

# Infant-Toddler Educator **AWARDS**\$<sup>®</sup>

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A black and white photograph of a young child with dark hair, wearing a white short-sleeved dress and dark leggings, running away from the camera on a paved path. The child's arms are slightly out to the sides, and their feet are in mid-stride. The background is a blurred natural setting with rocks and foliage.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **FY2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

[WWW.CHILDCARESERVICES.ORG/AWARDS](http://WWW.CHILDCARESERVICES.ORG/AWARDS)

Professionals who serve our youngest, most vulnerable children—when brain development is at a peak—are key to ensuring successful growth and development. Yet they earn the least. While post-COVID-19 information on the workforce is needed and will be collected soon, 2019 data shows that in North Carolina, **infant-toddler teaching staff earn \$11.00/hr. on average** compared to \$12.45/hr. for those who teach children who are three to five years old (*Working in Early Care and Education*, Child Care Services Association, 2019). These low wages, often poverty-level, contribute to the difficulty child care programs are experiencing in hiring and retaining staff in the wake of the pandemic. Without qualified educators, programs struggle to serve the children that need care.

**Compensation is critical**, particularly now as North Carolina and the entire nation battle the “great resignation” and employees around the country demand higher pay, better working conditions and much-deserved respect.

Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® helped address this issue by providing education-based salary supplements to well-educated teachers and family child care providers working full-time with children birth through age two. AWARD\$\* was funded by the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and administered by Child Care Services Association (CCSA).

*\*As of August 2022, the program has expanded eligibility and is now called Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus.*

“There have been many instances where if it hadn’t been for the supplement, I don’t know what I would’ve done. It has meant the world to me. It has helped me stay afloat and be the best possible teacher I can be.”

--AWARD\$ participant

“AWARD\$ has saved my family the last few times I’ve gotten it. It has meant being able to get gas/food/minutes for my phone when there was no money in the bank and payday was still a week away.”

--AWARD\$ participant





## Compensation for the educated infant-toddler workforce is critical

With increased compensation, degreed AWARD\$ recipients can afford to stay in the infant-toddler classroom and many are encouraged to continue their coursework. Our youngest children depend on stable and engaging relationships with the adults in their lives to ensure they get the best possible start. **Early educators need increased compensation to improve their own lives and take care of their own families.**

“Please continue to support NC early childhood professionals in this way. . . This program is important because it helps to supplement teachers’ income, increase stability in centers by increasing retention, encourages hiring higher quality staff, and encourages staff to obtain higher education. All of these can increase quality.”

--AWARD\$ director

**\$1,288**

Average six-month supplement (approximately \$1.24/hr. more when viewed as an hourly increase)

In FY2021-2022, North Carolina distributed more than *\$3 million* in AWARD\$ salary supplements to 1,337 infant-toddler teachers and family child care providers.



AWARD\$ helps retain educated professionals, which supports young children's growth and development and makes it easier for child care programs to thrive.

**98% of survey  
respondents said  
AWARD\$  
encourages them  
to stay with their  
current child  
care programs**

**16%  
Turnover  
Rate**

“AWARD\$ has helped me stay with my current program. I probably would have left for other opportunities if not for AWARD\$. It benefits the children at the center because they see the same staff throughout the years and that helps them feel more secure and safe.”

--AWARD\$ participant

“It’s important because it gives the staff a sense of appreciation for the work, and it retains good staff. It helps the children because the staff will be eager to work and remain a faithful employee.”

--AWARD\$ participant

“AWARD\$ has empowered me to better provide for my family, which enables me to continue doing what I love, which is teaching children.”

--AWARD\$ participant





AWARD\$ supplements help ease financial stress, helping recipients focus more on the children in their care.



**97%**

said AWARD\$ helps them feel more satisfied with their jobs



**NEARLY  
100%**

said AWARD\$ helps ease financial stress

“Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® has given me reason to stay at my current program when their rate of pay was not meeting my needs. It’s given me more financial security, decreased stress from financial strain and helped me to be a more present teacher for my children in the classroom.”

--AWARD\$ participant

“I have always wanted to work with children. It is my passion, but once I started working in the field, I realized that it is a challenge to find a place willing to pay what is needed to live off of. The AWARD\$ program has helped ease some of the financial burden of doing what I love as a career choice.”

--AWARD\$ participant



AWARD\$ recognizes the educational accomplishments and commitment of infant-toddler educators through enhanced compensation.



98%

said receiving the AWARD\$ supplement makes them feel more appreciated and recognized

"It makes me feel valued and shows me that I am necessary. I feel like someone is recognizing the hard work I do and giving me the financial assistance to build my future."

--AWARD\$ participant

"I have found that when a teacher's efforts for achieving higher education are rewarded, we feel better about doing our jobs. Happier teachers mean more meaningful and successful classrooms. Students get more from teachers that are knowledgeable and if there is a way to supplement our income, we are more likely to stay in our field."

--AWARD\$ participant



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## Appreciating AWARD\$ Participant Highlight: LaTonya Pegues

Union County toddler teacher LaTonya Pegues got her Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education in her 40s, and she is proud that she went back to school and stuck with it. She said, “It was hard, but I did it! I have a son and two grandchildren. I’m a teacher all the time: at home, at church, in my community and in my center. I’m striving to do better every day and be a better person.”

LaTonya said, “My education has really helped me in my career because I know what the developmental goals are and I can see the growth in the children. I have more confidence. I have honed my craft and I know what I’m doing in the classroom.”



Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® has helped her obtain her degree and remain in the field she loves. She said, “AWARD\$ has been a blessing. It is rewarding because it supplements income that we are not getting because a center can’t afford to pay you what you are worth. It gives hope to educators who work for centers that do not have much funding. These centers still need teachers to provide quality care to infants, toddlers, and 2s. It’s important to start learning early and AWARD\$ gives stability to teachers by giving an incentive. This incentive helps teachers to stay at centers that are understaffed and underpaid. I don’t do this job for the money, but because it gives me joy to create bonds and to hear my 2 year olds say their numbers in Spanish, which is something I taught them. Children are like a blank canvas and as we pour into them, they become a masterpiece full of color and knowledge.”

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### Infant Toddler Educator AWARD\$® is now Infant-Toddler Educator® AWARD\$ Plus.

AWARD\$ Plus expands the program eligibility, enabling more infant-toddler educators across the state to participate. As of August 2022, more education levels have been added to the scale, additional sites are now eligible to participate and the program has a higher income cap. To be eligible for AWARD\$ Plus, an applicant must:

- Work with children birth through age two at least 30 hours per week
- Earn \$20 or less per hour
- Work in a licensed child care center or home
- Have at least 12 semester hours of birth to five focused coursework from a regionally accredited school

Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$®  
Plus is funded by the North Carolina  
Division of Child Development and  
Early Education (DCDEE).



**NCDHHS**  
Division of Child Development  
and Early Education

**Infant-Toddler Educator  
AWARD\$® Plus**

**Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus**

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# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

