

Child Care
WAGES[®] **2021-2022**
Program **EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**



The Child Care WAGE\$® Program was created in response to research-based evidence showing that the quality of care children receive is lowered by high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education. The combination of a lack of resources and efforts to maintain affordability for parents means many early childhood teachers are severely underpaid and leave the field for better paying jobs, and others never consider the profession as an option.

WAGE\$ provides tiered education-based salary supplements to teachers, directors and family child care providers working with children from birth to five with the goal of improving the retention, education and compensation of this workforce. The compensation is critical, particularly now as North Carolina and the entire nation battle the “great resignation” and employees around the country demand higher pay, better working conditions and much-deserved respect. As child care programs struggle to attract and retain staff in the current employment climate, WAGE\$ can help turn the tide on turnover and decrease the financial stress experienced by an essential workforce.

In North Carolina, WAGE\$ is made possible through a funding collaboration between local Smart Start partnerships that elect to participate and the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Child Care Services Association administers the program for participating counties across the state and extends gratitude on behalf of the participants to these supportive funders. Please see page 08 for a 2021-2022 funder list.

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WAGE\$
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DIRECTORS SEE WAGE\$ AS AN IMPORTANT STRATEGY TO HELP MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR STAFF AND THEIR PROGRAMS

With directors reporting difficulty finding and keeping staff, particularly qualified staff, now more than ever, it is clear that North Carolina's \$12/hr. average rate of pay for teachers and assistants (*Working in Early Care and Education*, Child Care Services Association, 2019) is simply not enough. Offering WAGE\$ supplements to qualified staff as part of their overall compensation package can be an important strategy for employers. As one director stated, "I always tell my staff 'Once you qualify, IT'S FREE MONEY!!!!' It is a great program that helps my staff with finances." Another said,

"It is important to supplement our teachers with the additional funding due to low salaries. The staff looks forward to the additional income, and they are very excited about participating in the program. WAGE\$ is an asset to our program, and it is listed on our job flyers as a benefit for working as a child care teacher. Our children benefit because the staff turnover is low." According to directors, the additional compensation makes a difference for their staff and their families, the children in care and for their programs overall.

"WAGE\$ motivates my staff to keep going, making my job more rewarding as they meet their goals. ... WAGE\$ has added a monetary reward to keep the staff pushing for higher education and allows the staff to gain more knowledge to apply in the center. It definitely helps with job retention as well!"

-WAGE\$ director

"This program has been great for the staff, and it has built morale and helped keep steady staffing. Thank you so much!!,"

-WAGE\$ director

"It is critical. We can't compete with the benefits of the public school system. We can't offer health insurance as it is cost prohibitive. However, these stipends go a long way in helping out staff with their basic needs, including health care costs. Without WAGE\$, I don't know if we could retain our staff. I think turnover would be doubled and quality of care would go down significantly, as well as star ratings, as we must be able to retain our educated staff."

-WAGE\$ director

"The staff has supplemental income to support their needs, and it provides needed funds to continue their education. As a result the program has a highly educated staff that can give a richer experience to the children we serve."

-WAGE\$ director

"WAGE\$ is so important because I can keep my staff and get more candidates for the center. It keeps my staff motivated."

-WAGE\$ director



PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE LESS FINANCIAL STRESS AND ARE MORE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS

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 promoting the supportive environments and engaging interactions children need. Easing financial stress is critical for the participants, their families and for the children they serve. As the workforce behind the workforce, early educators deserve better pay and more recognition for their role in supporting economic recovery. WAGE\$ enhances their compensation and recognizes their achievements.

\$1,203

Average six-month supplement = **\$1,203** (an increase of approximately **\$1.16** per hour for full-time employment)

4,018

4,018 paid in **61** participating counties

98%

98% of the WAGE\$ participant survey respondents said WAGE\$ helps ease financial stress and **96%** said WAGE\$ helps them feel more satisfied with their jobs

"WAGE\$ allows me to enter work free of stress and allows me to focus solely on doing what I can to best help the people I serve."

-WAGE\$ participant

"WAGE\$ has helped me keep a roof over my head, food on my table, and clothes on my back. ... It's a start to a better life for me."

-WAGE\$ participant

"Without the Child Care WAGE\$® Program my budget is stretched thin, so it helps relieve financial stress. ... WAGE\$ means making work better and helping ease stress because of lack of finances. Knowing that the funds are coming also gives hope when there sometimes is none."

-WAGE\$ participant

"Happy employees lead to a happy workplace, and WAGE\$ definitely makes you happy."

-WAGE\$ participant



WAGE\$ ENCOURAGES, SUPPORTS AND REWARDS CONTINUED EDUCATION

While post-COVID-19 information on the workforce is needed and will be collected soon, 2019 data shows that 62% of the early childhood teaching staff had at least an associate degree in any field and 40% had earned these degrees specifically in early childhood education (*Working in Early Care and Education*, Child Care Services Association, 2019). WAGE\$ plays a role in encouraging, supporting and rewarding educational pursuits.

To earn a WAGE\$ salary supplement, a participant must have credit-bearing coursework. The WAGE\$

scale ranges from 12 semester hours of early childhood coursework all the way to a doctorate degree. Participants with education below an associate degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours are awarded temporarily and must make educational advancements in order to retain their eligibility. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships may be available to provide financial assistance with the coursework needed. The programs work hand-in-hand to make a difference with education.

87%

87% of WAGE\$ participants working in counties with at least two years on WAGE\$ have an associate degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours or submitted coursework during the year to reflect their ongoing education

93%

93% of those at temporary education levels responding to the participant survey said that WAGE\$ is an incentive to seek additional education and/or helps pay for it

WAGE\$ participant Grettel “Carolina” Jarquin has both an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education and a Birth to Kindergarten Bachelor’s Degree and she is proud of reaching the finish line for her education. She said, “I am a first generation high school graduate and a first generation graduate with either a two- or four-year degree. Accomplishing something that no one in my family has done is my greatest achievement. I feel like I’ve been able to almost repay the sacrifices my mom had to make, having to migrate from another country to provide a better life for her children, to provide opportunities that weren’t available.”

Carolina calls WAGE\$ a blessing. She said, “WAGE\$ opens up opportunities for the community to further their careers without having to choose between work and school. It has been very important to be able to have that financial stability, to not have it weigh so heavily on me while I was obtaining my degree.”



CHILDREN NEED STABLE AND ENGAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS

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

14%

14% turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants, well below what might have been expected during this time of flux

96%

96% of the WAGE\$ participant survey respondents said that WAGE\$ encourages them to stay in their current programs

"WAGE\$ is important because child care providers and early childhood teachers and assistants do not get the pay they deserve or need, even though we provide a really important service to the community. This money helps us continue to do the job we were called to do."
-WAGE\$ participant

"WAGE\$ has allowed me to stay in a career I love."
-WAGE\$ participant

"In a field that is rewarding in many other ways, yet barely pays a living wage to most educators, this financial incentive helps fill in the gaps twice a year to make paying bills easier. It supports teachers to stay in the field and in a particular place of employment. It takes some of the stress off, helps us better provide for the children in our care, and gives us emotional incentive to keep going."
-WAGE\$ participant



EARLY EDUCATORS DESERVE RECOGNITION FOR THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WAGE\$ and its funders know how important it is to have an educated teacher who stays in the field. WAGE\$ participants often juggle work, family and school all while trying to make ends meet on a minimal salary. The importance of teachers and what they do for families, the workforce and the economy came into focus during the pandemic and that realization needs to remain in the forefront. Their dedication is recognized and rewarded through the WAGE\$ supplement.

97%

97% of survey respondents said that receiving WAGE\$ made them feel more appreciated and recognized for their work.

"The WAGE\$ program is an encourager. I've told others how the program is there to make providers feel good about the work we do. This is not an easy career, and we need all the encouragement we can get."

-WAGE\$ participant

"I think WAGE\$ helps staff feel valued and confirms the work done is worthwhile and important. This in turn helps us to do better and worry less. This all benefits the children we care for and teach. Ultimately that is the goal: for our children to have the best environment for learning and growth."

-WAGE\$ participant

"WAGE\$ is important because child care professionals don't get recognized for the work they do. It also provides motivation that they are not alone. Child care is where you start to plant seeds and watch them grow."

-WAGE\$ participant



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF WAGE\$

Alamance Partnership for Children
Alexander County Partnership for Children
Alleghany Partnership for Children
Alliance for Children (Union County)
Blue Ridge Partnership for Children
Buncombe Partnership for Children, Inc.
Cabarrus County Partnership for Children
Caldwell County Smart Start
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.
Guilford County Partnership for Children, 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.
Montgomery County Partnership for Children
North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education
North Carolina Partnership for Children
Partners for Children & Families Inc. (Moore County)
Partnership for Children of Johnston County, Inc.

Partnership for Children of Lenoir and Greene Counties
Partnership for Children of Lincoln/Gaston Counties
Partnership for Children of the Foothills
Randolph County Partnership for Children
Region A Partnership for Children
Richmond County Partnership for Children
Rockingham County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Smart Start of Brunswick County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davidson County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davie County, Inc.
Smart Start of Forsyth County
Smart Start of Mecklenburg County
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*

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