

# 2020-2021 WAGES<sup>®</sup> EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child Care  
**WAGES<sup>®</sup>**  
Program



CHILD CARE WAGES<sup>®</sup> PROGRAM  
NORTH CAROLINA

*STABILITY IN A TIME OF TURMOIL*





## STABILITY IN A TIME OF TURMOIL

During FY21, COVID-19 continued to create unprecedented challenges for individuals, businesses and the economy overall. Early childhood continued to support the state's workforce during this period of turmoil and change. Early care and education programs provided families as much stability as they could despite facing many new requirements, decreased enrollment, turnover, hiring challenges and financial burdens. While the state has provided bonuses and grants to help shore up the field, low compensation remains a critical issue for attracting and retaining quality teachers. The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is one strategy for getting increased compensation directly into the hands of early educators.

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program was created in response to research-based evidence showing that the quality of care children receive is lowered by high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education. The combination of a lack of

resources and efforts to maintain affordability for parents means many early childhood teachers are severely underpaid and leave the field for better-paying jobs, and others never consider the profession as an option. WAGE\$ provides tiered education-based salary supplements to teachers, directors and family child care providers working with children from birth to 5 with the goal of improving the retention, education and compensation of this workforce.

In North Carolina, WAGE\$ is made possible through a funding collaboration between local Smart Start partnerships that elect to participate and the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Child Care Services Association administers the program for participating counties across the state and extends gratitude on behalf of the participants to these supportive funders. Please see page 7 for a 2020-2021 funder list.

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

In FY20-21, WAGE\$ participants and their employers struggled with COVID-19 in a variety of ways, including the fear of catching the virus or bringing it home to their families. WAGE\$ 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.



“Following COVID-19 protocols has added an almost insurmountable amount of stress and responsibility for staff. We were already stretched very thin, and we are working to the point of mental and physical exhaustion. I have been teaching for 26 years and this has been the most challenging year of my professional career.” – Participating Director

“I have had to educate parents and children about how serious this pandemic is. It has been hard knowing that every time I come to work, I’m putting my life and my family’s lives in danger, but I still love my job. I also know my students need me.” – Participating Teacher

“I got my WAGE\$ supplement and put it in my savings just in case something might happen. I’m so glad I did because a month later, I ended up with COVID-19. WAGE\$ helped pay my light bill, and I thank you.” – Participating Teacher

“It has assisted me with purchasing sanitizing and disinfectant items for my home and classroom as well as non-perishables. The funds have truly been a blessing!” – Participating Teacher

“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WAGE\$ Program has helped me maintain my business financially.” – Participating Family Child Care Provider

## COMPENSATING AN ESSENTIAL WORKFORCE IS CRITICAL

With directors reporting difficulty finding and keeping staff in the wake of the pandemic, particularly qualified staff, it is clear that North Carolina's \$12 per hour average rate of pay for teachers and assistants<sup>1</sup> is simply not enough.

Teachers who do stay deserve fair compensation and should be able to take care of their families without holding two or three jobs. Economic insecurity impacts teacher well-being and can affect the quality of interactions they have with the children in their care. Stress and adversity can affect the health of teachers and how effective they can be in promoting the supportive environments and engaging interactions children need. Especially now, easing financial stress is critical for teachers, their families and the children they serve. WAGE\$ recipients find relief through their supplements.

**3,751**

paid in 58  
participating counties

**\$1,169**

average six-month supplement  
(an increase of approximately  
\$1.12 per hour for full-time  
employment)

**98%**

of the WAGE\$ participant  
survey respondents said  
WAGE\$ helps ease  
financial stress

“I think the Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it takes a great amount of stress off of the teacher and less stress helps the teacher do her job better. A happy teacher makes happy children.”  
– Participating Teacher

“Usually people with the amount of education that I have would NEVER settle for a job that pays less than the employees at COSTCO. In order to retain quality teachers in child care, income supplementation is absolutely necessary.”  
– Participating Teacher

## WAGE\$ ENCOURAGES, SUPPORTS AND REWARDS CONTINUED EDUCATION

While post-COVID information on the workforce is needed, 2019 data shows that 62% of the early childhood teaching staff had at least an Associate degree in any field and 40% had earned these degrees specifically in early childhood education.<sup>1</sup> WAGE\$ plays a role in encouraging, supporting and rewarding educational pursuits.

To earn a WAGE\$ salary supplement, a participant must have credit-bearing coursework. The WAGE\$ scale ranges from 12 semester hours of early childhood coursework all the way to a doctorate degree. Participants with education below an Associate degree with at least 24 birth to 5 focused semester hours are awarded temporarily and must make educational advancements in order to retain their eligibility. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships may be available to provide financial assistance with the coursework needed. The programs work hand in hand to make a difference with education.

88%

of WAGE\$ participants working in counties with at least two years on WAGE\$ have an Associate degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours or submitted coursework during the year to reflect their ongoing education

92%

of those at temporary education levels responding to the participant survey said that WAGE\$ is an incentive to seek additional education and/or helps pay for it

Tanaka Eaddy is a recent graduate of Durham Technical Community College, and she managed to complete her degree despite the challenges of the pandemic. She knows her education has helped her grow as a teacher, and she believes WAGE\$ helped encourage her education and keep her in the field. She said, "I've been able to learn and know why babies do things. I understand more about their development and how to meet their individual needs. I can help them grow and learn. I want to continue to get my Bachelor's degree and maybe my Master's...WAGE\$ has helped me and my family so much. I could pay for my books in school. We were able to buy a house. WAGE\$ helped me get through COVID when I didn't get a check. It was an incentive to know I could get more money with more education, and it has also helped me stay in early childhood. It really has!"



Tanaka Eaddy at her graduation

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)

## CHILDREN NEED STABLE AND ENGAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDUCATED TEACHERS

WAGE\$ participants must work at least six months in the same child care program in order to be eligible for a supplement. These financial awards make it more possible for teachers to be able to afford to work in an undercompensated field. As a result, children benefit in the years when these stable and engaging relationships are most critical.

**12%**  
turnover rate of  
WAGE\$ participants

**97%**

of the WAGE\$ participant survey respondents said that WAGE\$ encourages them to stay in their current programs

Henderson County director Catherine Leiberman recognizes the impact of WAGE\$ on attrition. She said, "With early childhood, we are not paid what we are worth. My husband makes almost twice what I do in the public schools and it still isn't enough. We are always pushed to the side and the supplement elevates the professionalism of the field. It is recognition as much as money. What we do is valuable and important. It's nice to know that the Partnership recognizes the importance of what we do and backs that with actual funding. They put their money into it and that makes teachers more willing to stay in the field. WAGE\$ helps me reduce turnover. I dread turnover because it's hard to rehire and it is bad for children. WAGE\$ helps me hire qualified staff because it does put them on par with other educators. Public schools don't want to lose teachers every four months, so why should child care?"



Catherine Leiberman and her niece



## EDUCATED TEACHERS DESERVE RECOGNITION FOR THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WAGE\$ and its funders know how important it is to have an educated teacher who stays in the field. WAGE\$ participants often juggle work, family and school all while trying to make ends meet on a minimal salary. In addition to these accomplishments, supporting other families during the COVID-19 crisis is worthy of special acknowledgment. Their dedication is recognized and rewarded through the WAGE\$ supplement.

97%

of survey respondents said that receiving WAGE\$ made them feel more appreciated and recognized for their work.

“I think the WAGE\$ Program is important because it helps me financially provide for my program. It makes me feel supported and that the importance of what I’m doing for young children and their families is understood and valued.”

– Participating Family Child Care Provider

“It validates the importance and professionalism of a career in early childhood, offering support that will encourage staff to remain in this field.”

– Participating Director



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF WAGE\$

- 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'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
- Montgomery County Partnership for Children
- North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education
- North Carolina Partnership for Children
- Partnership for Children of Johnston County, Inc.
- Partnership for Children of Lenoir and Greene Counties
- Partnership for Children of Lincoln/Gaston Counties
- Partnership for Children of the Foothills
- Randolph County Partnership for Children
- Region A Partnership for Children
- Richmond County 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 Partnership for Children, Inc. (Henderson County)
- 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

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