

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

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2022-2023**



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# Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus

Professionals who serve our youngest, most vulnerable children – when brain development is at a peak – are key to ensuring successful growth and development. While a new workforce study is underway, 2019 data shows that in North Carolina, infant-toddler teaching staff earn \$11.00 per hour on average compared to \$12.45 per hour for those who teach children who are 3-5 years old (Working in Early Care and Education, Child Care Services Association, 2019). Though North Carolina offered temporary stabilization grants that early care and education programs could use to increase compensation, low overall wages continue to contribute to ongoing hiring and retention challenges.

Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus helps address this issue by providing education-based salary supplements to teachers and family child care providers working full-time with children birth through age two. The statewide program is funded by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and is administered by Child Care Services Association (CCSA). While supplements alone cannot solve the compensation crisis, they are a critical strategy until early educators receive the base pay, benefits and respect they deserve for the important work they do.



## **In FY23, AWARD\$ transitioned to AWARD\$ Plus to reflect the expansion of program eligibility:**

- More education levels were added to the scale, beginning with 12 semester hours of birth to five focused coursework
- More child care facilities became eligible – staff from all licensed sites were eligible to apply
- A higher income cap of \$20 per hour was implemented

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

With increased compensation, AWARD\$ Plus recipients can better 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 off to the best possible start. **Early educators need increased compensation to improve their own lives and take care of their families.**

***"It helps to be able to meet financial needs of my family. It's a wonderful supplement to our income because honestly, some of us could not make ends meet without it."***



average six-month supplement (approximately **\$1.15** more when viewed as an hourly rate)



North Carolina invested more than **\$3 million** in AWARD\$ Plus salary supplements for infant-toddler teachers and family child care home providers



**Because it helps retain educated professionals and encourages additional education, AWARD\$ Plus supports the growth and development of young children and makes it easier for child care programs to thrive**

***"It helps so many educators and influences us to stay in the education field. We already have a passion for young children, but of course AWARD\$ Plus gives us more motivation to continue in that field."***



***"AWARD\$ Plus encouraged me to continue my education in early childhood. I feel more noticed and appreciated for my efforts in furthering my education, but also continuing in the field of child care for 29 years."***

**14%**

turnover rate of participants

**96%**

of survey respondents stated that AWARD\$ Plus encourages them to stay with their current child care programs

**85%**

of the AWARD\$ Plus participants have an Associate Degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours or submitted education during the year to document additional coursework

## AWARD\$ Plus supplements help ease financial stress, enabling recipients to focus more on the children in their care

*"AWARD\$ Plus helps me financially and lessens stress, which allows me to be focused while working."*

*"At times my job can feel overwhelming and stressful. Before I started receiving assistance from AWARD\$ Plus, it was hard to make ends meet at times. I feel a sense of security, and I feel appreciated for the work I do."*

*"AWARD\$ Plus helps to ease the financial burden that teachers encounter and helps to reduce stress that could easily trickle in at work."*

**97%** said that **AWARD\$ Plus** helps ease financial stress



**98%** said that **AWARD\$ Plus** helps them feel more satisfied with their jobs

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

**99%** participants indicated that receiving the AWARD\$ Plus supplement makes them feel more appreciated and recognized

**"AWARD\$ Plus helped me realize how important and vital my role in child care is."**

**"The incentive helps me to feel appreciated. When I feel appreciated, it helps me to feel happy about what I'm doing and helps me to strive to be and do better."**

**"Being recognized and appreciated in this way has helped immensely with job satisfaction. ... AWARD\$ Plus has been a nice bonus twice a year to help me feel that my job working with infants and toddlers is needed and important."**





## Appreciating AWARD\$ Plus: Participant Highlight

**Veronica Pigford** loves working with two-year-olds, but she didn't start with this age group. *"I came here for a summer job when I was working in the public school system and I just fell in love with infants and toddlers,"* Veronica said. *"I love all the children, but I am so happy working with the twos. They love you so much. They cling to you. They appreciate you and are eager to learn new things. I really like being part of that."*

She said she was honored when Infant-Toddler AWARD\$® Plus made salary supplements available to her. It helps with the financial challenges of working in early childhood. *"I want to thank AWARD\$ Plus for coming to my rescue,"* Veronica said. *"It has helped me with bills, with paying for my education and with purchasing things I needed for my classroom. It came right when I needed it."*

She's grateful to the Division of Child Development and Early Education for funding the program, and she said, ***"Please continue. It is so important, and I appreciate you thinking of us. This is keeping me in my program. You are helping us with low pay. You are rewarding us and recognizing us for what we are doing."***



Appreciating  
**AWARD\$ Plus**