

# **Child Care WAGE\$® Program**

## **Statewide Final Report**

### **Fiscal Year 2021**

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

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

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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.

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.

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.

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## **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 FY21, 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)
  - \$19 per hour
  - \$17 per hour
  - \$15 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 must rebuild its economy, but can only do so if early educators can afford to return to and stay in the field. As of June 2021, 3,089 child care professionals in 1,431 child care programs from 58 North Carolina counties were active participants in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program. Of these individuals, 99% are women and 58% reported being person of color and/or Latinx. 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-eight percent (88%) of the participants work in four and five star licensed centers or homes.

As of June 2021, 510 of the active participants were reported by their employers as being NC Pre-K teachers and assistants. Of this group, 124 are teachers and 386 are assistant teachers in NC Pre-K classrooms. These individuals work in 337 different child care programs in 56

counties. Of these, 99% are women and 55% indicated they are Latinx and/or a person 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). With partnership support, WAGES\$ was able to offer increased compensation in many communities. Last year, nearly half (49%) of the counties funded the lowest tier for the full fiscal year compared to 34% this year. One county funded Tier Three (the highest option) in FY20, while ten provided funds at that level for at least half of FY21.

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

**Table A: Tier and Income Cap Selections\***

	<b>\$15 per hour</b>	<b>\$17 per hour</b>	<b>\$19 per hour</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Tier One</b>	5	14	1	20
<b>Tier One/Tier Two Split</b>	3	1	2	6
<b>Tier Two</b>	3	13	5	21
<b>Tier Two HEO**</b>	0	1	0	1
<b>Tier Two/Tier Three Split</b>	0	1	7	8
<b>Tier Three</b>	0	2	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	11	32	15	58

\*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 WAGES\$ 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 WAGES\$ scale (which includes, for example, 12 semester hours of birth to five focused coursework).

Thirty-one (31) counties implemented one or a combination of these strategies. Please note that reduced income caps are not discussed here; partnerships *must* choose an income cap each year. See below for additional information on the eligibility cuts applied for FY21.

- Cut administrator time only – two counties
- Cut those at level two on the scale only – three counties
- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars only – 17 counties

- Cut administrator time and those working in sites with fewer than three stars – two counties
- Cut administrator time and those at level two on the scale – two counties
- Cut administrator time, those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – three counties
- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – two counties

Two counties implemented a percentage cut in payments for the first half of the year, but returned to 100% payments in January. Twenty-five (25) counties were able to fund a percentage increase over their base tier.

### Turnover

Turnover numbers for the Child Care WAGE\$® Program reflect active participants who left their child care programs during the fiscal year. In addition to regular monthly confirmation calls, each participating center was contacted to assess year-end employment. Information for FY21 has now been collected and is presented in these reports. Turnover was counted regardless of whether it may have been connected to 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 FY21 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. Perhaps most importantly, this rate is below what might have been expected as teachers struggled with their decisions to return to or stay in the field with the risks and challenges brought by COVID-19. The turnover rate among WAGE\$ NC Pre-K teachers and assistants was even lower at only 8%.

The participant turnover rate compares favorably to the 21% turnover rate of full-time teachers and assistants in the state’s early childhood workforce overall, captured in 2019 pre-pandemic data (Child Care Services Association, 2020). Given the low, often poverty level, compensation for early educators, the rate of departure would likely have been much higher without the workforce supports available in North Carolina, including WAGE\$, Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program.

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. Although we want

educators to remain in their programs, it is expected that the WAGE\$ population of educated professionals would typically have more job opportunities than the child care workforce at large. 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**

	<b>Statewide Workforce Pre-Program</b>	<b>Statewide ECE Workforce 2019</b>	<b>Original PBIS Goal</b>	<b>WAGE\$ FY21</b>
<b>Turnover Rates</b>	31%	21%	25%	12%

With directors reporting difficulty finding and keeping staff, particularly qualified staff, in the wake of the pandemic, it is clear that North Carolina’s \$12 per hour average rate of pay for teachers and assistants is simply not enough. The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is one strategy that helps address retention and makes 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 10% left their programs this past year. Of all participants with less education, 19% 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, as shown in Table C below.

**Table C: Turnover by Education**

	<b>FY18</b>	<b>FY19</b>	<b>FY20</b>
<b>AAS ECE or higher</b>	13%	13%	11%
<b>Below AAS ECE</b>	20%	17%	17%

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 experienced with COVID-19’s impact on their lives, having stable teachers who can engage in best practice will be more important than ever.

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.

*“It is unbelievable how much this program has impacted my life. I would not still be working in child care without it!” (Avery, teacher)*

## Education

The WAGE\$ population is well educated, with the bulk of participants having at least a two-year degree. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the active FY21 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 303 completed calls this year, 85% indicated that they do still intend to take coursework in order to remain eligible for their WAGE\$ supplements and 60% said they had completed new coursework since their last submission. When given a list of possible benefits resulting from WAGE\$, 87% 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.

When examining education by ethnicity across all participating counties, 82% of the participants who reported being a person of color and/or Latinx have earned an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher on the WAGE\$ scale compared to 81% 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. The Children’s Equity Project recently encouraged states and tribes to adopt or expand WAGE\$ with funds from the American Rescue Plan Act as a way to address equity in the early care and education workforce.<sup>1</sup>

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.

*“If it wasn’t for WAGE\$ and T.E.A.C.H., I would not have my degree today and be doing what I love to do, teaching kids, which was my dream when I was in high school.” (Craven, 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. Fifty percent (50%) of the active WAGE\$

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<sup>1</sup> Meek, S., Iruka, I. U., Catherine, E., Yazzie, D., Gilliam, W., McIntosh, K., Fernandez, V., Blevins, D., Jimenez Castellanos, O., & Garcia, G (2021). Advancing Equity in Early Care and Education Systems with the American Rescue Plan Act. The Children’s Equity Project. Retrieved from: <https://childandfamilysuccess.asu.edu/cep/initiatives/advancing-equitythrough-american-rescue-plan-act>

participants earn less than \$13 per hour (47% of teachers, 96% of family child care providers and 35% of directors or those with partial administrative time earn less than \$13). Seventy-seven percent (77%) earn less than \$15 per hour, which is the starting rate for many employers, including Target. While some partnerships utilize the \$15 income cap, restricting participation for those that earn more, this is still an alarming percentage. The challenge of hiring new teachers after the pandemic-related departures highlights the ongoing compensation plight of the field. Even in the best of times, early educators are severely underpaid for the work they do, which is illustrated by a comparison to the rate of \$30.09 that may be needed for one North Carolina employee with one child to meet basic, fundamental needs (Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021). Looking only at those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms, 28% earn less than \$13 per hour. Thirty-two percent (32%) of the NC Pre-K teacher assistants and 17% of the teachers earn less than \$13 per hour. While this is dramatically better than the field at large, it is still higher than expected for the state’s Pre-K Program.

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-seven percent (97%) 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 FY21 was \$1,169, which is well above the \$993 average from FY20. Many partnerships prioritized the WAGE\$ compensation, including providing carry forward funds to support higher awards. 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 \$587 to \$2,381. The average six-month supplement at each tier level can be seen in Table D below. In the Tier One category, two counties are included that issued one payment at a percentage cut. Twenty-five (25) counties overall provided percentage increases.

**Table D: Compensation by Tier**

<b>Tiers Funded FY20</b>	<b>Number of Participating Counties by Tier</b>	<b>Average Six-Month Supplement</b>
<b>All Tiers</b>	58	\$1,169
<b>Tier One</b>	20	\$906
<b>Tier One/Tier Two Split</b>	6	\$935
<b>Tier Two</b>	21	\$1,228
<b>Tier Two HEO</b>	1	\$2,381
<b>Tier Two/Tier Three Split</b>	8	\$1,518
<b>Tier Three</b>	2	\$1,786

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:

- 83% are better able to pay their bills
- 71% are more able to address the basic needs of their families (food/housing)
- 66% rely on the supplements to help address transportation costs
- 64% use the funds to provide additional resources for their classrooms or child care programs

In a separate question, a greater number of respondents (90%) stated that providing resources for their programs is a benefit of WAGE\$.

WAGE\$ recipients found the supplements to be particularly helpful during COVID-19 to meet their basic needs when many temporarily lost their employment or they were required to quarantine. Many also used the funds to buy supplies needed to protect their families and/or classrooms from infection.

*“During COVID, WAGE\$ helped me pay bills, and I was able to get some food to eat. It also helped when I needed to fix something on my car.” (teacher)*

*“It has helped me to buy protective necessities such as masks, wipes, and sanitizer.” (teacher)*

*“Our hours were cut due to less children and the supplement helped me catch up on my bills.” (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.” (teacher)*

*“It gave a boost to my COVID-strained finances last year due to having to purchase so much cleaning supplies.” (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!” (teacher)*

*“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WAGE\$ Program has helped me maintain my business financially.” (family child care provider)*

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.

*“Wages for teachers and child care workers are low. The supplement helps improve life for my staff. I think improved happiness for teachers leads to a better classroom experience for children in their care.” (Mecklenburg, director)*

## OUTPUTS

This section highlights the projected outputs of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program statewide for FY21 and the program’s effectiveness in reaching these goals. Primary results are shown in Table E below followed by additional detail as applicable.

**Table E: Outputs**

	<b>Projected Output</b>	<b>Results</b>
1	Approximately 3,350 eligible participants will receive WAGE\$ payments as of June 30, 2021.	Output exceeded. As of June 2021, 3,751 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 24 outreach sessions.

*WAGE\$ payments:* Three thousand seven hundred fifty-one (3,751) participants were paid for completing at least one six-month period on the Child Care WAGE\$® Program during FY21. These participants worked in 1,585 facilities serving approximately 67,277 children. This number is an unduplicated count of supplement recipients. Of these, 597 were NC Pre-K teachers or assistants. Over 400 applicants are currently on the waiting list, either waiting for funding and/or completing their initial or reactivated six-month commitment period in FY22.

*Outreach and recruitment:* Twenty-four (24) virtual outreach sessions were done upon request or as a result of WAGE\$ solicitation between June 15, 2020 and June 14, 2021, and many other sessions were offered but did not have registrants during this year of COVID. 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. Field-based outreach was suspended for the duration of FY21.

In addition to the outreach listed above, over 9,000 recruitment emails or mailings were sent to 2,933 sites. 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 F below details the primary outcome of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

**Table F: Outcome**

Projected Outcome	Results
By June 30, 2021, 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 is particularly encouraging given the current reports of an overall teacher shortage.

This outcome is measured through employment confirmations completed as each participant concludes a six-month commitment period on the program and at the end of the fiscal year. 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.

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, 66% of the sampled population completed surveys (1,472 of 2,232), which included the following:

- 69% of participating teachers/family child care providers (890 of 1,292)
- 69% of participating directors (133 of 193)
- 60% of non-participating directors with staff receiving salary supplements<sup>2</sup> (449 of 747)

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<sup>2</sup> Non-participating directors in some cases may have responded about participants in WAGE\$ and/or AWARD\$.

### 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, listed in survey order:

- 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. – 87% (92% of those at temporary levels)
- The WAGE\$ supplement helps ease financial stress. – 98%
- WAGE\$ encourages me to stay with my current program. – 97%
- My WAGE\$ supplement helps me to provide more resources for my program or classroom. – 90%
- Receiving the WAGE\$ supplement makes me feel more appreciated and recognized for my work. – 97%

**Ninety-four percent (94%) 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, 94% of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGE\$ benefits the children in some way. The most popular example of impact was that improved morale has created more positive child-teacher interactions. Over half of the directors indicated 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.**

**For those respondents who 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.** 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:

*“They have been very positive and polite when I’ve spoken to the WAGE\$ staff. They are also very encouraging to finish school or continue up the ladder.” (teacher)*

*“The WAGE\$ staff are the most helpful and kindest people. They are very professional and well-mannered. Determined to help the best they can.” (teacher)*

*“I love the way the Child Care WAGE\$® Program keeps us providers up to date on what’s going on and the way they support us as child care providers. They are our back bone with their support and kindness.” (family child care provider)*

*“The staff is always knowledgeable and friendly. I feel they want me to be successful in my educational goals.” (director)*

*“WAGE\$ staff are dependable, knowledgeable and caring. They go over and beyond the call of duty.” (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.

*“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.” (Brunswick, family child care provider)*

### **PROGRAM CHALLENGES**

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has operated successfully in a largely remote capacity and has issued payments on a regular schedule since the pandemic began. However, the impact on the field at large has been significant. While DCDEE reports that program closures are not as high as many expected, WAGE\$ recipients and their employers shared through survey responses that the challenges have been difficult to overcome and they are still suffering from the impact. See Appendix E for a sample of this feedback.

*“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.” (Forsyth, director)*

*“During COVID-19, I have had three teachers quit. I need to hire six teachers, and I haven’t received one application in over a year. People are not interested in working in child care. My enrollment is down to 20 children out of 100, my waiting list is over 200 children, and I had to dis-enroll children when my last teacher quit to maintain staff to child ratio. I’m not sure how long we can keep our doors open.” (Rowan, director)*

WAGE\$ is an important resource for the early care and education field as it rebounds from this crisis, and to help participants get funds easily and quickly, WAGE\$ is in the process of collecting Automated Clearing House (ACH) paperwork. The goal is to enable direct deposit for the thousands of early educators that receive WAGE\$ funds. This will eliminate waiting for a check or losing checks in the mail. It will also eliminate returned checks due to moves. However, the process has been more challenging than anticipated. Staff are fielding questions on a daily basis and much of the documentation has been incomplete. After a few months of collection, forms are still needed from around half of the participating population. Early educators are dealing with new requirements as well as health and safety concerns for themselves, their families and the children they serve. It is likely difficult to prioritize the submission of the needed documentation, but WAGE\$ will continue to pursue this goal. Having WAGE\$ recipients paid electronically is one more step to building our profession. Although difficult, we will continue this effort to directly deposit payments.

### **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. Even as the program converts to electronic payments, notification will continue. 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 presentations. 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 F for a sample of those messages for FY21. Please note that, in addition to the sample comments included, a large number of recipients shared their gratitude through “thank you” messages that are not listed.

*“Thank you so much! It is a vital and desperately needed program. It has also been a lifesaver through rough times. Teachers are very underpaid for all the work that is involved, and this helps us to be able to remain in the field and provide quality care to the children we love.” (Rockingham, teacher)*



**Table 1**  
**Demographic Profile of the 3,089 Participants in North Carolina**  
**Infant-Toddler Educator AWARDS®**  
**July 2020 - June 2021**



	# of Participants	% of Participants
<b>Race*</b>		
White	1288	42%
Black or African American	1577	51%
American Indian or Alaska Native	16	1%
Asian	14	0%
Two or more races	32	1%
Not Given	117	4%
Other	45	1%
<b>Ethnicity*</b>		
Not Given	16	1%
Latinx	96	3%
Not Latinx	2977	96%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	26	1%
Female	3063	99%
<b>Age Range of Participants</b>		
15-19 years	4	0%
20-24 years	125	4%
25-34 years	662	21%
35-44 years	738	24%
45-54 years	784	25%
55-59 years	335	11%
60-64 years	279	9%
65 and over	159	5%
Not Given	3	0%
<b>Position</b>		
Teacher	1744	56%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	6	0%
Teacher (Assistant Director)	43	1%
Teacher (Director)	39	1%
Teacher (Director Owner)	59	2%
Assistant Teacher	734	24%
Director	39	1%
Director (Owner)	8	0%
Assistant Director	28	1%
Small Home Provider	253	8%
Split Position	136	4%
<b>Ages of Children Served**</b>		
Birth up to Three	793	26%
Three to Five	1610	52%
Mixed Ages	686	22%

\*1753 participants identify as Latinx or as a person of color, which is 58% of the active population that provided data.

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

**Table 1 (cont.)  
Demographic Profile of the 3,089 Participants in North Carolina  
Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$®  
July 2020 - June 2021**

	# of Participants	% of Participants
<b>Education Level</b>		
12 birth to five sem. hours	25	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	44	1%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	81	3%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	7	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	23	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	57	2%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	8	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	17	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	75	2%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	16	1%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	122	4%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	15	0%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	69	2%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	8	0%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	1496	48%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	80	3%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	14	0%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	173	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	66	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	606	20%
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	15	0%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	71	2%
PhD/EdD including 18 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
<b>Wage Rate***</b>		
Below \$7.25 per hour	231	7%
\$7.25 - \$9.99 per hour	269	9%
\$10.00 - \$12.99 per hour	1046	34%
\$13.00 - \$14.99 per hour	825	27%
\$15.00 - \$16.99 per hour	551	18%
\$17.00 - \$19.00 per hour	167	5%
<b>Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Report End Date</b>		
0 to .99 Years	109	4%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	296	10%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	380	12%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	298	10%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	262	8%
5.00 or More Years	1744	56%

\*\*\*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 2020 - June 2021**



	Programs	Participants
<b>Center</b>	<b>1,177</b>	<b>2,833</b>
1 STAR	7	7
2 STAR	2	3
3 STAR	138	232
4 STAR	288	562
5 STAR	693	1,923
GS-110	24	36
PROB	2	4
PROV	5	16
SPPROV	3	7
Temporary	15	43
<b>Family Provider</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>256</b>
2 STAR	1	1
3 STAR	23	23
4 STAR	172	173
5 STAR	57	58
SPPROV	1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b><u>1,431</u></b>	<b><u>3,089</u></b>



**Table 3**  
**Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,089 Participants**  
**in North Carolina**  
**Child Care WAGES® Program**  
**July 2020 - June 2021**



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 "% 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.

**88% 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
<b>Teacher Scale</b>	<b>2625</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>85%</b>
Two	63	2%	2%
Three	71	3%	2%
Four	80	3%	3%
Five	24	1%	1%
Six	82	3%	3%
Seven	121	5%	4%
Eight	1372	52%	44%
Nine	84	3%	3%
Ten	195	7%	6%
Eleven	492	19%	16%
Twelve	40	2%	1%
Thirteen	1	0%	0%
<b>Teacher/Home Provider Scale</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Two	2	1%	0%
Three	8	3%	0%
Four	1	0%	0%
Six	4	2%	0%
Seven	10	4%	0%
Eight	111	44%	4%
Nine	5	2%	0%
Ten	23	9%	1%
Eleven	73	29%	2%
Twelve	16	6%	1%

**Table 3 (cont.)**  
**Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,089 Participants**  
**in North Carolina**  
**Child Care WAGES® Program**  
**July 2020 - June 2021**

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Scale	% of Participants Out Of Active
<b>Director Scale</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Two	2	3%	0%
Four	4	5%	0%
Six	2	3%	0%
Seven	4	5%	0%
Eight	24	32%	1%
Nine	2	3%	0%
Ten	9	12%	0%
Eleven	19	25%	1%
Twelve	9	12%	0%
<b>Teacher and Director Scales</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Two	2	1%	0%
Three	2	1%	0%
Four	2	1%	0%
Five	1	1%	0%
Six	3	2%	0%
Seven	2	1%	0%
Eight	66	49%	2%
Nine	3	2%	0%
Ten	12	9%	0%
Eleven	37	27%	1%
Twelve	6	4%	0%



**Table 4**  
**Total Participants that Received a Supplement in North Carolina**  
**Child Care WAGES® Program**  
**July 2020 - June 2021**



**3,751** unduplicated participants received a supplement for completing a six month period that ended during this reporting period; these participants worked in 1,585 different child care programs serving approximately 67,277 children.

	Total Paid*	Total Programs	# Of Children 0 to 5
Center	3,487	1,323	66,235
Family Provider	265	262	1,042
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>3,752</u></b>	<b><u>1,585</u></b>	<b><u>67,277</u></b>

\* 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 3,510 Participants**  
**in North Carolina**  
**Child Care WAGES® Program**  
**July 2020 - June 2021**



The annual turnover percentage is based on an overall population of 3,510 participants. This population includes those individuals that were active during the reporting period of July 2020 - June 2021 (3,089) and those who left their centers during this time (421). 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.

<b>Annual Turnover July 2020 - June 2021</b>	
Total Participants	= 3,510
Active Participants	= 3,089
Left Center	= 421
Turnover Percentage	= 12%



**Table 5**  
**Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina**  
**Child Care WAGES® Program**  
**July 2020 - June 2021**



	# of Participants	% of Participants
<b>Race</b>		
White	206	49%
Black or African American	180	43%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0%
Asian	3	1%
Two or more races	5	1%
Not Given	24	6%
Other	2	0%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Latinx	12	3%
Not Latinx	409	97%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	9	2%
Female	412	98%
<b>Position</b>		
Teacher	301	71%
Teacher (Assistant Director)	1	0%
Teacher (Director)	5	1%
Teacher (Director Owner)	1	0%
Assistant Teacher	84	20%
Director	5	1%
Assistant Director	2	0%
Small Home Provider	7	2%
Split Position	15	4%
<b>Education Level</b>		
12 birth to five sem. hours	7	2%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	6	1%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	10	2%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	1	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	3	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	17	4%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	11	3%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	7	2%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	25	6%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	16	4%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	3	1%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	176	42%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	17	4%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	3	1%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	22	5%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	8	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	75	18%

**Table 5 (cont.)  
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina  
Child Care WAGES® Program  
July 2020 - June 2021**

	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>% of Participants</b>
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	3	1%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	7	2%
<b>Wage Rate</b>		
Below \$7.25 per hour	7	2%
\$7.25 - \$9.99 per hour	52	12%
\$10.00 - \$12.99 per hour	155	37%
\$13.00 - \$14.99 per hour	116	27%
\$15.00 - \$16.99 per hour	74	18%
\$17.00 - \$19.00 per hour	17	4%
<b>Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Date Ineligible</b>		
0 to .99 Years	19	5%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	60	14%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	84	20%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	59	14%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	44	10%
5.00 or More Years	155	37%
<b>Regulation Type</b>		
1 STAR	2	0%
3 STAR	34	8%
4 STAR	91	22%
5 STAR	273	65%
GS-110	5	1%
Temporary	9	2%
PROB	1	0%
PROV	5	1%
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.



**43 Partner Organizations  
Child Care WAGES® Program  
July 2020 - June 2021**



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  
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

\*Henderson County



**43 Partner Organizations  
Child Care WAGES® Program  
July 2020 - June 2021**



Smart Start of Transylvania County  
Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.\*  
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

\*Henderson County

Report Date: 7/6/2021

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## **Appendix A: Retention Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY21**

“It helps bring consistency to the lives of young children.” (Alamance, teacher)

“WAGE\$<sup>1</sup> has made staying in my position possible.” (Alexander, teacher)

“I feel it’s very important for them because I used to be a recipient myself, and I personally know it helps motivate staying with the program.” (Alleghany, director)

“It is unbelievable how much this program has impacted my life. I would not still be working in child care without it!” (Avery, teacher)

“The salary in child care is low. WAGE\$ helps me to remain in the place where I work, and the children and I form a bond. We work and play together. It is good to stay in a place where the children know their teacher. Even though the salary is low, I am doing this because I like working with children. WAGE\$ is a huge help in this respect.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes you as a teacher want to keep going in this field. I have been a teacher for 30 years and I have stuck with it for the WAGE\$ Program. It is a great incentive to encourage others to even want to work in child care. We are underpaid and most of the time underappreciated. WAGE\$ helps us keep doing what we do!” (Buncombe, teacher)

“I believe the WAGE\$ Program helps me not to quit my job as easily. It is almost like I reach a small goal for myself each time I receive the WAGE\$ benefits. It is like getting a reward for all the difficult and unexpected challenges that I may encounter daily as an early childhood educator. I work really hard and wear many hats daily. I work full time and attend college full time.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“It makes me stay in my field. The pay is low, but the extra funds give me what I need to stay in Pre-K.” (Cherokee, teacher)

“I think WAGE\$ is important because it helps retain staff at their child care centers, which promotes a sense of stability for the children. It also makes the teachers feel appreciated for their work, dedication to the children and helps boost their income. Personally, it has encouraged me to take additional classes to enrich my education. It also keeps me at my current job, which I love. My class benefits from having the same teacher and the same routines. They also benefit from me spending some of my WAGE\$ supplement on classroom resources. I feel that WAGE\$ is a valuable program that encourages staff retention and education as well as rewarding teachers for their hard work.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“It has helped me financially and allowed me to stay in a career I love.” (Columbus, teacher)

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

“WAGE\$ is extremely important. It has helped me stay at my job, which I love! It has also helped me purchase things for my classroom.” (Craven, teacher)

“It’s important because the child care industry is extremely short staffed and underpaid. A program like WAGE\$ can help entice people to stay in the industry.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“More qualified staff will stay in early childhood careers with the extra money from WAGE\$.” (Davidson, director)

“It is important because it gives an incentive to early childhood teachers to look forward to staying with it, to not give up and go to another career because they may get more money somewhere else. It has been very helpful to my family to get this supplemental pay.” (Davie, teacher)

“It helps reduce turnover, which has allowed me to stay in my current position. If it weren’t for WAGE\$, I may not have seen my first group of children go from infancy through Pre-K graduation. It also means that I can better support my family and sometimes we really need it. It has been a blessing.” (Durham, teacher)

“It helps with staff longevity and helps me to stay motivated.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“With my education, and now experience, I could find a job at a higher paying center, but I love the small town feel of the center I am at. WAGE\$ helps me be able to stay here without too much financial strain on my home life.” (Franklin, director)

“It’s an extra incentive and helps with low teacher turnover. The WAGE\$ supplement has helped teachers financially and has created positive attitudes in the workplace.” (Gaston, director)

“Because of the WAGE\$ Program, I’m more motivated to continue my career as a child care provider.” (Halifax, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is a great bonus two times a year, which is a great incentive to stay with my current center.” (Haywood, teacher)

“It motivates me to stay at my current center and knowing I will receive this supplement is encouraging and positive, but losing it would be a huge loss.” (Henderson, teacher)

“Child care staff are grossly underpaid. The supplements help to keep teachers in this field. Many teaching staff are moving out of the field into other higher paying jobs.” (Hertford, teacher)

“It allows me to stay in this profession rather than to seek employment in retail or other places. It is unfortunate that teachers in this field are paid poverty wages. Without help, it is impossible to live on this income.” (Iredell, teacher)

“It helps me to stay at one location and continue to work in my field.” (Johnston, director)

“It allows me to stay working in child care without having to look for other work and focus on my passion for teaching.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement is so important because it has helped with staff retention. Our workers deserve to be paid so much more and for the teachers receiving WAGE\$, I am so grateful.” (Martin, director)

“WAGE\$ helps teachers because they can stay in a field they love that they maybe would not be able to because of their income. It also furthers their education, which helps for a better program.” (Mecklenburg, director)

“The program has honestly helped with my decision to stay in child care and with the center that I am working at right now. The pay in child care centers is ridiculous. I love what I do, but sometimes when I look at my check, I want to find another career.” (Nash, teacher)

“It is important because working in an early childhood program is challenging and important, but the staff is severely underpaid. To attract highly competent and qualified candidates, you have to be able to offer a competitive wage, especially when teachers are licensed and hold a Bachelor's Degree. I have been in the field for over 20 years, and it is becoming harder and harder to attract highly qualified candidates.” (Pitt, director)

“I would have to consider another job if it weren't for the WAGE\$ Program. ... Child care is one of the most underpaid professions, and the program helps keep quality teachers who would otherwise need to look for employment elsewhere to maintain a comfortable living.” (Randolph, teacher)

“It has really helped me fill in the gaps financially. Teachers here are woefully underpaid for all they do and can barely make ends meet. The money has saved me through many tough situations and made me able to stay in this job. It's a lifesaver! Thank you!” (Rockingham, teacher)

“It definitely allows me to stay in my current position. I could not love my job more, and I see great value in what I do. The supplement makes it financially possible for me to stay in this support position, while getting my own children through college.” (Surry, teacher)

“It works for keeping teachers at their current center, which is beneficial to the children's sense of stability.” (Watauga, teacher)

“It's a good dollar amount to want to stay planted where you are.” (Wayne, teacher)

“It helps with consistency in the lives of the children and parents that we serve. It gives me reasons to continue my education.” (Yancey, teacher)



## **Appendix B: Education Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY21**

“WAGE\$<sup>1</sup> has helped in my life by giving me even more reason to continue with my education.”  
(Alamance, teacher)

“I noticed my staff is more motivated to complete their education. ... Wages in early child care are lower than public school teacher salaries. The supplement not only encourages the early childhood educators to continue their education, but also helps them feel that their work is valued.” (Alexander, director)

“It gives me an incentive to keep going to reach my goal and dreams of getting my Birth-Kindergarten Degree.” (Alleghany, teacher)

“It has given me even more of an incentive to seek higher education and stay in the field.”  
(Buncombe, teacher)

“The supplement encouraged me to register for my first college courses to get my Bachelor’s in Early Childhood Education. Because of this, I am graduating with my teaching license this May. The supplement helped me pay for my courses. ... I believe the program has helped improve the competence of the early childhood field. It encourages participants to stay in the field, further develop their skills, and continue their education. The supplement has helped improve the quality of early childhood programs in my county.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“It helped with providing financial assistance as I worked to complete my degree, allowing me to stay on my current job.” (Cleveland, director)

“It encourages me to continue my education so I can offer more to the children in my care. It also encourages me to remain with my employer.” (Columbus, teacher)

“If it wasn’t for WAGE\$ and T.E.A.C.H., I would not have my degree today and be doing what I love to do, teaching kids, which was my dream when I was in high school.” (Craven, teacher)

“It improves morale and encourages teachers to take classes to increase their education level. It is a great feeling when that check arrives.” (Durham, director)

“It motivated me to keep going to school.” (Forsyth, director)

“It has motivated me to continue my education and to receive my bachelor's degree.” (Franklin, teacher)

“It gives me the drive to continue to further my education, and it means a lot when I receive encouraging postcards after I complete a semester.” (Gaston, teacher)

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

“It’s beneficial financially and helps motivate teachers to go back to school.” (Granville, director)

“WAGE\$ helped me finish school with my degree. ... For someone like myself that had to pay for school out of pocket, and that was very expensive, WAGE\$ was the number one source to go to. It also helped me want to go back to school, and I finished up with my degree in early childhood.” (Halifax, family child care provider)

“The WAGE\$ Program is a wonderful tool for teachers because it encourages us to better our education, as well as stick to our jobs, which can be very stressful. Teachers are needed all across the world, and I think this program helps teachers realize how appreciated they are.” (Iredell, teacher)

“Without the supplement I would be unable to continue school.” (Lee, family child care provider)

“It has inspired me to get my Associate’s Degree. ... It’s important because it encourages you to go back to school. Everything I learn is taken back to my classroom and my community.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has encouraged me to further my education.” (Nash, teacher)

“Everyone wants to take more classes because of the supplemental income.” (Pitt, director)

“Teachers are more eager to take more classes and encouraged to provide better services to the children.” (Richmond, director)

“It has helped me to stay encouraged, to continue my education and to become a better qualified teacher.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is always a huge help! I usually split up what I receive so that I can use the money on different areas of my life. ... The money also has helped me keep a focus on school and getting more education related to early childhood education.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“The majority of my staff receives WAGE\$, and it’s a great program that helps providers with funding for our staff that we sometimes cannot afford, but they deserve WAGE\$. Staff attending school is a bonus for us, and we are thankful they can be awarded.” (Vance, director)

“It helps to provide teachers with financial support and helps with education. It also makes teachers feel appreciated and special for a job well done.” (Warren, director)

“WAGE\$ helps me to be a child care professional because it promotes obtaining a higher education to help directly in my classroom. It is a huge bonus to be financially compensated! Thank you!” (Watauga, family child care provider)

“It gives teachers an incentive to continue their education and stay with a certain center. More education and experience create better teachers and a better education for the children in their care.” (Wayne, teacher)

“It is very important in helping to encourage staff to obtain more education, and our staff look for the WAGE\$ check. I think it encourages stability in the classrooms.” (Wilkes, teacher)



## Appendix C: Compensation Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY21

“I have anxiety and this helps me big time, releasing my stress levels when I get the bonus.”  
(Alamance, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program<sup>1</sup> is so important because child care professionals are underpaid and the supplement helps us make up some of the difference. It has made a huge difference in my family because with me not making as much, it helps fill the gaps.” (Alexander, teacher)

“The program changes lives for the better. Child care does not pay a lot, so the program helps fund the people who work so hard to make children’s lives better!” (Avery, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me to be more relaxed, knowing that additional funding is coming to help with my finances. It also eliminated a need to look for another job that pays more.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“It helped alleviate the burden of bills as well as helping me buy PPE and materials for my classroom. It has meant so much to me! It has helped me during tough financial times and has helped to make a beautiful classroom.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“It has helped keep me afloat.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“It helped me not stress about how I was going to pay for food, gas and other supplies that I needed to finish my classes.” (Clay, teacher)

“I think it is very important not only to my child care home, but my family as well. Not only does it help buy supplies, toys, other things for my child care home, but it helps pay for things needed in my home.” (Cleveland, family child care provider)

“It has helped me economically so that I could focus more on my work.” (Craven, teacher)

“It prepared us for financial burdens in so many ways. It has kept us motivated in doing what we love to do and that is the dedication and commitment to helping children meet their developmental needs during growth. We are able to stay motivated and creative because we have a little boost of financial control.” (Cumberland, family child care provider)

“I’m a single mom with three kids and having an extra income like WAGE\$ helps me to provide for their needs and shelter.” (Davidson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is amazing and keeps staff motivated in so many ways. Thank you for offering this to our staff. In a time that money is tight, the WAGE\$ funding helps out. I have needed things for my classrooms, and I am waiting on the WAGE\$ check to come so I can purchase things.”  
(Davie, director)

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

“Families can’t be the only ones supporting higher wages for early childhood education staff, and centers can’t afford to pay all staff the wages they deserve. It takes outside subsidies to support them.” (Durham, director)

“It has provided essential items that are much more needed during these times! It has relieved some stress and gives me something to look forward to because we are underappreciated many times. I’m thankful!” (Edgecombe, family child care provider)

“I think it’s important because there are so many teachers that can hardly pay their bills. With the program, it gives us a little extra to help get us through.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“It helps teachers that give back to their classrooms without hesitation. It has also made a way to help me to survive when things are tight, and I don’t want to give up.” (Gaston, teacher)

“It is important because teachers are struggling during this time, and it is an incentive to keep pushing and makes you feel appreciated.” (Halifax, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has helped me in every financial way in my life.” (Harnett, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has meant so much to me. It has allowed me to pay my bills, put money into my savings account and put food on my table for my family. It has allowed me to purchase items for my classroom to better provide for the children in my care.” (Haywood, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me live the life I’ve wanted. My wife and I can more comfortably raise our daughter without financial stress. Thank you so much.” (Henderson, teacher)

“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.” (Hertford, 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.” (Iredell, teacher)

“WAGE\$ supplements help me pay my bills and meet my personal needs. I would be hurting greatly without it.” (Johnston, teacher)

“It is important because early childhood as a whole is not recognized, which makes it difficult for teachers to pursue their dreams without being properly compensated. The extra support helps in all parts of life.” (Lee, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement helped me to buy things for the classroom and makes me feel appreciated. I am a happy teacher instead of a stressed teacher.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“It is very important because I depend on that extra money to help pay bills that I couldn’t afford before.” (Macon, teacher)

“Wages for teachers and child care workers are low. The supplement helps improve life for my staff. I think improved happiness for teachers leads to a better classroom experience for children in their care.” (Mecklenburg, director)

“It helps me to be more attentive to what’s around me because the extra stress is lifted.” (Nash, director)

“Without the WAGE\$ supplement, I would not be able to pay my monthly bills. It literally gives me an extra payday each year that I depend on for financial support.” (Randolph, director)

“It helps make ends meet. I may make more than most, but I still come in well below the poverty line at the end of the year. Thanks to my health insurance doubling in cost for the second year in a row, I currently don’t make enough to pay my basic bills each month. I will literally need it in order to keep my bills paid this year.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“It has blessed me because living paycheck-to-paycheck is not easy, and it always comes through for me. I am blessed. Thanks to the WAGE\$ Program.” (Rowan, teacher)

“When I receive the supplement, it is always at a time when I need it to survive!” (Rutherford, teacher)

“Teachers are extremely underpaid for the duties that are required of them. WAGE\$ helps balance that out and make us feel more appreciated. Teaching is my passion and the program has ensured that I feel satisfied with the income I receive based on the supplement.” (Stanly, teacher)

“It means so much to me because it has helped relieve so much financial stress.” (Surry, teacher)

“Staff are far more valuable than what they are paid, and the supplement helps counter that.” (Swain, director)

“I am extremely thankful for the program because without it, I would be looking for an extra job to supplement my living income. ... Personally, I would have had to search for another career because without the WAGE\$ Program, I would be struggling to make ends meet every month. I wouldn’t have had the income to increase my education for my degree. The supplement has assisted me with my daily life and career.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement helped with maintaining a good status on my bills and also helped with gas and personal items for my family. The WAGE\$ Program keeps my children and myself a float.” (Vance, teacher)

“I just want to emphasize the financial stress it eases.” (Warren, teacher)

“It has added a great amount of joy to my life and removed a great deal of stress due to finances.” (Watauga, teacher)

“It helps provide for me and my family, and it also motivates me to keep striving even when times are hard.” (Wilson, teacher)



## **Appendix D: Appreciation/Recognition Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY21**

“I think that WAGE\$<sup>1</sup> is important because it make us feel appreciated and rewarded for our work in child care.” (Alexander, teacher)

“It gives you a feeling that you matter when you work hard to serve your community to help children to learn and grow.” (Alleghany, teacher)

“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.” (Brunswick, family child care provider)

“The recognition and supplemental pay really help boost morale. I also think educated teachers are essential and financial incentives are encouraging.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement makes me feel not only appreciated, but also important, that my job does mean something.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“The program makes you feel valued and that we make a difference in child care.” (Columbus, teacher)

“It’s important to let child care workers know they are special and appreciated. Every time I am able to receive funds from WAGE\$, it lets me know that what I do matters!” (Craven, teacher)

“It encourages teachers to continue their education, and it gives me a sense of value in this profession. The program has increased the professionalism of early educators.” (Cumberland, director)

“It shows me that I matter to the community.” (Davie, teacher)

“In reality, we don’t get paid enough for all that we do, and we’re truly invested in our children and classrooms. We spend a great amount of our own money, and sometimes we aren’t appreciated or compensated for what we do. WAGE\$ honestly makes me feel seen, deserving and appreciated as a professional.” (Durham, teacher)

“It helps keep the staff happy and shows them that what they do makes a difference for young children.” (Edgecombe, director)

“I think it is helpful to child care workers because it reminds us that what we do is valued.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“It lets me know that I am appreciated, and it helps to know that people care about what I do as a child care worker. It has also helped me out so much in my life.” (Franklin, teacher)

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

“The program makes me feel important and that my work with children matters.” (Halifax, teacher)

“It shows the staff that they are making a difference, not just in our program, but across the county and state levels as well.” (Harnett, director)

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

“I think the program has helped us feel appreciated in a field that goes unappreciated and is not seen as important. Early childhood education is the foundation to how well a child does in school and many people don’t see it that way.” (Iredell, teacher)

“It makes me feel valued, appreciated, and rewarded as an early childhood professional.” (Johnston, teacher)

“The job our staff does is a very thankless job, especially to not be recognized for the importance of the role it plays in the development of children. These supplements let staff know that others do recognize and reward for jobs well done, as well as recognize the importance of GREAT child care.” (Macon, director)

“The program is important because even with the strides we take every day for the children in our care, child care workers do not always get the appreciation they deserve. The program tells the workers that YES, they are important and that they are cared for and appreciated.” (Mitchell, director)

“Both supplements are very beneficial to staff in the child care profession. It helps to place value in what we do while making us feel truly ‘essential’. The morale boost is definitely passed on through staff and child interactions.” (Nash, director)

“We are very proud and grateful as child care providers that have remained open to provide child care to many children and families all across North Carolina. It means the world to me that the Child Care Wages® Program makes me feel more appreciated and recognized for my work. I thank you.” (Pitt, family child care provider)

“It increases morale, teachers come in happier and the kids are happier.” (Richmond, director)

“I feel like it shows early childhood educators that we matter and what we do matters.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“WAGES shows the workers that they are valued and by sowing this seed, they are allowed to blossom in their classroom.” (Rowan, teacher)

“I think it gives Pre-K staff a greater feeling of worth. When people feel appreciated and seen, they do a better job. It also makes its way to the children and to the families, which happens both through resources for our classroom as well as overall contentment of staff.” (Surry, teacher)

“Because of WAGES, I feel more valued and appreciated for the hard work I do.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“It makes me feel like what I do matters in my community.” (Watauga, teacher)



## Appendix E: COVID-19 Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY21

“The pandemic is STRESSFUL. We are not operating well and are barely making ends meet.”  
(Alamance, director)

“It has created a great amount of stress and uncertainty.” (Alexander, teacher)

“There were many new rules and regulations to follow. We had to do everything over the computer and phone instead of in person. Families have had to pull their children out due to lost jobs or fewer hours. It was just so much to deal with, especially in the cleaning and sanitizing every day.” (Avery, director)

“During COVID-19, our program is much smaller and many of our teachers left the program to pursue other lines of work. The instability, at the time, led to many teachers jumping ship. We have many new staff this year, which has given us some fresh perspectives, but new hires require a great deal of onboarding. The uncertainty around enrollment and employment has been difficult. The fear of a possible outbreak has us all on edge all of the time. Overall, lots of uncertainty makes it hard to plan and project for the future.” (Buncombe, director)

“COVID-19 has made the teacher’s job more difficult with increased cleaning and worries about contracting the virus. Our enrollment is lower than expected and keeping rooms staffed with consistent teachers has been an issue. We are having to use substitutes much more than normal.”  
(Caldwell, director)

“I realize now more than ever how underappreciated early childhood educators are. They are rarely mentioned as frontline workers like teachers are, but many people do not associate child care centers with teachers. Child care centers, by many, are still just considered babysitting even though we are required to have the same education levels as teacher assistants in the school system. Child care workers also do not receive the benefits from the school system such as health insurance. When schools were shut down, many centers stayed open providing care for the children whose teachers were too worried about having them in their classrooms. I saw many child care workers work through the pandemic, following procedures to stay safe, taking care of many children not in school, doing their jobs and risking their health, knowing they did not have insurance to help them if they got sick. I feel deeply about child care workers getting the chance to have health insurance at a more affordable rate and centers that run state programs such as Pre-K and Head Start at least should be offered full benefits that are the same as the school system. The pandemic has brought me even more frustration on how early childhood educators are viewed and treated by the masses.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“It has impacted our program deeply. Staff were becoming discouraged, and children were also experiencing grief and disappointment. We are trying to implement happier activities in our lesson plans to boost up the children’s morale as well.” (Columbus, teacher)

“I am fearful of getting COVID-19, and it’s hard not to hug, hold hands and comfort a child when needed because of the social distancing policy.” (Craven, teacher)

“We lost many teachers and children. Our enrollment of children has decreased by 70% of our capacity because of the shortage of staffing.” (Cumberland, director)

“Our center was closed from the end of March to mid-May. A couple children have tested positive this week, and I am more anxious about catching it myself. I am trying to do all that I can think of to decrease the chance of anyone in my class getting sick, but it is hard, stressful, and challenging. It feels impossible sometimes.” (Davidson, teacher)

“It is very hard to keep morale up during COVID-19. We are short staffed and are overworked.” (Davie, director)

“It has been the singular most stressful year of my life. In the early childhood program, initially, there was a great amount of uncertainty. No one could tell us what we were supposed to do or how we were supposed to protect these kids from a virus that we didn't know at the time how it would affect young children. We lost many children when parents got laid off from work, children who still haven't come back to the center. We've been running at 2/3 capacity at the highest for months now. Some of our staff got scared in the beginning and left, they said they would come back, but they never did, so we've been short staffed. We're trying to maintain NAEYC and state standards, all while trying to engage and enhance cleaning procedures due to the lack of a cleaning crew. We had to try to prevent extra bodies from being in the center. It has been stressful watching kids graduate from the program knowing that they're not going to get the same kindergarten experience that was available to them a year ago. Knowing these kids are going to be isolated and alone with, if they're lucky, immediate family only. It's been hard to see babies come into the center who have never had human interactions outside their family. These babies cry, scream and don't understand what's going on. It takes twice as long, sometimes three times as long, as it used to for them to acclimate to people. Overall we have been making it work, but it has truly taken a toll on us, our students, and our families.” (Durham, teacher)

“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.” (Forsyth, director)

“The stress has been higher, and the staffing has been lower. Some days it feels like a normal pre-COVID day and other days I feel like I'm barely hanging on and barely able to deal with all the surprises that get thrown at us.” (Franklin, director)

“No one wants to work. With the added guidelines, it is burning out the great staff I have, and I find it difficult to maintain them. Out of three months and hundreds of dollars, no one that is qualified has applied. What is being done? I can't afford to pay for extra staff without raising my fees. We need some type of supplement to help us in this area.” (Gaston, director)

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been tough to keep all staff employed at full time due to the low number of children enrolled in my center. It has also been hard to fill one position I have for toddlers.” (Harnett, director)

“Our staff are now having to work more hours due to scheduling constraints and conflict with some staff. Costs have increased, but market rates have not. COVID-19 has brought about enormous loads of stress for different reasons. Some days, it’s a challenge to make sure everyone’s needs are met to continue providing high quality care and to meet the demands with such a tight budget and lack of staff.” (Haywood, director)

“We have tried to stay as normal as possible for our kids. Losing sand, water, and play dough was a disappointment. We are going above and beyond on sanitation. Teachers being quarantined, and finding staff have been a challenge. It’s hard keeping a center open low staffed.” (Henderson, teacher)

“The virtual teaching and learning experience has been difficult. I am a hands on learner and teacher. The pandemic has not allowed that, and I feel I have not been able to show my best side as a teacher.” (Iredell, teacher)

“I thank God I have been able to continue to work, but when the pandemic first began, I worked for a few months getting four hours a day, then six, and currently at eight for several months now. I took a few jobs on the side to help support myself for a while so I did not have to draw unemployment. So many needed it worse than I did, and the times were tough, but God always supplied my needs using various means.” (Johnston, teacher)

“COVID-19 has made a huge impact for many reasons. Staff are afraid to work, so we have lost several valuable staff members. We have reduced our staff child ratios to help social distance in the classroom, which has caused less revenue, but the staff feel more comfortable. The operational grants have helped offset the loss of revenue. COVID-19 has added new costs to our program, PPP supplies, extra cleaning expenses and extra staffing. As an owner, there is always the fear and worry that we will have to close. We already had to close for two weeks due to a cluster, which was a huge financial hardship. We will not survive if this happens again. We did not charge our families, but paid our staff, which was extremely hard financially. On a personal level, there is always the fear of getting COVID-19. The staff and children work closely together. We try to social distance, but you just can't in this line of work.” (Lincoln, director)

“Because of COVID-19, staff worry about having to come to work and then go back home to their families. Safety is definitely an issue.” (Martin, director)

“I have anxiety for going to work, getting sick, bringing sickness to my family and financial strain for being out of work.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“COVID-19 has made life more difficult in every aspect. As an early childhood educator, I feel that it has made it more difficult to provide children with the highest standard of care and education by limiting physical contact and in person education.” (Mitchell, teacher)

“COVID-19 has been challenging mainly because with the ‘required to live’ mask wearing, facial expressions are greatly impacted. There is a great amount to be gained for children with a ‘SMILE’ and a hug.” (Nash, director)

“The stress and anxiety are at an all-time high due to COVID-19, especially because other typical stressors in child care don’t stop during a pandemic. It has been extremely hard to hire teachers during this time and enroll children.” (Pitt, director)

“There are fewer in person classes, and we have lost some children. Thankfully, I can still work my regular hours. Wearing masks is a little difficult, and we come in nervous every day just thinking that we could be exposed on a daily basis knowing families still go out.” (Randolph, teacher)

“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.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“During COVID-19, I have had three teachers quit. I need to hire six teachers, and I haven’t received one application in over a year. People are not interested in working in child care. My enrollment is down to 20 children out of 100, my waiting list is over 200 children, and I had to dis-enroll children when my last teacher quit to maintain staff to child ratio. I’m not sure how long we can keep our doors open.” (Rowan, director)

“It’s very stressful worrying about getting sick or getting someone sick. There’s very little stability because of the quarantine days that have to be taken when someone is sick.” (Surry, teacher)

“Before the pandemic, I was focused on assessments and observations on improving the way I teach and interact with children. Now, I feel the focus is on health requirements and ‘keeping kids alive.’ It is sad to give up some of the things I felt were important, but my brain does not have enough bandwidth to do all the things. I constantly feel guilty for not being able to get it all done.” (Watauga, family child care provider)

“We lost a few staff members because they were scared to work in child care with COVID-19 around. It’s also been very difficult to hire teachers. The people that want to work don’t have the qualifications, so we are way down in classrooms, which was a problem before COVID-19, but is worse now. If it were not for a PPP loan and grant money from the state, we would not be open right now!” (Wayne, director)

“COVID-19 has impacted our workforce, and we cannot find qualified teachers. All of our substitutes quit at the beginning of COVID-19, and we have tried to rebuild our substitute pool with little success. We also had several part-time employees quit. Office employees are working in classrooms to keep them open.” (Wilkes, director)

“It has caused stress, stress and more stress. We have stayed open, but it has been stressful.” (Wilson, director)



## **Appendix F: Smart Start Messages Feedback Collected from WAGE\$ Surveys FY21**

“I am very thankful, especially through this challenging time that we have been experiencing. Thank you for all you do and every penny you fund for the Child Care WAGE\$<sup>®</sup> Program!<sup>1</sup> God bless you all.” (Alamance, teacher)

“Thank you very much for making me feel like my job is important and children matter.”  
(Alexander, teacher)

“Thank you for providing the Child Care WAGES<sup>®</sup> Program supplement. It has provided so many learning opportunities for the children in my classroom. For example, it helped me to provide the materials for the children to create their own insect book when we did the study on Eric Carle in our classroom, and the children loved it.” (Alleghany, teacher)

“I appreciate all the money that you allocate for the program because it has made a huge impact on my life.” (Avery, director)

“Thank you! The funds are greatly appreciated! I’ve been operating my family child care home for almost 13 years and credit my continuance in the field to WAGE\$.” (Brunswick, family child care provider)

“Thank you! The program helps in so many ways, from partnering with education to helping people during financial struggles.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“Thank you so much for the opportunity. As a first generation high school graduate and community college graduate, I am closer to accomplishing my long term goal, which is to have my bachelor’s.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“Thank you for allotting funds to people working in early childhood education and helping to provide brighter futures by valuing our work in the field!” (Clay, director)

“I thank you for this funding because it is such a valuable program that impacts children as well as teachers. Teachers are more likely to stay at their centers and further their education. The children also benefit from having that stability of teachers staying. Teachers appreciate their efforts being recognized and rewarded.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“Thanks for being there for teachers because we need encouragement every so often. I love the program and am so grateful for you.” (Columbus, teacher)

“Thank you. You have changed my life.” (Craven, teacher)

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

“I thank you for caring about us and our needs. Thank you for helping to make a difference in my life and so many others. Thank you for being supportive because sometimes we feel we are alone and no one is listening. Thank you.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“The funding from the program has helped for financial needs, shelter needs and also for any other needs. I’m very thankful for the program. Thank you!” (Davidson, teacher)

“I appreciate you all for making it possible for early childhood professionals like me to get the supplemental pay twice a year. It helps make my family’s life better and finances not feel too tight.” (Davie, teacher)

“There have been times when I didn't know how I was going to feed our family, times when COVID-19 caused uncertainty, but the program helped make both of those a little less stressful. It helped me feed my family and took some of the burden left on my shoulders when my husband lost his job due to coronavirus restrictions. I truly want to thank you. God bless.” (Durham, teacher)

“I truly appreciate how they have given teachers the incentive to work with the children. It gives us something to look forward to and helps with the financial hardship for school and my personal life.” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is awesome! It gives you an incentive to stay in the field and to continue employment at the facility you work at.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“It is the best program, and it helps teachers to become motivated to receive a higher education.” (Franklin, teacher)

“Thank you for all the help, support and financial assistance. Without the funds, I would not have been able to get meds, gas and maintain my household. I am so grateful that you were there to help give to my classroom and family as well. Thank you!” (Gaston, teacher)

“Thank you, and I appreciate all you do in making sure we receive the supplement.” (Granville, family child care provider)

“The supplement is awesome, and I would not have gone back to school without it.” (Halifax, family child care provider)

“Thank you for all you do to help us be able to keep pushing to make a difference in the lives of children and their families.” (Harnett, teacher)

“Thank you! Thank you for seeing that child care workers are a vital part of a child’s life. The program truly helps each one of us.” (Haywood, director)

“Thank you. I love my job, but it does not pay me enough alone to care for my family. WAGE\$ helps fill the gaps in my income.” (Henderson, teacher)

“Thank you for caring enough to help us continue to be able to provide a safe, educational environment for the young children we interact with on a daily basis.” (Hertford, family child care provider)

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the funds you provide to improve the quality of a teacher’s life!” (Iredell, teacher)

“Thank you, although those words seem to fall flat in comparison to how I really feel. That check has helped ease a great deal of financial burden in my family, and I’m very thankful for it.” (Jackson, teacher)

“As a director, I encourage my employees to sign-up for the WAGE\$ supplement and further their education, which also increases the likelihood that they stay with my center for a long period of time. Thank you Smart Start!” (Johnston, director)

“Thank you very much for supporting me and all child care workers! Sometimes it feels like we are just considered babysitters and not enough credit is given for what we really do.” (Lee, teacher)

“I am grateful and thankful for WAGE\$!” (Lincoln, director)

“It has made a huge impact on me and has helped me so much! I greatly appreciate the efforts made by the Smart Start Partnership.” (Macon, teacher)

“Thank you for your help and support! I am 59 years old, and I have been on my job for 20 years. I’ve always wanted to get my Associate’s Degree in Child Care and because of WAGE\$, I will continue taking classes.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“Thanks for all that you do and for encouraging educators to keep working with young children.” (Nash, teacher)

“The supplement is more important than ever. In the age of people getting their own businesses or side hustles started, it is imperative that qualified teachers are compensated enough to stay in the field.” (Pitt, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is an awesome program. I feel like more people need to know about it to encourage them to go back to school.” (Randolph, teacher)

“First, thank you for this opportunity! The supplement honestly helps me feel valued and appreciated in my line of work. I know this is not something that you HAVE to do for us, but it really makes me feel valued and that my job IS important. In times like this, during the pandemic, especially where everyone is under so much stress, this was a much appreciated supplement for me and my family.” (Richmond, teacher)

“Thank you so much! It is a vital and desperately needed program. It has also been a lifesaver through rough times. Teachers are very underpaid for all the work that is involved, and this helps us to be able to remain in the field and provide quality care to the children we love.”  
(Rockingham, teacher)

“Thank you for recognizing the hard work and dedication that teachers give their jobs and the need for such a program.” (Rowan, teacher)

“Thank you! It truly helps me in my life, my career and education.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“Thank you so much because we are often NOT seen as professionals by the public and sometimes parents. The incentive makes me realize that I am important to someone and that my job is just as important! Thank you kindly!” (Stanly, teacher)

“Thank you so much! Without your help, I am not sure if I would stay in child care. I love children and have the passion and want to stay working with them.” (Surry, teacher)

“You help make life better for families and children! You are appreciated, and you help me to always keep going!” (Transylvania, teacher)

“My supplement is a blessing that is much needed. Thanks for not giving up on this important program.” (Vance, teacher)

“Thank you for supporting teachers and recognizing our accomplishments and the care for our child care children.” (Warren, director)

“It is one of the best programs that I have been a part of.” (Watauga, family child care provider)

“Thank you so much for your support of early childhood staff. I love my job, but it’s not new news that it isn’t the best paying career. Your support of the WAGE\$ Program is greatly appreciated. The WAGE\$ supplement has been a financial blessing to my family. Thank you!”  
(Wayne, teacher)

“It’s greatly appreciated and helps relieve financial strain.” (Wilkes, family child care provider)

“Thank you for thinking of me and all of us as educators of young children because for so many years, we felt left out. Now, we feel included and valued as important to the development of young children.” (Wilson, teacher)