

# 2020-2021 AWARD\$ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Infant-Toddler Educator  
AWARD\$®



*INFANT-TODDLER  
EDUCATORS ARE VITAL*





# INFANT-TODDLER EDUCATORS ARE VITAL

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. 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.<sup>1</sup>

The particularly low salaries for infant-toddler educators are a long-standing issue for the early childhood field, but they have been spotlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. These low, often poverty-level wages, are contributing to the difficulty child care programs are experiencing in hiring and retaining staff in the wake of the pandemic. Programs struggle to serve the children needing care without qualified educators.

Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® helps 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 2. The program, available statewide, is funded by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and is administered by Child Care Services Association (CCSA).

1. Child Care Services Association. Working in Early Care and Education, 2019 Workforce Study. Retrieved from [https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA\\_2020\\_Statewide\\_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf](https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA_2020_Statewide_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf)

## AWARD\$ PARTICIPANTS AND EMPLOYERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DURING THE PANDEMIC

AWARD\$ participants and their employers struggled with COVID-19 in a variety of ways, including the fear of getting the virus or bringing it home to their families. Recipients found the supplements to be particularly helpful to meet their basic needs when many temporarily lost their employment or were required to quarantine. Many also used the funds to buy supplies needed to protect their families and/or classrooms from infection.



“Due to COVID-19, some staff elected to stay home when the pandemic began and have yet to return. Due to fewer staff, we have fewer children enrolled. It is a struggle trying to hire new staff who have experience and education. Funding is down and we are open reduced hours due to a lower number of staff, which is hard on parents. The pandemic has also added stress and worry of someone coming into the building that has COVID-19.” — Participating Director

“COVID-19 has made it hard to hire qualified staff members. They really highlighted the importance of what we do, but now we need to get paid accordingly.” — Participating Director

“It has helped to purchase extra items to help keep my family protected from COVID-19. Extra money to buy masks, hand sanitizer, extra cleaning supplies, etc. for our home.”  
— Participating Teacher

“I personally have worked during this whole pandemic and I’m thankful to have a job. But at the same time, I don’t think it’s understood and recognized how much we are risking our lives working in this field.” — Participating Teacher

“I was still blessed from the AWARD\$ program during the pandemic. Some of us were either furloughed or hours had been cut because of the pandemic, but AWARD\$ still sent out bonuses to help everyone in need who is on the program. That just showed me how much we are cared about.” — Participating Teacher

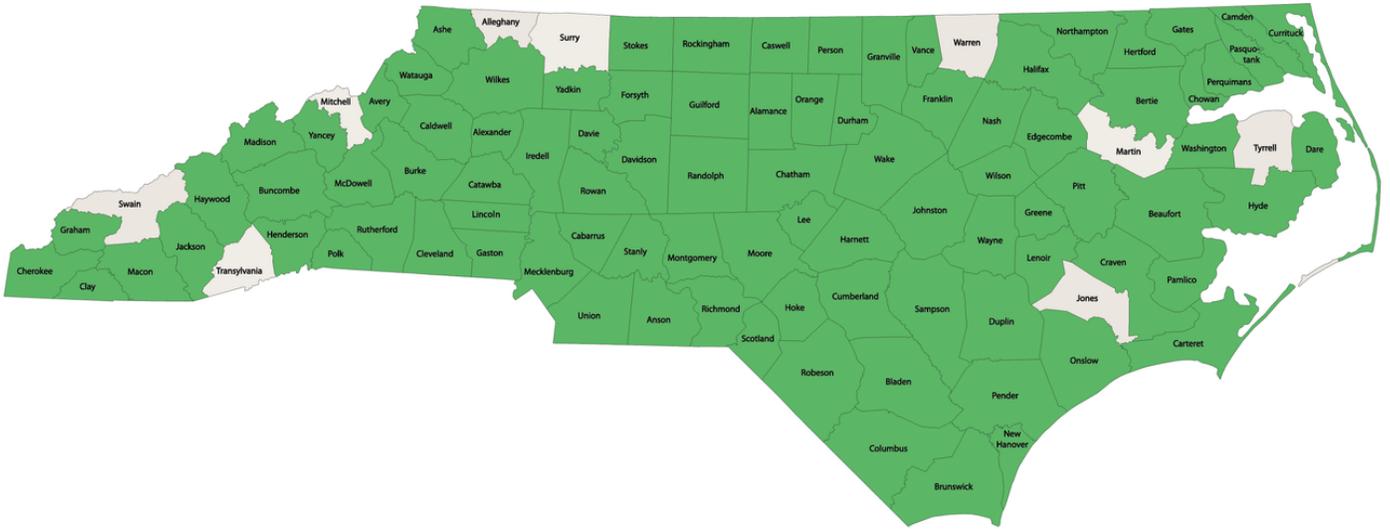
“I have worked through the pandemic. Others who were laid off were making more sitting home than I was working. My bills and my paycheck stayed the same. The payment helped me provide for my family and pay my bills.” — Participating Teacher

## COMPENSATING AN ESSENTIAL WORKFORCE IS CRITICAL

With increased compensation, degreed AWARD\$ 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. With the uncertainty caused by COVID-19, this consistency is more important than ever.



# IN FY21, INFANT-TODDLER EDUCATOR AWARD\$® HAD RECIPIENTS IN 91 COUNTIES



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“It has been a true incentive to me and made me feel more valuable as an early childhood educator. It has most certainly added to my financial stability. It has also been a very real incentive for me to remain in the position and in the location that I’m at right now. I’m a believer in consistency of care and I am so thankful that there’s a tangible way that this priority is evident in the hearts and minds of others.”  
– Participating Teacher

“I love being a teacher but the wage is so low that I have trouble paying all my bills. AWARD\$ has helped me financially and it’s a reason why I keep my career that I love so much.” – Participating Teacher

“I feel AWARD\$ encourages further education in a most valuable profession. I feel further education is an asset for better understanding and meeting the needs of young children in our care.” – Participating Teacher

“I encourage more providers to improve education, because I see the benefit of having more courses in order to receive more AWARD\$.” – Participating Family Child Care Provider

**AWARD\$  
SUPPLEMENTS HELP  
EASE FINANCIAL  
STRESS, ENABLING  
RECIPIENTS TO FOCUS  
MORE ON THE  
CHILDREN IN THEIR  
CARE**

**99%**

said that AWARD\$  
helps ease financial stress

**98%**

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

“We love what we do, but we get low pay and can hardly take care of our families. It has made me less stressed.”  
— Participating Teacher

“Bills were about to be due and I was extremely stressed out about how I was going to pay them. My AWARD\$ supplement came in the mail and I was so relieved. Not only was I able to pay that month’s bills on time, I was able to get a few groceries and pay ahead on a few of the following month’s bills. It was the biggest relief to have received that supplement in the mail at such a critical time.” — Participating Teacher

“It has helped me with financial problems so I don’t have to focus on that. I can focus more on work.”  
— Participating Teacher

“Financially and emotionally, having the AWARD\$ incentive has helped me focus on giving the children the best I can give them as a teacher. It relieves having to worry about paying bills.”  
— Participating Teacher

## AWARD\$ RECOGNIZES THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND COMMITMENT OF INFANT-TODDLER EDUCATORS THROUGH ENHANCED COMPENSATION

98%

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



“It is important as it has boosted staff morale and they feel more valued as educators. When the teachers are happy, the child-teacher interactions are more positive.” – Participating Director

“AWARD\$ brings awareness to the incredible value of teachers working with this age group and how important the earliest years are.” – Participating Teacher

“It just makes you feel like you are not forgotten and that we are needed.” – Participating Teacher

“It is always a plus to feel appreciated and recognized for my work. AWARD\$ makes me feel like I’m not just babysitting. The children in my care benefit through supplies to enhance learning and a teacher who strives to keep them learning and happy.” – Participating Teacher

# Appreciating AWARD\$

## PARTICIPANT HIGHLIGHT: ARIETHA BRUNSON



Arietha Brunson

"When we are children, we have dreams and goals of what we are going to become and I wanted to be a pediatrician," said Arietha Brunson, a family child care provider in Guilford County. As she grew up, Arietha found herself teaching the young children of her friends and family members and that sparked her desire to work in early childhood.

She obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Human Development and Family Studies with significant early childhood coursework, but she didn't want to stop there. Arietha is now pursuing her early childhood master's degree at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "My child care program is in my home now, but I hope to open a center and have even more skills when I am leading others," she said. "I learned that the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship was there to support a master's and that was a huge influence in my continuing. I was elated to learn that T.E.A.C.H. offers scholarships to family child care providers. It has always been my desire to get higher education and to grow in the field."

As an early educator, compensation has been her biggest challenge. "We are overworked and underpaid, and that has always been true," Arietha said. "Parents want the best for their children, we all do, but they just can't always pay the costs of that care. I still give care like I would to my own children, even when parents can't pay."

That's where Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® comes in. Arietha said, "AWARD\$ helps mitigate financial stress that I face as an early educator. Compensation is a big issue. It is insufficient to meet the cost of living. It has helped me be more financially successful. When families can't pay more, it helps balance that out. Seeing growth in the children keeps me going and it's about the passion for children, but you still need fair compensation to be able to do this work."

Arietha is very grateful to the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) for funding AWARD\$. She said, "I want to thank DCDEE so much for lifting the financial stress that early educators face and I want to personally thank them for contributing to my financial success."

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NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
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Division of Child Development  
and Early Education

