	0%
Seven	11	4%	0%
Eight	130	45%	4%
Nine	5	2%	0%
Ten	24	8%	1%
Eleven	84	29%	3%
Twelve	17	6%	1%
Director Scale	71	100%	2%
Two	1	1%	0%

Due to COVID-19, employment status was not verified for the last quarter of the fiscal year. The active number includes all of those that were still eligible prior to the suspension of confirmations and new applicants that were paid. Please note that if unsolicited confirmations were provided, information was updated on this table.

Table 3 (cont.)
Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,292 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Scale	% of Participants Out Of Active
Three	1	1%	0%
Four	2	3%	0%
Seven	5	7%	0%
Eight	28	39%	1%
Nine	4	6%	0%
Ten	5	7%	0%
Eleven	19	27%	1%
Twelve	6	8%	0%
Teacher and Director Scales	154	100%	5%
Two	7	5%	0%
Three	4	3%	0%
Four	2	1%	0%
Five	2	1%	0%
Six	5	3%	0%
Seven	4	3%	0%
Eight	68	44%	2%
Nine	4	3%	0%
Ten	14	9%	0%
Eleven	38	25%	1%
Twelve	6	4%	0%

Due to COVID-19, employment status was not verified for the last quarter of the fiscal year. The active number includes all of those that were still eligible prior to the suspension of confirmations and new applicants that were paid. Please note that if unsolicited confirmations were provided, information was updated for this report.



Table 4
Total Participants that Received a Supplement in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020



3,880 unduplicated participants received a supplement for completing a six month period that ended during this reporting period; these participants worked in 1,571 different child care programs serving approximately 71,343 children.

	Total Paid*	Total Programs	# Of Children 0 to 5
Center	3,573	1,271	70,027
Family Provider	307	300	1,316
<u>Total</u>	<u>3,880</u>	<u>1,571</u>	<u>71,343</u>

Data for paid participants reflects the full fiscal year; payments were issued using more flexible procedures in response to COVID-19.

* This may reflect a duplicated number of people paid if participants moved between a center and a home and were paid from both locations. Refer to the number at the top for an unduplicated count of people paid.



Table 5
Annual Turnover Summary of the 3,742 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - March 2020



The annual turnover percentage is based on an overall population of 3,742 participants. This population includes those individuals that were active during the reporting period of July 2019 - March 2020 (3,285) and those who left their centers during this time (457). Active participants meet all eligibility requirements and have worked at least six months in their child care programs. Active participants might also include individuals who have left a child care program, but have since worked six eligible months in a new site. (These "reactivated" participants are not factored into the report at all until they have completed this six month period.) The annual turnover percentage is obtained by dividing the total number of participants who left their center into the total number of participants.

People who became ineligible for other reasons (i.e. position change within center, became over-income due to raise, center closure, noncompliance with the program's income documentation guidelines, failure to obtain necessary coursework) are not included in the table. They have been removed from the overall total and the turnover numbers since they were no longer eligible for the Child Care WAGES® Program, and the supplement could not have been an incentive for them to stay.

Individuals who left their child care programs and those who became ineligible due to other reasons may or may not have been paid during the current fiscal year for completing one or more commitment periods. However, they have all been paid at some time during their participation on WAGES and thus earned active status prior to becoming ineligible.

Annual Turnover July 2019 - March 2020	
Total Participants	= 3,742
Active Participants	= 3,285
Left Center	= 457
Turnover Percentage	= 12%

Information is shown from July to March to reflect the program's turnover status prior to COVID-19 impact and the suspension of confirmations.



Table 5
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - March 2020



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Ethnicity		
American Indian	2	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1%
Biracial	1	0%
Black/African American	233	51%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	13	3%
White/European American	197	43%
Not Given	6	1%
Other	2	0%
Gender		
Female	449	98%
Male	8	2%
Position		
Teacher	300	66%
Teacher (Assistant Director)	5	1%
Teacher (Director)	2	0%
Teacher (Director Owner)	2	0%
Assistant Teacher	80	18%
Director	5	1%
Assistant Director	6	1%
Small Home Provider	24	5%
Small Facility (<13) Operator	7	2%
Split Position	26	6%
Education Level		
12 birth to five sem. hours	5	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	12	3%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	24	5%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	2	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	8	2%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	12	3%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	3	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	26	6%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	23	5%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	5	1%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	31	7%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	8	2%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	151	33%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	13	3%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	26	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	23	5%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	66	14%

**Table 5 (cont.)
 Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
 Child Care WAGES® Program
 July 2019 - March 2020**

	# of Participants	% of Participants
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	12	3%
Wage Rate*		
Below \$7.25 per hour	23	5%
\$7.25 - \$8.99 per hour	22	5%
\$9.00 - \$11.99 per hour	160	35%
\$12.00 - \$14.99 per hour	175	38%
\$15.00 - \$18.00 per hour	77	17%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Date Ineligible		
0 to .99 Years	37	8%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	99	22%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	68	15%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	54	12%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	44	10%
5.00 or More Years	155	34%
Regulation Type		
1 STAR	5	1%
3 STAR	42	9%
4 STAR	109	24%
5 STAR	288	63%
GS-110	4	1%
Temporary	6	1%
PROB	1	0%
PROV	1	0%
SPPROV	1	0%

* The first category under Wage Rate reflects those earning below North Carolina's minimum wage, typically home providers or owners whose income is dependent upon revenue.



**41 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020**



Alamance Partnership for Children
Alexander County Partnership for Children
Alleghany Partnership for Children
Blue Ridge Partnership for Children
Buncombe Partnership for Children, Inc.
Caldwell County Smart Start
Children & Youth Partnership for Dare County, Inc.
Children's Council of Watauga County, Inc.
Cleveland County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Columbus County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Craven Smart Start, Inc.
Down East Partnership for Children
Durham's Partnership for Children
Franklin Granville Vance Smart Start, Inc.
Halifax-Warren Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.
Harnett County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Hertford-Northampton Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.
Iredell County Partnership for Young Children, Inc.
Lee County Partnership for Children
Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children, Inc.
Mecklenburg Partnership for Children
North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education
Partnership for Children of Johnston County, Inc.
Partnership for Children of Lincoln/Gaston Counties
Partnership for Children of the Foothills
Randolph County Partnership for Children
Region A Partnership for Children
Rockingham County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Smart Start of Brunswick County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davidson County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davie County, Inc.
Smart Start of Forsyth County
Smart Start of Transylvania County
Smart Start of Yadkin County, Inc.



**41 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2019 - June 2020**



Smart Start Rowan, Inc.

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



Appendix A: Retention Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY20

“The WAGE\$ Program¹ helps me to afford the job that I have, and without it I would not be able to stay in the child care field. ... The supplement has meant that I can remain in a field where I get paid by doing what I was meant to do instead of what is financially beneficial.” (Alamance, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it increases retention in early childhood education and the child care center where the recipients are employed. ... For the children in my care and community, it means longevity.” (Alexander, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program makes me feel appreciated in my job, and it also helps lower turnover rates in my program.” (Avery, teacher)

“The supplement is an incentive to stay in the program. It has helped me so much financially. It also helps to buy items for the classroom, and I don’t always have to pay out of pocket. The children are very excited when I can buy new things for the class.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“I have no words for how much the WAGE\$ Program has helped me, my family and my classroom. There are months that I was barely making ends meet, then the check of assistance showed up in the mail and helped me through the month. It allowed me to stay in the field of child care, which I love. Otherwise, I would have had to leave this field to find a job that supplied more money to support my family.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“I really love to get WAGE\$ because I can pay bills and get new supplies for my classroom. I couldn't live without it, and I would have to get another job.” (Cherokee, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has been a major financial help for me and my family. It has helped me to stay in the early childhood education field as a teaching assistant while pursuing my bachelor’s degree.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it helps individuals stay in one place without change, which helps children stay secure under the teacher’s care and helps parents become more comfortable.” (Columbus, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me to stay and teach in an early childhood program. Without it, I would have to work elsewhere. Another important part of WAGE\$ is that I was able obtain my bachelor's degree!” (Craven, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because teaching is hard and even harder with long hours and little pay. WAGE\$ gives me an added incentive to keep going.” (Cumberland, teacher)

¹ Respondents referred to the Child Care WAGE\$® Program in a variety of ways. Throughout the quotes, the name has been corrected when necessary. Abbreviated references have been retained.

“I believe the Child Care WAGE\$® Program helps child care centers maintain workers and limits the amount of turnover.” (Dare, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program makes me feel appreciated for the work I do, especially since the pay for the early childhood field is not compatible with the education I have. I could go to work in a public school system and make more money, but I feel that young children deserve a strong educational foundation and the WAGE\$ Program helps support me financially so that I can stay at the facility where I am employed.” (Davidson, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is vital because many are self-employed and not privy to a bonus on the job. The program is a cushion to help us stay motivated to continue in the industry. Moreover, it's a huge thank you to us for giving high quality care, nurturing and for educating our future leaders in a mostly underpaid industry.” (Durham, family child care provider)

“The WAGE\$ Program makes me want to stay on the job. It's something you can count on.” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program encourages lower staff turnover rates. Large changes, such as losing old teachers and having to grow accustomed to new ones, are very difficult for young children. The program helps to improve that problem by incentivizing staying at one place of employment.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps keep teachers at the same program, therefore ensuring that the children in the program keep familiar faces and relationships with the program staff to help them be comfortable attending the program.” (Franklin, teacher)

“The supplement is an excellent incentive to continue one's education and to remain in an occupation that is fulfilling. We need more teachers that are dedicated to the education of the young child, but pay does not always meet the need of the teachers, and as a result, they have to find other jobs. The support of T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ is a huge benefit to teachers. Thank you!” (Gaston, teacher)

“The children have consistent teachers that give them stability. The morale of the teachers has increased because they get a better salary, and they continue their education.” (Granville, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives individuals more benefits and commitment to continue to do what we do. We do not get paid enough, but incentives help us, to keep us encouraged to stay in the field and increase our education, especially for those working hard as me with maintaining a 5 star center.” (Harnett, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives me the incentive to stay in the field and at my job. We work in a field where the pay is not so good, so the supplement motivates me to stay in my job and be able to make it.” (Haywood, teacher)

“It keeps the teacher here and keeps her motivated to continue doing a good job. That is good for the children and for the program.” (Hertford, director)

“Because the pay for this field is low, the supplement helps us to get by. It gives us the incentive to continue to work in early care and education.” (Iredell, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is so important because early child care providers are underpaid, and the program creates a financial incentive to stay. It also helps us increase our education, which allows us to better serve the children in our care. The WAGE\$ Program is helpful to the community because it provides us the incentive to stay where we work and this consistency makes it better for the children.” (Jackson, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped keep the same staff over the years.” (Johnston, director)

“It is important to me because I enjoy working with children, and the supplement helps me to stay at my job and not look for work in a different field.” (Lee, teacher)

“With the Child Care WAGE\$® Program, I was able to get back and forth to work, contribute more to my family and my classroom. This program has truly made me feel worthy and has made me want to stay in the child care field to give all that I have to each child.” (Martin, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has made me feel driven to do what I love to do the most because I am being compensated for my skills and knowledge.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is very important because as a teacher assistant, I love what I do, but the pay isn’t good. The WAGE\$ Program helps to make it possible to stay with the job I love.” (Mitchell, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has made a significant impact on my financial well-being, and it has allowed me to continue working in the field of early childhood education, which I am very passionate about. The supplement has allowed me to enhance my program as well as take care of my necessary bills. There is a great need for affordable child care services in the area, and I provide child care services. Because of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program supplements, I am able to provide those services.” (Pitt, family child care provider)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped keep me in the child care field. I would very likely have chosen a different career by now if it weren’t for this supplemental income.” (Randolph, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has made a big difference in my life. It has helped me decide to stay with the program. I depend on WAGE\$.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“The program has made me want to stay with early childhood education. ... I always set goals for myself prior to receiving WAGE\$, and WAGE\$ helps me to meet those goals.” (Rowan, teacher)

“The financial supplement helps families because child care workers receive very low pay. The supplement helps me to be able to stay in the child care field.” (Stanly, teacher)

“It’s such a nice reward to the teachers! This added ‘bonus’ helps me keep staff longer, and in turn keeps more stability for the children.” (Surry, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important to me because it helps ‘fill in the gap’ financially for my family. This means where I may have been a little short on the payment for a bill, I can now put WAGE\$ towards that and not be short. Receiving the supplement encourages me to stay with my current program, and has even got me thinking about going back to school to continue my education and possibly move up on the scale.” (Wayne, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has helped supplement my income so I can continue to do what I love, teaching young children.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“I think it helps the staff to continue doing what they love to do. I feel like when the teachers have more education and feel more appreciated, it helps them do a better job.” (Wilson, director)

“It is a wonderful program. WAGE\$ has allowed me to stay at my current job.” (Yancey, teacher)



Appendix B: Education

Feedback Collected from WAGES[®] Surveys FY20

“Receiving a WAGES[®] supplement affirms the importance of teacher education to the quality early learning experiences provided for young students. The supplement reinforces early childhood education as a profession and encourages early educators to continue their pursuit of knowledge and skills that are beneficial to all involved.” (Alamance, director)

“The WAGES[®] Program encouraged me to continue furthering my education and taught me about the T.E.A.C.H. Program that I'm currently receiving assistance from to help further my education.” (Alexander, teacher)

“Showing appreciation for what teachers are doing encourages them to get more education to get higher on WAGES[®].” (Alleghany, director)

“I think the WAGES[®] Program is important because it gives educators like me a chance to feel valued. We don't get paid nearly enough, and it gives us the extra push for school.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“I really feel it is important to have the program because it gives the teachers something to work towards. Most of the staff wouldn't be able to go back to school without those supports. The children benefit from our staff having higher education.” (Buncombe, director)

“In a field where education is invaluable to doing the job well, the pay continues to be very low in both child care centers and schools. This supplement encourages our staff to continue their education and rewards that progress to help keep them motivated to continue growth and education. This impacts their well-being and job satisfaction, which is reflected in the work they do.” (Caldwell, director)

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program is important because it encourages child care teachers to further their education. The program, in turn, benefits children in child care settings. This program has also had a great impact on me financially. It is a great supplement to my income.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“It gives initiative to pursue further education. It boosts up the employees' morale. The more educated the staff are, the more parents are happy that there are dedicated and quality staff caring for their loved ones.” (Columbus, director)

“The WAGES[®] Program motivated me to get my degree.” (Craven, teacher)

“The WAGES[®] Program has helped me to realize that there is so much to learn in this profession and to never stop learning about what you love to do.” (Cumberland, teacher)

¹ Respondents referred to the Child Care WAGES[®] Program in a variety of ways. Throughout the quotes, the name has been corrected when necessary. Abbreviated references have been retained.

“WAGE\$ encourages staff to increase levels of education and keeps consistent staff at the school.” (Dare, teacher)

“The center benefits from staff members who are continuing their education by an increase in the quality of their teaching.” (Davidson, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives help with education and helps me on catching up with bills. It also helps me stay in my current program.” (Davie, teacher)

“I think it keeps the teachers motivated and they want to go back to school. The better educated your teachers are, the better it is for the children and their families. It helps boost the morale of people wanting to work in child care.” (Durham, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps by bringing more opportunities to further your education, which benefits the children in your care.” (Edgecombe, director)

“The supplement is an incentive for me. It is nice to feel rewarded. It has helped me pursue a higher education, which makes me better equipped to offer families higher quality care. It trickles down. I am able to influence my staff to get higher education, which will help to attract and retain people in the child care field.” (Forsyth, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important to help early childhood educators to feel more appreciated and supported! The WAGE\$ Program has helped me to feel appreciated and has supported me throughout the years! As a single mom, I went back to college and was taking online courses. I graduated last month with my Birth-Kindergarten Degree, Early Childhood concentration, and Suma Cum Laude Honors!” (Franklin, teacher)

“The program offers an opportunity to jump start the education process for those not having money or resources to continue their education. Our program has seen better class and child planning and interaction. We have seen more confident attitudes and pride among the participants. This is the best program for continuing education overall.” (Gaston, director)

“The WAGE\$ supplement is an incentive for teachers to gain more education.” (Graham, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is very important and has meant a lot to my life. I have gained wisdom, knowledge and direction by attending classes in how to care for children and gain their attention.” (Granville, family child care provider)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives me the opportunity to expand my education.” (Halifax, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has been very important to me because it gives me the room to grow academically.” (Harnett, teacher)

“Being a single parent can be challenging at times, especially if you are working full-time and also taking classes, but with the WAGES supplement, it has lifted some of the weight. I have worked at my center for four and a half years now and have moved up their tiers quickly, so the supplement has increased quickly as well!” (Haywood, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ program is very important. It helps centers to get more highly qualified teachers. It encourages teachers to continue their education. It also helps our community by having a higher educated workforce!” (Iredell, director)

“If WAGE\$ did not exist, I would not have been able to go back to school and finish my degree. I have applied for my license now. The supplement also helps ease the stress of bills, and it allows us to have some money to put back into our classrooms. It gives us breathing room!” (Jackson, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it gives early childhood educators the opportunity to further their education and get more knowledge about the ever changing field. It also gives teachers supplements that are much needed to continue to stay in the field.” (Johnston, family child care provider)

“I feel the WAGE\$ Program is very important to help child care providers to further their education and to provide an incentive to stay in a child care career.” (Lee, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives teachers an incentive to pursue their education and stay at their current job.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me to be able to focus on classes and to buy resources for my room, which make me a better teacher.” (Macon, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me financially in my education, and it has encouraged me to learn and evolve in my current role. I share with other staff and my parents the work that is put into us as educators to be professionals, which makes our job easier. It makes me feel good to be a teacher, I am grateful.” (Martin, teacher)

“This program has given me the confidence to fulfill my educational requirements and is something that was simply not feasible before, considering my lack of financial resources. I am sure others are very appreciative of this program. The children in my care are also seeing the benefits of this program as I am applying what I am learning directly to the center.” (Mecklenburg, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has given me a better chance at school to be successful in my career. It helped me finish school and obtain my Bachelor’s in Early Childhood.” (Mitchell, teacher)

“The WAGES Program is beneficial because it helps people feel valued for the work they do while encouraging them to pursue higher learning in the education field.” (Nash, teacher)

“Staff feel valued and the awards help supplement their income, often in needy times. They feel encouraged to go to school because of the support.” (Northampton, director)

“I actually went through the program as a teacher and it helped me move up in the company. I was able to finish my degree.” (Pitt, director)

“It has increased education and professionalism among staff. It has also increased morale and the quality in classroom environments.” (Randolph, director)

“I couldn’t have obtained a degree without the WAGE\$ Program’s support.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“We are not able to pay teachers what they deserve, so this is a big help. It also pushes my teachers to get more education because they see their bonuses will be more, which is good for the children!” (Rowan, director)

“I think it is important because it assists the staff to go back to school and the reason is to get the money. The more informed and educated the teachers get, the better equipped they are for the children. It is a win-win for the teachers and the children.” (Rutherford, director)

“I have felt more confident and on board with our curriculum as my last college class covered it in depth! I believe it has also helped me financially, in that I was able to pay for some of my schooling and also pick up dinners on the nights that I had the college classes. I am very thankful that WAGE\$ has come into being because there are so many children that I would love to help more and having had this past college class, I can understand a lot more than I did before!” (Surry, teacher)

“High quality teaching assistants are one of the most valuable assets in early childhood programs. Supplementing their income and encouraging education provide them with a morale boost and motivation to provide higher quality care and stay with the program.” (Swain, director)

“The supplement helps teachers feel more secure within their jobs, and it’s a great incentive to keep teachers working towards more education.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has given the extra drive to take more than the required courses to stay in the program.” (Vance, teacher)

“It lets the teacher know that even when underpaid, they are not forgotten. The staff participating in this program furthered their education to reap more benefits.” (Wayne, director)

“The supplement has allowed me to further my education. It has shown my child at home that education is important.” (Wilson, teacher)

“I think it gives them something to work for. Continuing their education helps staff learn how to better care for the children. It gives them incentives and goals to work towards.” (Yadkin, director)

“It provides a path for better education for my staff.” (Yancey, director)



Appendix C: Compensation Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY20

“It’s helpful for the teachers to not have to worry about income. We all know that they don’t get paid a lot so it helps them focus on the children.” (Alamance, director)

“The supplement has helped me with my finances! It has been a real blessing to me and my family. ... The WAGE\$ Program¹ helps take some of the stress away from working in early childhood.” (Alexander, teacher)

“When working in early childhood education, you don't make a lot of money to take care of the things you need. You actually go broke! WAGE\$, for me, helps me do some of the things I normally have no money to do! I truly thank you!” (Alleghany, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me many times to stay on my feet. ... The WAGE\$ Program has honestly changed my life, all for the better!” (Avery, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it allows me to provide materials and equipment that I wouldn’t be able to purchase with my regular income. I use the supplement to provide meaningful experiences for the children in my care.” (Brunswick, family child care provider)

“It adds to the value of their daily life by giving teachers extra resources to meet the needs of their own families. Plus, it adds to their employment satisfaction.” (Caldwell, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps with everyday living.” (Cherokee, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has given me support for many years to help me provide for my family as well as to grow professionally. The program’s supplement has given back to the community by providing a nurse, an engineer, a mechanic, and a chef. Our family has benefited greatly over the years because of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.” (Clay, teacher)

“It has been a Godsend. I use it in every aspect of my life and hope I never have to do without it.” (Cleveland, family child care provider)

“Salaries are not high in child care. Employers can’t afford to pay teachers what they are worth and provide good quality care without raising rates for children to attend, which causes financial problems for parents. WAGE\$ gives a little extra, and it also helps people that are trying to go back to school.” (Columbus, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me get my home fixed after a hurricane in 2018. The WAGE\$ money will help me get a roof over my trailer and get me and my two girls out of the

¹ Respondents referred to the Child Care WAGE\$® Program in a variety of ways. Throughout the quotes, the name has been corrected when necessary. Abbreviated references have been retained.

camper that we are calling home. And WAGE\$ helps me get food for my girls.” (Craven, teacher)

“I have been in business for twenty years with the help from the WAGE\$ Program. ... WAGE\$ is very important because it has helped me to pay for my own health care insurance, resources for my classroom, early childhood coursework and also helped me to take much needed vacations. Thank you WAGE\$ Program for all you do to help early childhood providers.” (Cumberland, family child care provider)

“Those of us that work in the early childhood field are underappreciated and underpaid. I work just as hard as a public school teacher, but with far less pay. The WAGE\$ Program helps to ease financial burdens while recognizing the accomplishments I’ve made. It’s helped me not stress about the money I spend making my classroom better for the children I care for.” (Dare, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has been a blessing! It came just in time this time! I was able to help one of my student’s family who got burned out of their home.” (Davidson, teacher)

“A lot of teachers are unemployed because of COVID-19. I am so dependent on my WAGE\$ check, more than I’ve ever had to be. I need this next check to help keep food on the table and to keep from going homeless. ... I depend on WAGE\$ because it fills in the gaps, and now that we are dealing with COVID-19, where most of us are not working, my next check can’t come quick enough. I am trying to balance how much money to spend on food vs. bills, like my mortgage, so I am very thankful for WAGE\$, more than I can put into words. Thank you, and I am feeling grateful.” (Durham, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has given me extra money. I don't have to get a second job, and I can completely focus on the education of the children in my care. I love my job!” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped to prevent foreclosure on my home.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“Any money that helps ease my financial stress makes me feel appreciated because child care is a low paying job without enough raises.” (Gaston, teacher)

“Financially, the supplement has been nothing short of a blessing.” (Granville, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps with additional financial needs and makes me more satisfied with the work I do. Because of this program, I don't have to seek part-time work in addition to my main job to fill in the gap in salary. It allows me to concentrate more completely on my students with less worry about personal finances. Due to the above mentioned issues, my choice to continue working in this program has increased.” (Halifax, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has really given me a support system to be the best educator that I can be, especially when the center that you are working in is doing the best they can with pay and cannot contribute to the employee any greater. The WAGE\$ Program is my ‘saving grace.’” (Harnett, teacher)

“I cannot make it without the WAGE\$ Program. I get paid less than an employee at Chick-fil-A, and I have two four-year degrees and that is very sad!” (Haywood, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps to make happy teachers. When you have happy teachers, you have happy students, and I think that makes a happy community.” (Hertford, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because I am able to share this resource with new staff that are not familiar with the program to support salaries. It has allowed me to take coursework, trainings and to get materials and resources for the classrooms. We like to go over and beyond in our rooms and the money allows us to provide out-of-the box care for the children we serve.” (Iredell, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps supplement our classrooms with materials and supplies, which helps me to build up my classroom. It also helps me feel important and valued, which makes me a better teacher for the children.” (Johnston, teacher)

“My WAGE\$ check helps me buy tires for my car and oil changes. I have a 35 minute drive to work and home. ... It also has helped me buy groceries, pay a light bill, and provide items for the classroom.” (Lee, teacher)

“It is a great supplement that helps with financial burdens. It has been a huge blessing and is helping me pay off the previous year’s bills.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“The additional income improves my quality of life and lowers my stress.” (Macon, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because they help meet financial needs by supplementing income that’s needed for everyday living expenses.” (Martin, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is a huge help financially. It alleviates stress that I didn't realize was snowballing into my classroom. ... I think there are many people out there who would agree that teachers are underpaid. It is helpful to feel appreciated and have the decreased financial burden.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is very helpful with funding for different projects for my classroom. Personally, it helps with my bills, thus making me not stressed - that makes me a better teacher!” (Mitchell, teacher)

“It has helped the teachers financially, so there is less everyday stress. Teachers are more focused on the classroom.” (Nash, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has made it easier for me to purchase things for the class and have food to eat.” (Pitt, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has given me and my family my ‘WHY’ -- why I do what I do, why I continue to love my profession, why I continue to further my professional development, why I want to further my education, why I want to give the families and students I have the opportunity to serve the BEST

ME, why I have been in my position for 10 years in two months. I could go on and on about my whys.” (Randolph, teacher)

“I think the WAGE\$ Program is important because child care workers are underpaid and the supplement helps ease a lot of stress financially. I think the less stress we have as child care workers, the better teachers we can be to the children in our care.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me pay off loans and buy materials during school. It has helped me with financial despair along with staff members I work with.” (Rowan, teacher)

“The supplement helps make all my ends meet.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“The extra money helps us with personal family bills, and helps us buy things for our classroom. It also keeps us at our center.” (Stanly, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me provide more for my family and their health needs. It makes me perform better at my job and makes me feel appreciated. I feel so satisfied with my job! With more finances, I am able to provide more for the children in my classroom. It makes me want to stay with my job. I feel that children learn better when there is less turnover.” (Surry, teacher)

“I was able to pay a mortgage, not rent, with the extra income in a period of time of saving, and I used it for furthering my education.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me pay my bills, and I’ve been able to buy things for the classroom. I have also been able to keep myself healthier by eating better, and going to the doctor when needed.” (Vance, teacher)

“The supplement is a great asset for a child care provider. It helps us keep our head above water.” (Warren, family child care provider)

“The WAGE\$ is important to support childhood educators. It has meant a lot to my life and helped relieve financial stress, which has benefited my mental health both in and out of the classroom.” (Watauga, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is beneficial because it helps to address the financial needs associated with this type of work and in turn decreases the stress level of being able to provide some of the extras that I may not have been able to provide.” (Wayne, family child care provider)

“My WAGES supplement always seems to come when I need it most. Last year, my brakes went bad on my car and that check paid to have them replaced. Otherwise, I don’t know what I would have done.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“The Child WAGE\$® Program relieves your financial burdens. It means a lot to me to receive my WAGE\$ check during the six-month period because that is extra money for my needs. I can also purchase small items for my classroom. The WAGE\$ Program can benefit you in so many ways such as food, bills, and gas.” (Wilson, teacher)

“I am a single parent. The supplement has allowed me to provide for my child, being able to afford things I could not normally obtain.” (Yadkin, teacher)



Appendix D: Appreciation/Recognition Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY20

“It has enhanced teacher morale. It has encouraged several to further their education. It also helps in building more positive relationships with the child and parent, as it uplifts their spirit and worth.” (Alamance, director)

“Working in early childhood is stressful and demanding. The WAGE\$ Program¹ offers support to the staff and makes them feel valued.” (Alexander, director)

“The supplements make my teachers very happy! It is nice to be recognized for all the hard work we do.” (Brunswick, director)

“The supplement is extremely important because the field of early childhood education is undervalued in our society. WAGE\$ helps us financially as well as increases our sense of value in the important work that we do.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has helped me by giving me an incentive for my hard work and efforts in child care. Child care teachers are underpaid and WAGE\$ definitely helped me feel more appreciated as a child care employee.” (Cherokee, teacher)

“The supplement makes you value your job more because it lets you know how much people appreciate you for what you do.” (Columbus, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program encourages providers and staff to not give up. We are making a difference in the lives of children.” (Cumberland, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has been very beneficial to me as I feel more recognized and valued as an early childhood professional.” (Davidson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel that my work is important and valued.” (Davie, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program makes you feel like you are accomplishing something by working in the child care field. It makes you feel counted and appreciated. And now with the essential workforce needing child care in order to do their jobs, I hope this can change some attitudes to bring more to our workers and field as society sees how vital we are as a workforce. We are also essential!” (Durham, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it shows educators that someone is out there who feels we are important in the children’s lives. It pushes us to strive for more and to do more.” (Forsyth, teacher)

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“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it lets me know that I am appreciated and recognized for my work in early childhood.” (Franklin, family child care provider)

“It has improved the morale of the staff and self-esteem, which also creates more positive child-teacher interactions and relations. It has motivated teachers to continue to do well.” (Halifax, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has made me feel valued, and it has contributed to my self-worth as an educator.” (Harnett, teacher)

“I appreciate that I am appreciated. I love what I do, and I’m glad to know that I am appreciated! Thank you!” (Haywood, teacher)

“It is beneficial to the program because the teachers get better pay, and they are happy. Happy teachers make the children happy.” (Iredell, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps us to feel better appreciation as ‘professional teachers’ in a workforce contributing to society.” (Johnston, teacher)

“Above all, the WAGE\$ Program increases my self-esteem. Low paid workers feel as if their work is unimportant or that they are unskilled. I felt this way until I began being compensated for my hard work and dedication to early childhood education.” (Macon, teacher)

“The program has not only helped me financially, but made me feel as if I matter to each child.” (Martin, teacher)

“The staff at our facility have been very positive about the program and love that their hard work is recognized by someone other than ‘us’ and the families. It does add a level of professionalism to the field to know that on a higher level we are beginning to acknowledge the importance of early education.” (Mecklenburg, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives me more motivation to be a better teacher. It makes me feel appreciated.” (Pitt, family child care provider)

“I feel like the morale of the staff is more positive when they know they are achieving a higher education and implementing the knowledge they acquire in their daily interactions with the children in their care, as well as getting compensated for it!” (Randolph, director)

“With my staff, it makes them feel valued and it is an opportunity to seek higher education.” (Rowan, director)

“WAGE\$ is a means of opportunity and acknowledgement. It is an opportunity for me to earn an income that in turn makes me feel acknowledged as having an important role in the child care profession. As the years have progressed there have been so many cuts in education, but WAGE\$ keeps me hopeful that things will improve in the preschool/child care fields.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“The teachers who receive the supplement are very appreciative. It does help to be rewarded for the hard work and hours that are required in the child care field. So when the teachers feel good and positive, of course the children reap the benefits.” (Surry, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program makes me feel valued because I know that programs such as WAGE\$, and the people behind the programs, are here to support me and help me be successful in my career.” (Watauga, teacher)

“It offers an extra incentive to the teachers and shows appreciation to them because most do not get paid what others do, so it keeps them motivated and it shows in the positive attitudes and interactions with the kids.” (Wilkes, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important for people to feel valued and appreciated for their hard work.” (Yadkin, family child care provider)



Appendix E: Smart Start Messages Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY20

“I would like to thank the funders for allowing me to give to and provide for the children and also for providing a chance for me to have a financial means to decompress or for personal renewal.” (Alamance, teacher)

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for valuing my service in the early childhood education field.” (Alexander, teacher)

“Thank you! Thank you for believing in us and knowing we need extra money throughout the year. Thank you for your support, always caring about us and what we try to do for the children every day.” (Alleghany, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program¹ is a great program and a wonderful incentive for teachers.” (Avery, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has meant so much to me. It’s hard to describe because it has helped me pay some bills for my family. It has also helped me pay for some of my classes so I could get a better education for my class. I have used the money to help pay for materials for my class. It also has helped me pay for a mini vacation for my family.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“Thank you for the recognition of the low wages that teachers and support staff receive by doing something about it.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps people like me stay in the field of early child care education because I feel I am called to do it, and it is a complete blessing. If I could personally thank each person, I would.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“The supplement greatly helps with turnover and consistency, which is so important for the children. It is a great incentive for staff to stay invested at the same center. Turnover is greatly impacted. Thanks.” (Cherokee, director)

“I would like to tell Smart Start that WAGE\$ is a worthy program that keeps giving to the next generation, proving that education is a way out of poverty, and it helps our community move forward in a positive way.” (Clay, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program supplement is a great financial incentive for child care workers to further their education and to stay in the early childhood field.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“Thank you for giving us the incentive to want to work more for the children.” (Columbus, teacher)

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“Thank you for supplementing our income and allowing us to maintain our career in the field.”
(Cumberland, teacher)

“The supplement makes a difference in my program and in turn, the lives of the children I care for.” (Dare, family child care provider)

“Thank you. Without these funds, I would have to seek employment elsewhere, and I do not want to do that.” (Davidson, teacher)

“Thank you! Please do not let this program go. It is more of a benefit than you realize.” (Davie, director)

“Thank you very much for funding WAGE\$ because it’s very valuable to us, and I’m thankful that you understand our roles as early educators. It is definitely something to keep fighting for because it is important.” (Durham, family child care provider)

“First, thank you! The funds are a great help to people such as myself that really love kids and love what we do. We do not educate for the money. We are educators because we have a burning passion for education and love for little people that want to be fed the knowledge of the world. They have the desire to learn, grow, dream and become developers of the next inventions of the future. Please continue to support educators, for we hold the future in our hands.” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“Thank you very much for supporting the Child Care WAGE\$® Program. It has personally made a big difference for me financially and in encouraging me to pursue further education. It is also having a great impact on young children by encouraging more consistent staffing in their classrooms. Thank you!” (Forsyth, teacher)

“I would like to thank the Child Care WAGE\$® Program and Smart Start for their partnership of helping me and other child care workers with financial and educational support. It is truly a blessing for me.” (Franklin, teacher)

“The supplement has been the difference between my staying in this field versus finding a better paying job. Teachers should never have to work two or three jobs simply to ‘afford’ this job. The supplement, in my particular case, means my employer has one less teacher turnover and my students have had a teacher who is there year after year. Please continue to fight for this funding. In a field that is so important to giving children the best possible start, it is very important to do whatever is possible to keep the turnover rate low and teacher satisfaction high.” (Gaston, teacher)

“I would be unable to continue working in child care without the WAGE\$ Program.” (Granville, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program continues to help me out with stressful situations, and I really would like to thank everyone who made this happen for me.” (Halifax, teacher)

“I greatly appreciate Smart Start for having the WAGE\$ Program because we have a lot of responsibility, and we are already low-wage employees. The supplement helps us get by.” (Harnett, family child care provider)

“It’s very hard to balance doing something you love that pays so little with providing for your family. The WAGE\$ Program makes it possible.” (Haywood, teacher)

“We greatly appreciate WAGE\$. We hope that this support will continue and grow in the future.” (Hertford, director)

“Thank you and please continue the program. I feel that if it did not exist, teachers would lose their energy to work in this field and continue their education.” (Iredell, director)

“The program is a game changer for educators who struggle. We don’t get paid much and have to overcome personal stresses outside and inside of the classroom. WAGE\$ reduces stress for me.” (Jackson, teacher)

“Thank you for providing the much needed supplements. It helps us be able to buy much needed supplies for our children. It makes me feel that we are important, we matter to our children and the profession of early childhood. Continue the supplements because it helps us be able to make ends meet.” (Johnston, family child care provider)

“Thank you very much. The supplement helps my family and helps me continue to be a teacher, which I enjoy. I am very grateful for this program.” (Lee, teacher)

“Thank you for the money. It has helped me in so many ways, and knowing that I get this does help me stay at my job. Thank you again.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“I really appreciate the supplement, and it means a lot that you are willing to invest in the field by supporting us.” (Macon, teacher)

“Thank you very much for all that you do and for the opportunities that you give us. I am elated and very glad that this program exists.” (Martin, teacher)

“Smart Start, thank you so much. These benefits would not be possible if it wasn’t for you. You inspire me to continue to do my best in working with children and their families. The supplement is a huge help and takes some of the weight off of me. I’m able to do things that I probably wouldn’t be able to do without the supplement.” (Mecklenburg, family child care provider)

“Thank you everyone for all that you do. The WAGE\$ Program is so important to teachers. Words cannot express how thankful we all are and how much this does mean to us, to feel wanted and needed.” (Mitchell, director)

“The supplements are making a huge difference in the lives of our next generation by providing them with better teachers.” (Nash, teacher)

“I would not have made it without the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.” (Pitt, family child care provider)

“Please continue to support the WAGE\$ Program so that valuable, caring teachers are not forced to choose between loving/teaching other people’s children and being able to support their own.” (Randolph, teacher)

Thank you for funding WAGES. Without it I would probably have to leave the field I love just to make ends meet.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“I love the WAGE\$ Program. It helps me out in times of trouble since I get paid once a month. I’m so glad that the county I work in participates in the program. Please don’t take the program away!” (Rowan, teacher)

“I am so grateful to you for caring. The WAGE\$ Program is very helpful to me and my family. Thank you for all that you do to assure those that work in the child care field are compensated.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“The program is a welcomed and much appreciated source of income to my average child care salary. I believe that when employees feel appreciated and are rewarded for hard work, those same employees are motivated to work harder. It’s a ‘win-win.’” (Stanly, teacher)

“Thank you for providing the funding, and making it possible for us to further our education. I pray that you will see fit for it to continue as it is very rewarding for me and the children that I teach and work with daily. They are the main recipients of your funding; with the knowledge you can afford me to achieve, I can have more abilities to go further with them than I ever have before. Actually, putting into practice the book and classroom knowledge comes into play when I come into my Pre-K class, and that is the proving grounds for the funding! Thanks again for putting the supplement in place.” (Surry, teacher)

“I would like to say thank you for providing these funds! They have helped many be able to provide for their classroom and their home needs.” (Swain, teacher)

“Keep doing the WAGE\$ Program. It helps so much!” (Transylvania, teacher)

“To my local Smart Start partnership: Please keep up the good fight for educators in the early childhood field because we need our supplements and all the information to continue to provide quality education to all children that we care for and teach. God bless you!” (Vance, teacher)

“The decision to give the supplement years ago has been life changing for me. I am very dependent on the supplement. It gives me peace knowing it will be there.” (Watauga, family child care provider)

“I really appreciate this supplement being available. It truly has helped me and my family financially and is a great incentive for me to continue working in the early childhood field!” (Wayne, teacher)

“Thank you so much. You have no idea how much the supplement helps and how much I appreciate it.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“It is a wonderful supplement to the teachers and allows us to further our education; therefore, it is helping the children.” (Wilson, teacher)

“Thank you for providing the funds. It is really nice to know you are thinking about us and appreciate the work we do for the children.” (Yadkin, family child care provider)

“Smart Start is absolutely wonderful, and I can't thank them enough for the generosity of the WAGE\$ Program and what it means to me!” (Yancey, teacher)