



T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood[®] Scholarship Program:

Supporting ECE Workforce Development,
Education, Compensation and Retention
in Western North Carolina

June 2022



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DOGWOOD
HEALTH TRUST



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Introduction

Early childhood education workforces are vital to the well-being of their communities. Those working in the early childhood field perform an important role by caring for and teaching young children so parents can work or go to school. Furthermore, early childhood educators are responsible for shaping young children's early experiences and preparing them for lifelong learning. The economic, educational and societal benefits of building a strong early childhood workforce are clear. However, a workforce crisis exists that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite early educators performing such a critical role, they remain significantly undercompensated and therefore more likely to leave the field. This instability has negative effects for children and the early childhood system. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® North Carolina Scholarship Program (T.E.A.C.H.) has been dedicated to addressing this predicament through the administration of a unique scholarship program for more than 30 years. T.E.A.C.H. scholarships are available to early educators and are designed not only to increase education, but also to link increased education to compensation and retention. The comprehensive nature of the scholarship program addresses issues holistically through an understanding that the workforce's education, compensation and retention are interrelated. Thus, solutions to these issues must be approached from all levels to ensure positive outcomes for the workforce as well as children and families.



The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® North Carolina Scholarship Program has consistently achieved increased education and compensation outcomes and reduced turnover on a statewide level since its inception in 1990. The program annually tracks and reports recipient and employer demographics, scholarship utilization and target outcomes to illustrate the program's effectiveness. However, until now there has not been funding to examine T.E.A.C.H. participants in a regional area and provide a comprehensive report. The purpose of this report is to provide background information on the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program and a demographic profile of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in western North Carolina. In addition, this report will highlight the outcome areas of increased education, compensation and retention for current recipients, followed by a comparative analysis of outcome areas from a pre-pandemic point in time to the present.

Child Care Services Association (CCSA) and T.E.A.C.H. are pleased to present this report, which includes background information on the scholarship program and design; a demographic profile of current scholarship recipients who are either working or living in the Dogwood Health Trust service area, including data on their scholarship utilization by county, degree level, role in the early care and education system, college of attendance and average income; outcome data related to increased education, wage progression, retention and degree attainment; and a comparative analysis of outcome data from a pre-COVID-19 point in time to the present. The report concludes with an overall summary of the findings and recommendations for promoting scholarship utilization and advancing program outcomes for the early childhood education workforce in the western North Carolina.



Background

T.E.A.C.H. was born from a vision that the way to address the low education, low pay and high turnover occurring in the early childhood education field was through a comprehensive workforce initiative that would tackle each of these issues simultaneously. The first early childhood workforce study in North Carolina identified these issues as essential to improving the quality of care and strengthening the workforce. At that time, many early childhood educators had no formal education beyond a high school diploma, were making little more than minimum wage and did not receive support for professional development from their employers. More than 40% were leaving the field in search of better paying jobs. All of these issues were severely affecting the quality and stability of care for children and families in North Carolina.

In 1990, with funding from foundations and United Way, CCSA piloted the first T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program in the Triangle (Durham, Orange and Wake counties.) The pilot project

examined whether teachers already working in the field could complete 18 credit hours in a year if they were given the opportunity to attend college, with assistance for tuition and books and paid time off to attend class and with centers sponsoring those teachers by paying part of the cost of tuition and release time. Would centers be willing to give these teachers a raise when they finished 18 credit hours? Would teachers be willing to remain at their sponsoring center another year when they received their raise? Twenty-one scholarships were awarded during the pilot phase and the pilot was successful immediately. Administrators noted changes in their teachers. Teachers remarked on the new knowledge and confidence they gained. More funding was secured and the pilot was tested in four other parts of the state with similar success

The program was expanded statewide in 1992 with public funding and has remained a catalyst for workforce development ever since. In 1994, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® name





was trademarked and national interest in the program increased. The first T.E.A.C.H. licenses were issued in 1996 to other states who wanted to administer their own T.E.A.C.H. programs. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center was established in 2000 to ensure the development, integrity and expansion of T.E.A.C.H. and other workforce initiatives aimed at education and compensation.

By 2022, T.E.A.C.H. programs operated in 23 states and the District of Columbia, with more states expressing interest. Although each state operates independently with their own

well-educated and well-compensated workforce to teach and care for young children in North Carolina.

CCSA, an organization whose mission is to strengthen accessible and affordable quality early care and education by providing supports for families, communities and the workforce, has administered T.E.A.C.H. since its inception. The program is currently funded through the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) from federal Child Development Block Grant

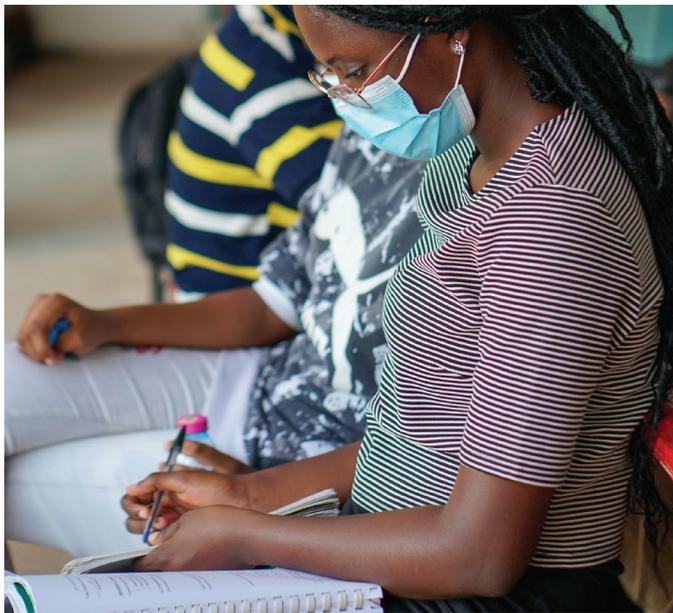


funding and scholarship models, states adhere to the guiding principles of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® model as part of the license agreement and data is shared and reported annually. T.E.A.C.H.'s national expansion and the data that has been compiled over the years from these states, including North Carolina, are strong indicators that this initiative is worthwhile. An examination of results-driven data demonstrates year after year the success of the program's overarching mission to create a

funding in 2020-2021. In Fiscal Year 2020-2021, T.E.A.C.H. provided scholarships to 2,064 early childhood education professionals employed in 942 licensed child care settings and 48 different early childhood education organizations throughout the state. As an example of T.E.A.C.H. outcomes, teachers participating on the Associate Degree Scholarship Program completed an average of 14 credits per year, received a 9% increase in hourly wages and had a turnover rate of 9%.

Scholarship Program Design & Principles

In order to fully understand T.E.A.C.H.'s impact, it is important to explain the scholarship program design and guiding principles. This unique scholarship was designed to address the interconnected issues of low education, low pay and high turnover in the early childhood education workforce and to build the early childhood system. Achieving these goals required a scholarship program guided by principles that strategically addresses challenges and bolsters the system in which the workforce is nested.



Although there are different scholarship models that vary depending on the degree level and role in the field, each scholarship model contains five core components: scholarship, education, counseling, compensation and commitment. The scholarship component provides financial support for tuition and books and, in some models, paid release time and course access stipends. The education component sets the expectation for the number of credit hours or education to be completed. Recipients who successfully complete the education component receive compensation in the form of a raise or bonus in recognition of

their increased education. In turn, scholarship recipients agree to complete a commitment period as part of the T.E.A.C.H. strategy to retain educated teachers. The scholarship counselor, a crucial part of the program, is the fifth core component of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. Scholarship recipients are assigned a dedicated counselor who supports the recipient and manages their scholarship.

Partnership is a key principle of the T.E.A.C.H. program, where all parties contribute and are invested in the success of each recipient's educational journey. Under the traditional comprehensive scholarship model, the early childhood program that employs the recipient sponsors the scholarship. For the program, this sponsorship involves contributing a small percentage toward tuition and books, providing teachers paid release time to help the recipient balance school and work and awarding a raise or bonus when the recipient meets the education component. The partnership principle is important to the scholarship design because one of the findings that ignited the T.E.A.C.H. concept was the fact that the early childhood education workforce was receiving little to no support from their employers for advancing their education. The idea was to encourage employers to make small investments in their employees' professional development with the support of T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. In addition, because of the compensation component, it served to illustrate the important link between increased education and compensation as a means of retaining educated teachers.

Another guiding principle is to be responsive to diversity in the early childhood education workforce, especially in the area of individual educational histories and goals. Scholarship models were developed with that in mind, and over time new scholarship models have been created and others modified or expanded



to reach the diverse workforce. Currently in North Carolina, T.E.A.C.H. offers an array of scholarships that help recipients take a few early childhood classes, earn credentials, certificates or diplomas, work toward associate degrees or bachelor's degrees in early childhood or complete post-baccalaureate programs such as Birth-Kindergarten Licensure or specialized early childhood focused graduate certificates and master's degrees. Within each education level, there are models available to a wide variety of individuals working in the early childhood workforce, including teachers and administrators of licensed early childhood programs, family-based professionals and other community specialists working on behalf of children, families or the early childhood workforce.

Although T.E.A.C.H. primarily seeks to transform the early childhood workforce through increased education, increased pay and reduced turnover, the impact of the program extends beyond those outcomes. For example, the scholarships can be used at any North Carolina community college with an early childhood education program and at partnering state universities and private colleges/universities for four-year degrees and post-baccalaureate coursework. The funding from scholarships is paid directly to these North Carolina colleges and universities, thereby strengthening their programs. T.E.A.C.H. cultivated collaborative relationships with these schools by sharing recommendations based on data collected from T.E.A.C.H. participants to better respond to working students' needs. In addition, T.E.A.C.H. has advocated and explored strategies for improving articulation agreements between two- and four-year colleges to expand educational opportunities for the field. The importance of a strong education delivery system for the workforce is paramount to ensuring that the degree programs are

high quality, allow individuals to build on their previous education and are responsive to the needs of those enrolled in these programs of study.

T.E.A.C.H. has a long history of providing direct support to the workforce, engaging in collaboration and system building and using data and recipients' stories to illustrate the impact and effectiveness of the program. The early childhood education workforce benefits because the program's diverse scholarship models essentially provide a debt-free education and because of the scholarship provisions of compensation and commitment. In order to continue strengthening the early childhood system, workforce initiatives like T.E.A.C.H. that have been successful in achieving education, compensation and retention outcomes can serve as a model for future comprehensive and system-building strategies to support the workforce.





T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program in the Dogwood Health Trust Area



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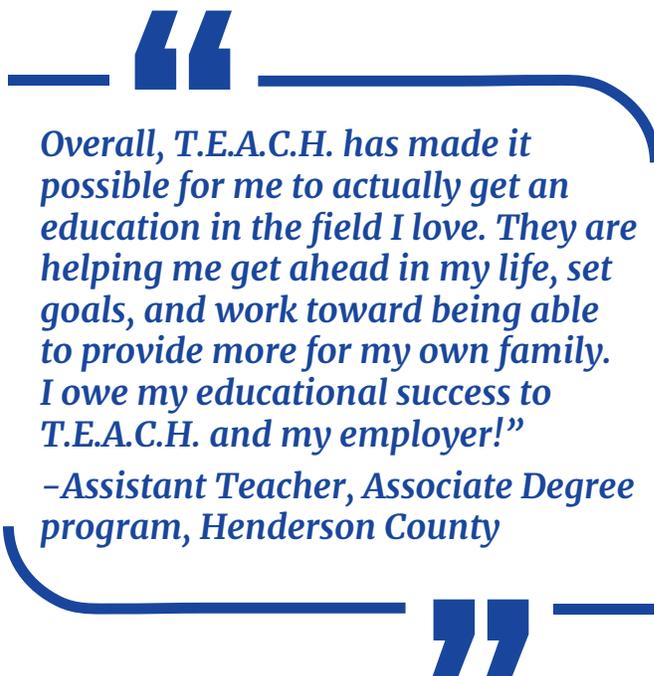
The use and program outcomes of T.E.A.C.H. for recipients living and/or working in the area of western North Carolina served by the Dogwood Health Trust are presented below with data tables, figures and analysis. The report concludes with a general discussion and recommendations for ways to improve the impact of the scholarship program on individuals and communities in western North Carolina and to gain insights into the workforce.



T.E.A.C.H. Data and the Database

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® North Carolina Scholarship Program uses a sophisticated database designed specifically for this program. The database allows staff to manage the various aspects of the scholarship with participants. It also serves as a data repository and tracking mechanism to report program outputs and outcomes. Data can be exported and analyzed in order to report on scholarship participation, demographics and outcomes.

The data presented in this report was culled from the T.E.A.C.H. program’s database. While demographic data is self-reported, other data such as employer, hourly wage, credit hour and degree completion are verified through paystubs, employer verification, transcripts and other forms of documentation. Quality control procedures are performed throughout the year to ensure that data is up-to-date and complete. The data pulled for this report was exported



Overall, T.E.A.C.H. has made it possible for me to actually get an education in the field I love. They are helping me get ahead in my life, set goals, and work toward being able to provide more for my own family. I owe my educational success to T.E.A.C.H. and my employer!”
–Assistant Teacher, Associate Degree program, Henderson County

from the database and analyzed to provide a picture of T.E.A.C.H. participation and to measure outcomes in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust.

Demographic Profile of T.E.A.C.H. Recipients in Counties Served by Dogwood Health Trust

The data presented in this section reflects the demographics of current T.E.A.C.H. participants from July 2020 to January 2022 who are living or working in the 18 counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. Scholarship applications are accepted throughout the year and participation is tracked based on the contract period dates and the semester in which activity took place. The contract period is determined at the point of application and enrollment. Typically, scholarship contracts last for one year and can be renewed annually if the recipient and employer agree.



County Data

There are 211 individuals who are currently participating or recently participated in T.E.A.C.H. in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. This is just more than 10% of the statewide T.E.A.C.H. recipient population (2,064) in fiscal year 2020-2021. Of those 211 scholarship recipients, 197 of them are living

in and 205 of them are working in one of the Dogwood Health Trust counties (Table 1). There are 14 recipients working in the service area but not living in one of the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. Six recipients are living in one of the Dogwood Health Trust counties, but working outside of the service area.

*Table 1:
T.E.A.C.H. scholarship
participation July
2020-January 2022 by
region and county*

| Dogwood Health Trust Region | By home county | # of recipients living in service area | By employer county | # of recipients working in service area |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--|--------------------|---|
| Western | Cherokee | 7 | Cherokee | 10 |
| | Clay | 1 | Clay | 1 |
| | Graham | 1 | Graham | 0 |
| | Jackson | 9 | Jackson | 9 |
| | Macon | 0 | Macon | 0 |
| | Swain | 2 | Swain | 2 |
| Total Western Region | | 20 | | 22 |
| Central | Buncombe | 71 | Buncombe | 75 |
| | Haywood | 18 | Haywood | 15 |
| | Henderson | 27 | Henderson | 30 |
| | Madison | 7 | Madison | 3 |
| | Transylvania | 12 | Transylvania | 14 |
| Total Central Region | | 135 | | 137 |
| Eastern | Avery | 7 | Avery | 8 |
| | Burke | 21 | Burke | 24 |
| | McDowell | 8 | McDowell | 8 |
| | Mitchell | 1 | Mitchell | 1 |
| | Polk | 1 | Polk | 1 |
| | Rutherford | 3 | Rutherford | 3 |
| | Yancey | 1 | Yancey | 1 |
| Total Eastern Region | | 42 | | 46 |
| Total | | 197 | | 205 |

- Fourteen recipients are working in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, but live outside of the area.
- Six recipients live in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, but work outside of the area.
- One hundred ninety-one recipients both live and work in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust.
- Two hundred eleven recipients who either live or work in the Dogwood Health Trust Service area.



Race and Ethnicity

The scholarship recipient's race and ethnicity are self-reported at the time of application. Because ethnicity can intersect with different racial identities, recipients are asked about their race from a list of choices that best describe themselves and are also asked to respond to a second question as to whether they consider themselves to be Latinx. Only 17% of recipients in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust are people of color,

compared to the statewide average of 52% recipients (Figure 1). In the demographic area of Latinx ethnicity, 7% of recipients in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust said they are Latinx (Figure 2), as compared to the statewide average of 11%. These recipients may identify with a different race; therefore demographics on both data points are provided to illuminate that distinction.

Figure 1:
Distribution of T.E.A.C.H. participants by race/ethnicity

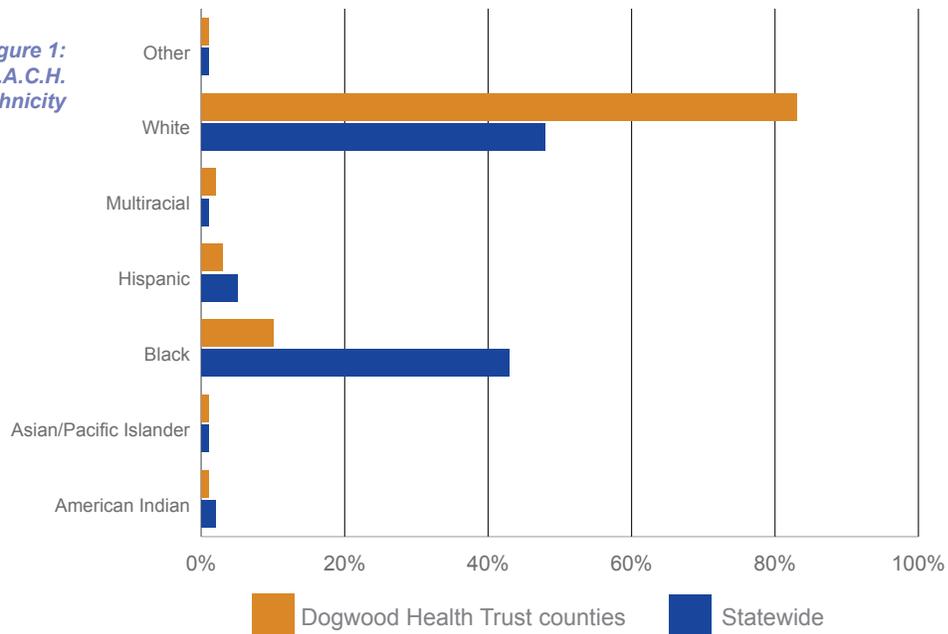
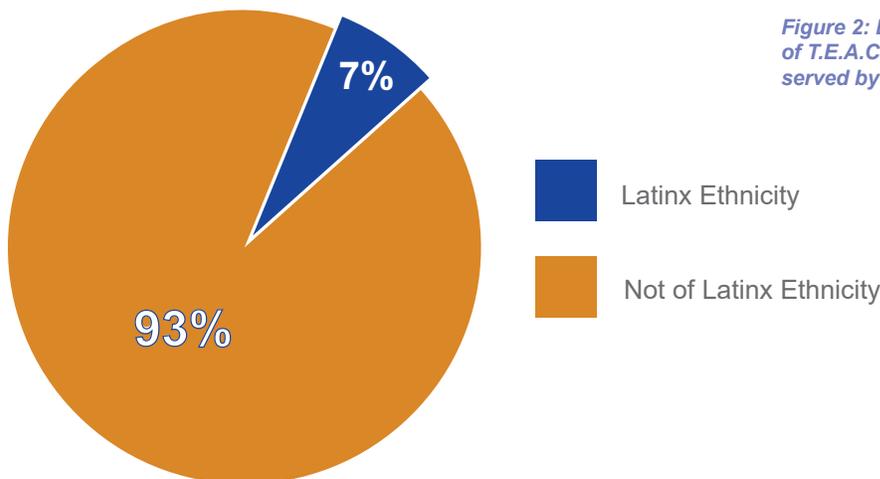


Figure 2: *Distribution of Latinx ethnicity of T.E.A.C.H. participants in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust*

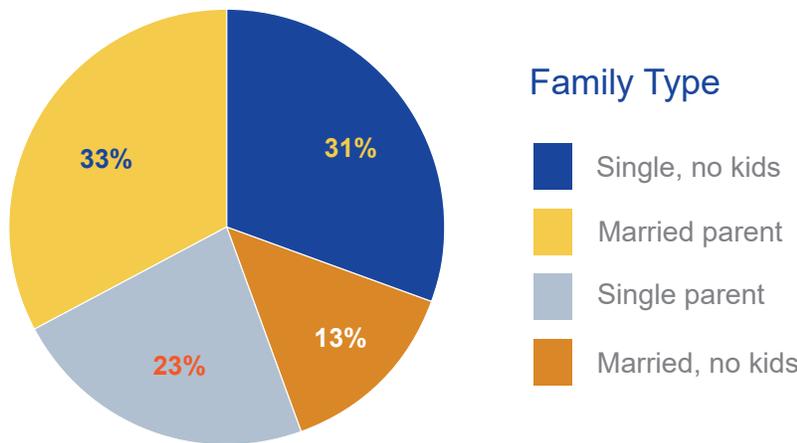




Family Type

Family type is another demographic data point collected from scholarship recipients. This information is collected at the point of application, updated as necessary and verified annually for any changes. Of the 211 current recipients in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, nearly 23% are single parents and nearly 33% are married parents, meaning approximately 56% of participants are parents with children living in their households.

Statewide, 31% of T.E.A.C.H. recipients are single parents and 28% are married parents. Collecting data on family structure is informative because it shows the recipients' population diversity and because it highlights the challenges some recipients may face due to the familial, personal and economic impacts of their household structures. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the distribution by family type.



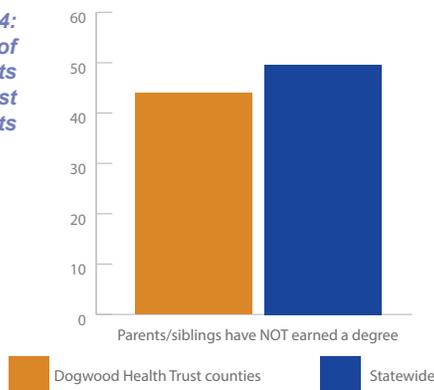
*Figure 3:
Family type of T.E.A.C.H.
participants in counties served
by Dogwood Health Trust*

First-Generation Students

Another data point collected from scholarship recipients is their status as a first-generation student. T.E.A.C.H. defines a first-generation student as a recipient whose parents or siblings have not earned a college degree. It is thought that these individuals are more vulnerable and more likely to need

additional support. This might be related to navigating the college system and/or other personal needs such as encouragement and a support system. This data point also helps demonstrate T.E.A.C.H.'s impact as it provides access to educational opportunities to a new generation of students who otherwise might not have pursued a college education. In counties serve by Dogwood Health Trust, 44% of current T.E.A.C.H. recipients are from families in which a parent or sibling has not earned a college degree compared to the statewide average of just less than 50% of recipients (Figure 4).

*Figure 4:
Distribution of
T.E.A.C.H. participants
that are first
generation students*





College and Educational Data of T.E.A.C.H. Recipients in Counties Served by The Dogwood Health Trust

T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients can access courses at all North Carolina community colleges with early childhood education programs and at partnering four-year colleges and universities with early childhood focused programs of study. There are scholarships for earning credentials, taking courses toward an associate degree, working toward a bachelor's

degree or post-baccalaureate and/or graduate level coursework, certificates and master's degrees. There are difficult models within each of these scholarship levels designed to reflect the diversity of the early childhood education workforce, depending on the role and the employer's involvement in the scholarship program.

Below is a brief description of each model type:

Comprehensive models:

This is the original and most generous scholarship model that requires the employer to sponsor the scholarship by contributing a small percentage toward tuition and books, providing paid release time to teachers and awarding a raise or bonus when the recipient completes the education component of the scholarship. The recipient also contributes a small percentage toward tuition and books and receives an access stipend each semester enrolled in courses. In exchange for the sponsorship and compensation, the recipient makes a one-year commitment to the sponsoring employer after receiving the compensation. These models are available to family-based professionals, teachers and administrators working in licensed early care and education settings at least 30 hours per week. Each scholarship lasts for one year with an option to renew annually if the employer and recipient agree.

Working Scholars models:

This newer model offers a modified scholarship to the early childhood workforce. Recipients receive a capped scholarship award per semester based on enrollment of six credit hours. The amount of the scholarship award is commensurate with the degree level, and, in most cases, is sufficient for tuition, fees and books. However, this scholarship is available for a maximum of five semesters, so it may not fully support a degree depending on the number of credit hours the recipient needs. To be eligible, applicants must be employed in a licensed early childhood setting at least 30 hours per week. The employer is not required to contribute toward this particular scholarship model. Bonuses are awarded by T.E.A.C.H. upon completion of 12 credit hours and the commitment for this model is for the early childhood education workforce, not necessarily to current employers.

Early Care and Education Community Specialists model:

This model was designed to support individuals who are not working in licensed early care and education settings but are working on behalf of children, their families or the early care and education workforce. This model provides a capped scholarship award and bonus per course for a year-long contract. The employer is not required to sponsor this scholarship, but they are asked to provide scheduling flexibility to the recipient to ensure success. The recipient is expected to remain with the employer for six months to one year depending on the number of credit hours completed, and they can renew their contract annually.



Participation by Scholarship Level and Type

Table 2 shows the number of scholarships in each level and scholarship type for recipients living and/or working in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. In addition to scholarship level and model type, T.E.A.C.H. also tracks

other college and educational data such as the recipient's educational goals, previous education and college of attendance. This information is provided at the time of application and tracked in the database.

*Table 2:
T.E.A.C.H. scholarship
participation in
counties served
by Dogwood
Health Trust, July
2020-January 2022*

| T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program Type | | # of scholarships |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Early Childhood Education Associate Degree-Level Scholarships | | |
| Comprehensive Associate Degree Scholarship | | 128 |
| Working Scholars Associate Degree Scholarship | | -- |
| Early Care and Education Community Specialist Associate Degree Scholarship | | 2 |
| | Total | 130 |
| Early Childhood Education Bachelor's Degree-Level Scholarships | | |
| Comprehensive Bachelor's Degree Scholarship | | 39 |
| Working Scholars Bachelor's Degree Scholarship | | 1 |
| Early Care and Education Community Specialist Bachelor's Degree Scholarship | | 4 |
| | Total | 44 |
| BA Plus Scholarship Program (BK Licensure and Post-BA ECE License and Graduate Degree Programs) | | |
| Comprehensive BA Plus Scholarship | | 22 |
| Working Scholars BA Plus Scholarship | | 1 |
| Early Care and Education Community Specialist BA Plus Scholarship | | -- |
| | Total | 23 |
| Special Scholarship Programs-Graduate Level | | |
| Leadership in Infant Toddler Learning (LITL) Post-Baccalaureate Certificate | | 1 |
| Early Childhood Leadership Master's Degree Scholarship | | 11 |
| | Total | 12 |
| Credential-Based Scholarships | | |
| Child Development Associate (CDA) Assessment and Renewal Scholarship | | 1 |
| NC Early Childhood Administration Credential Scholarship | | 8 |
| | Total | 9 |
| Total Scholarship Participation | | |
| | Total Scholarships Awarded | 218 |
| | Total Scholarship Recipients* | 211 |

*Six recipients graduated to an upper level scholarship during the reporting period of July 2021 to January 2022. One recipient participated on an associate degree-level and CDA scholarship simultaneously.

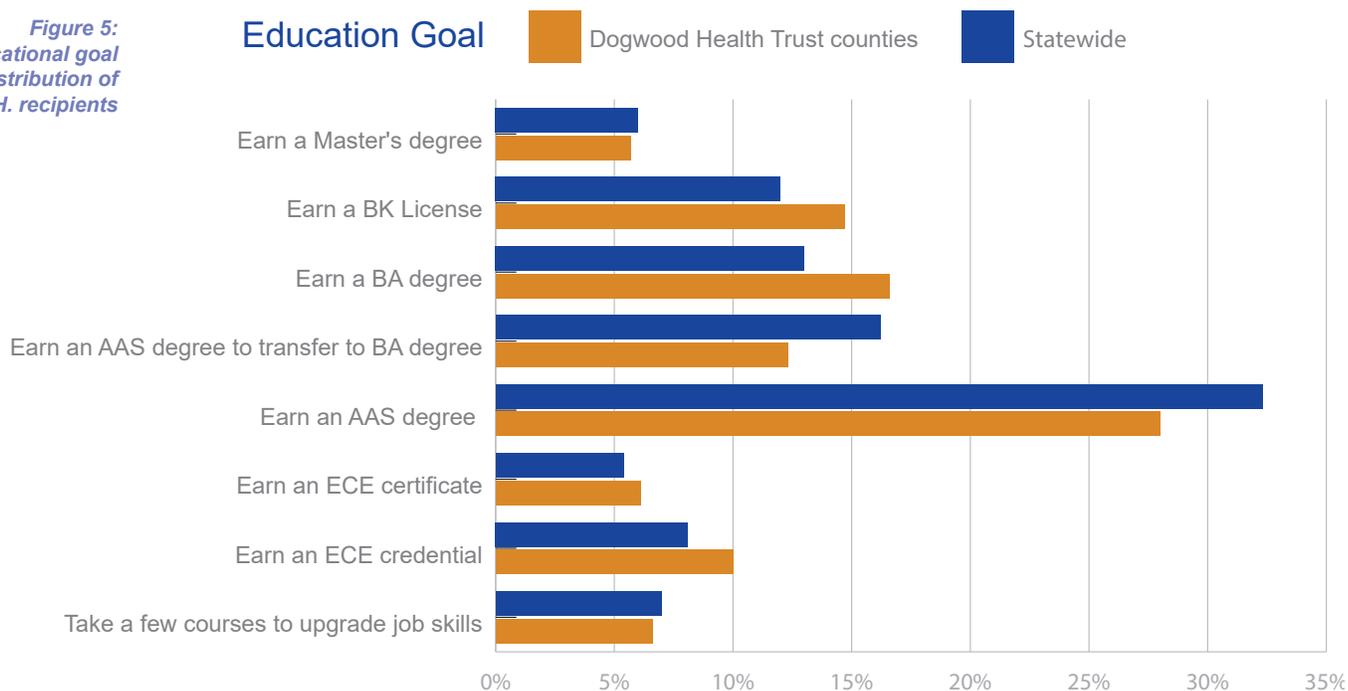


Educational Goals

T.E.A.C.H. collects recipients' educational goals when they first apply for the program, and those goals are tracked in the database. More than 77% of scholarship recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust say their educational goal was to earn a degree or post-baccalaureate licensure. Since the scholarship program was designed to offer flexibility for the different educational paths individuals may follow, scholarship programs

do not necessarily require degree completion. It is remarkable that the majority of scholarship recipients report that their ultimate goal is to earn a degree and demonstrates the workforce's willingness to increase education through degree attainment. Figure 5 provides more specific details on recipients' educational goals in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust and the statewide distribution from FY 2020-2021.

*Figure 5:
Educational goal
distribution of
T.E.A.C.H. recipients*



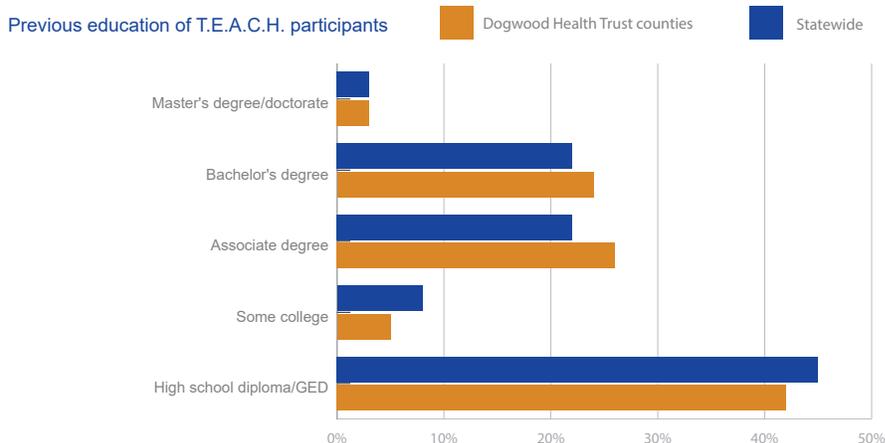


Previous Education

In addition to the educational goals, applicants are also asked to provide their highest level of education they attained to date. This data shows T.E.A.C.H. the scholarship recipients' current educational level, and demonstrates that access to college is available to different educational backgrounds. In the

counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, 58% of recipients have at least some college and 53% have completed a degree before starting a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship. Figure 6 provides more information on this data in the Dogwood Health Trust counties with the statewide distribution as comparison.

Figure 6:
Distribution of the previous education of T.E.A.C.H. participants



College of Attendance

Finally, Table 3 provides information about which community colleges and four-year colleges and universities T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust attend. Due to the availability of online coursework, scholarship recipients may attend colleges that are outside of the region. These scholarship recipients attend 11 different North Carolina community colleges and nine different four-year colleges/universities in the

state. When colleges are more responsive to working students' needs with programs such as fully online degree programs or accelerated coursework, they are more likely to attract students and ensure success by eliminating barriers. Thus, understanding the colleges that recipients are attending can help improve the system of higher education delivery in North Carolina and in the counties Dogwood Health Trust serves.

Table 3:
College of attendance of T.E.A.C.H. participants in the Dogwood Health Trust counties*

| Community College | # of T.E.A.C.H. recipients attended | Four-Year Colleges/Universities | # of T.E.A.C.H. recipients attended |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A-B Technical Community College | 34 | Appalachian State University | 2 |
| Alamance Community College | 2 | Brevard College | 5 |
| Blue Ridge Community College | 20 | East Carolina University | 2 |
| Caldwell Technical Community College | 5 | Gardner-Webb University | 1 |
| Catawba Valley Community College | 1 | UNC-Charlotte | 1 |
| Haywood Community College | 46 | UNC-Greensboro | 24 |
| McDowell Technical Community College | 3 | UNC-Wilmington | 7 |
| Southwestern Community College | 8 | Western Carolina University | 36 |
| Stanly Community College | 6 | Winston-Salem State University | 1 |
| Tri-County Community College | 1 | | |
| Western Piedmont Community College | 5 | | |

* Some recipients may attend multiple colleges during their participation on the T.E.A.C.H. program.

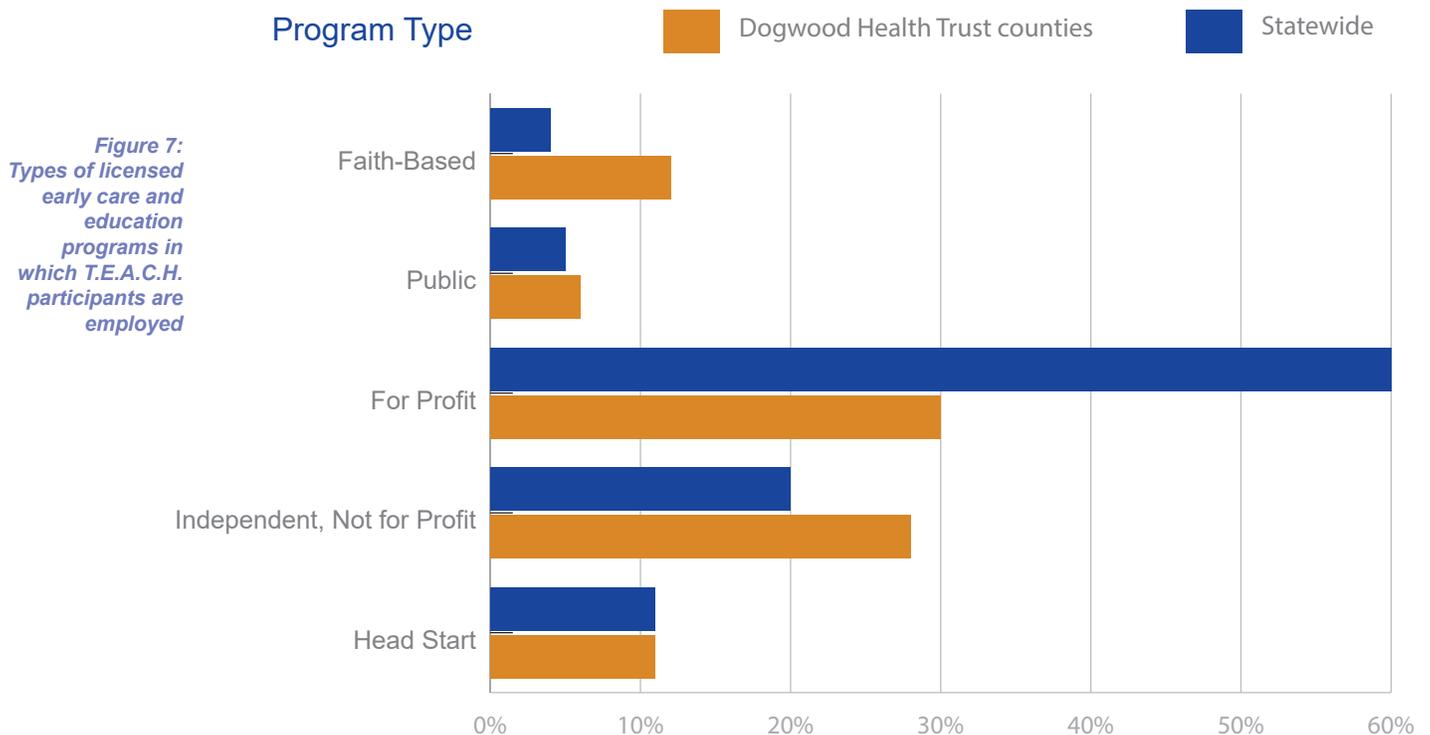
Employment Data of T.E.A.C.H. Recipients Working in the Dogwood Health Trust Area

The T.E.A.C.H. database also tracks scholarship recipients' employment data, including information such as employer type and auspice, the recipient's position/role and hourly wage information. The employer type and auspice are verified through the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and the annual collection of agency profile forms from scholarship recipients' employers. Position and hourly wage information is verified at the time of application through income verification. Employment and wage information are collected and updated to include changes to hourly pay or position as scholarship recipients participate and complete contracts.

Employer Type

T.E.A.C.H. recipients working in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust are employed

by 87 different employers in the region. Eighty of these employers are licensed early care and education settings, two are family-based programs and five are community or government organizations working on behalf of children, families and/or the early care and education workforce. Of the 80 licensed settings, 23% are Head Start funded programs, 28% are independent non-profits, more than 30% are for profit, 6% are publicly funded settings and 12% are faith-based programs. Figure 7 shows the auspice of licensed programs in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust that employ T.E.A.C.H. recipients compared to the statewide distribution, indicating a diverse delivery system of early childhood programs in which T.E.A.C.H. recipients are employed in counties served by the Dogwood Health Trust.





Position/Role

The scholarship recipients living or working in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust play a variety of different roles in the early care and education workforce (Figure 8). Eighty-five percent of these recipients work directly with young children in a licensed early care and education setting. More than 10% are working as administrators of licensed

programs and a little more than 3% are community specialists working in early childhood-focused organizations. Finally, two recipients in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust are self-employed family-based professionals operating in-home care.

Figure 8:
Number of T.E.A.C.H. participants in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust by position/role

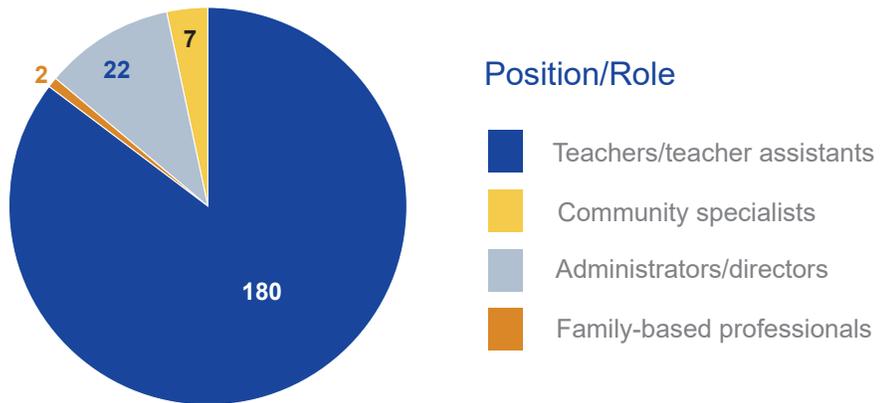


Figure 9 shows average hourly wage of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients living and/or working in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust by position. The statewide hourly wage averages by position are also included as a comparison. Hourly wage data may be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways; for example, the starting hourly wage may appear artificially higher, especially for teaching staff,

due to pandemic-related stabilization grants and labor shortages. Because programs have COVID-19 relief funding and are in desperate need to recruit staff, they may offer more competitive wages currently. It is unknown if they can sustain those wages in the future. The statewide averages were calculated in summer 2021 and there is reason to believe the current data may not be comparable because of when it was collected.

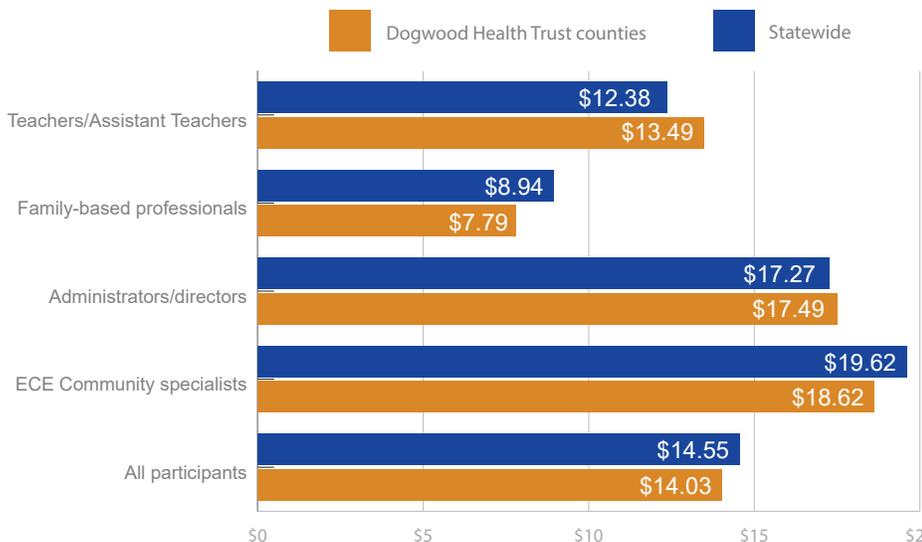


Figure 9:
Average hourly wage of T.E.A.C.H. participants by position/role

Outcome Data of Current T.E.A.C.H. Recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust Area

Now that the profile of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust has been established, this section will present outcome data for current participants. The T.E.A.C.H. program's primary outcome goals are to increase education and compensation and reduce turnover in the early childhood education workforce. Since its founding, T.E.A.C.H. has used data to demonstrate its effectiveness at meeting these goals. T.E.A.C.H. also tracks the number of recipients who earn college degrees while on scholarship and reports the number of graduates by degree level annually.

Outcome data in the areas of education, compensation and retention are analyzed annually for scholarship recipients of comprehensive associate degree or bachelor's degree scholarships who have completed their yearly scholarship contracts. The average number of credit hours completed, the average increase in hourly wages and the average

turnover rate are presented to show that the program's objectives are being met. In the Dogwood Health Trust counties, 92 scholarship recipients on comprehensive scholarship models completed a contract from July 2020 to December 2021, with 20 of those completing two different annual contracts during that period. The data from this group of recipients was analyzed to present the current results for the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust.

T.E.A.C.H. is one way to address the areas of low education, low pay and high turnover, yet its ability to completely solve these issues is limited. However, year after year program outcomes have demonstrated extraordinary progress in helping the workforce advance their education, earn degrees and increase their pay; the program also has significantly reduced turnover among those recipients, thereby keeping educated early educators in their classrooms.

Increased Education

T.E.A.C.H. expects recipients of comprehensive associate and bachelor's degree scholarships to complete 9-12 semester hours per scholarship contract year. T.E.A.C.H. verifies completion of credit hours through the collection of grade reports or transcripts which are entered into the database.

T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust who completed annual contracts completed an average of more than 16 credit hours per year. This is commendable because it exceeds the minimum number of credits required to complete a contract, indicating that these scholarship recipients were motivated to complete more than just the minimum. Also, these recipients are working full time in addition to taking classes, so it is compelling that they achieved this success.





“*Having T.E.A.C.H. to offset the cost of tuition, as well as providing the release time for staff so they can work on their assignments while getting paid, has allowed our center to continue to better educate our teachers, so that we can continue to provide the parents and children with staff who are highly knowledgeable in learning and child development. I personally have and have had several staff members who are single parents or are in lower income homes, and the bonuses they receive when completing a contract is a huge monetary reward that they look forward to receiving. I think the bonuses are a big motivational part to them continuing their education.*”

–Sponsoring employer, Haywood County

Increased Compensation

Comprehensive scholarships have an employer compensation component to make the crucial link between increased education and pay. For some models, the compensation takes the form of a 3-4% raise from the employer, while other models have a bonus provision that is shared between the employer and T.E.A.C.H. Income verification is required when scholarship recipients are accepted into the program, and that information is entered into the database to determine a starting hourly wage. As scholarship recipients complete the requirement for their contracts and become eligible for compensation, updated paystubs (indicating required wage increases) or proof of bonus payments from employers are collected and tracked. For bonuses, an hourly equivalent of

pay increase is determined based on the bonus amount and hours worked per week, in addition to any other pay increase the recipient may have received from their employer. New wage information allows T.E.A.C.H. to analyze wage progression, including T.E.A.C.H. mandated raises, bonuses and other pay increases recipients may have received.

The average hourly wage increase for current scholarship recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust service area who completed contracts was 8%. For raise models across T.E.A.C.H., the mandated wage increase is 3-4%. Furthermore, since some of these recipients were on bonus models that do not require an hourly wage increase from the employer and the hourly equivalent of bonuses is roughly 2%, it is significant that recipients experienced this rate of increase. This means that scholarship recipients have been rewarded with increased compensation for advancing their education beyond the program’s expectations.

Reduced Turnover

If the scholarship program simply helped the workforce pay for education without any provision for compensation and retention, the issues plaguing the early care and education workforce would not improve. Therefore, T.E.A.C.H.’s commitment component is critical to the program’s success. As mentioned previously, before T.E.A.C.H. was created, approximately 40% of early educators were leaving the field. Although that percentage has improved dramatically with the most recent workforce study reporting a turnover rate of about 20% (Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina 2019 Workforce Study) , it still is a significant problem because low compensation was the top factor for leaving, with 80% of respondents saying they would be more inclined to stay in the field if there was



better pay. Bear in mind that the most recent workforce study was based on data collected before COVID-19.

Recipients' employment is tracked in the database and their commitment periods are verified by counselors as they complete contracts and receive compensation. If recipients and/or employers inform the program of employment separations or if it is discovered during annual employment verifications, the reason for leaving is tracked in the database. Recipients that are terminated or laid off by employers are not included in the turnover rate because the recipient does not have the opportunity to complete the commitment in those cases. However, if the reason for leaving is resignation, it is counted as turnover in the analysis.

The average turnover rate of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust who completed contracts is 9%. Although turnover in the early childhood workforce remains a very complex problem, it is promising that 91% of the recipients in Dogwood Health Trust counties who increased their education during their scholarship year are remaining with their employers for their commitment period. It is especially encouraging when compared to the statewide turnover averages. The relationship between education, compensation and retention is clear, and we must continue to support all three areas with workforce initiatives such as T.E.A.C.H. to keep the most educated professionals in the field.

Table 4 summarizes all three areas of outcome data for these recipients.

*Table 4:
Current outcome
data for T.E.A.C.H.
participants in
counties served by
Dogwood Health
Trust*

| Degree Level | Education: Average credits completed per year | Compensation: Average increase in hourly wages | Retention: Average turnover rate |
|---------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Associate degree | 16.27 credits | 9% | 11% |
| Bachelor's degree/BA Plus | 15.73 credits | 7% | 7% |
| All | 16.04 credits | 8% | 9% |



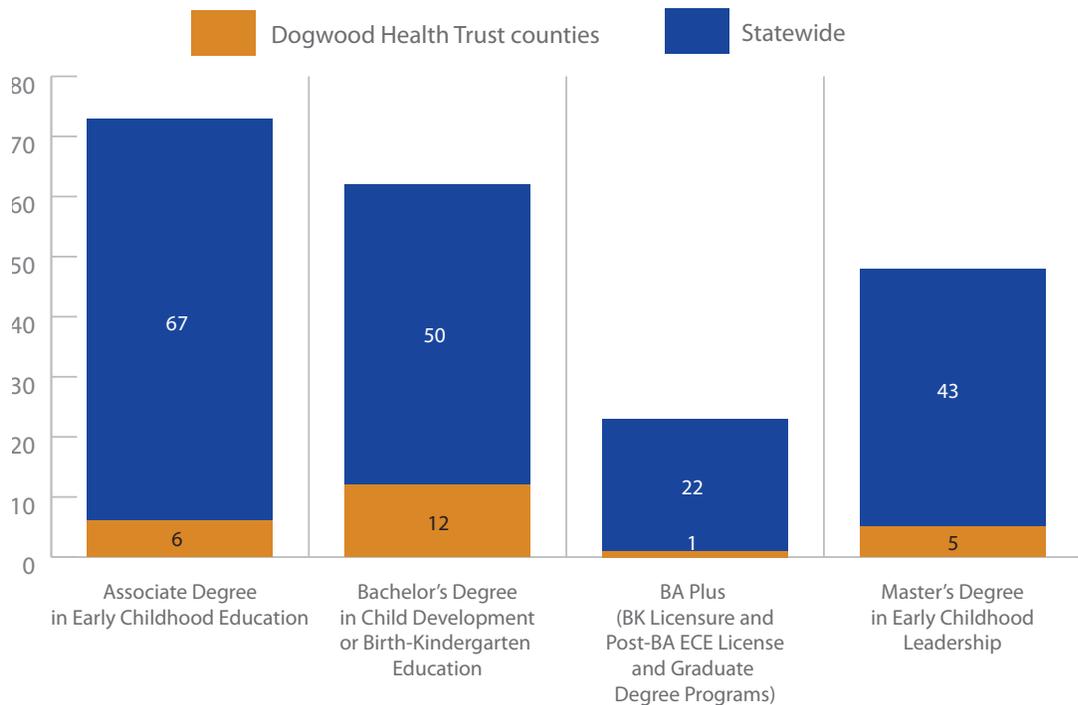
Degree Attainment

Although degree attainment was not one of TEACH’s original goals, recipient graduation is tracked and reported on annually. The scholarship program’s primary objectives have been to increase education as measured in credit hours completed, link increased compensation to those credit hours and to encourage the retention of scholarship recipients in the early childhood field. The scholarship program does not require recipients to commit to completing a degree. Nonetheless, supporting recipients who choose to complete

college degrees remains a worthy outcome of the scholarship program and should be celebrated, as research has shown that degreed teachers are linked to higher quality early care and education experiences for young children.

In the Dogwood Health Trust service area, 26 T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients participating from July 2020 to December 2021 earned a degree. Figure 10 shows the number of graduates by scholarship degree level and the number of graduates statewide.

Figure 10:
Degree Attainment of T.E.A.C.H. participants





Comparative Analysis of Outcome Data of T.E.A.C.H. Participants in Dogwood Health Trust Counties from Pre-COVID-19 and Post COVID-19

It is clear that the general workforce has felt the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the early childhood workforce is particularly vulnerable. This workforce was already fragile in terms of attracting and retaining early childhood professionals to the field and it remains severely undercompensated. Although programs like the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program have achieved remarkable success in the areas of education, compensation and retention, examining whether program outcomes have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic can be informative and ensure that T.E.A.C.H. remains an effective workforce support.

Because scholarship eligibility requires employment and recipients are expected to complete coursework and fulfill commitment periods, the COVID-19 pandemic can potentially affect the outcome areas of education and retention. Furthermore, employers have also been challenged by this unprecedented

pandemic, even with stabilization grants and other supports. It was anticipated that providing compensation to T.E.A.C.H. recipients would be difficult for employers and therefore would affect the outcome area of increased compensation. Additionally, if recipients were unable to complete the education component of their scholarship because of the pandemic, the compensation outcome could also be influenced. Because of these challenges, this section of the report includes a comparative analysis of the T.E.A.C.H. outcome areas of increased education, compensation and reduced turnover in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust from a pre-COVID-19 point in time and three other points of time in which COVID-19 may have affected those objectives. Data on the number of graduates across these time periods is also presented. It may be useful to note that a T.E.A.C.H. recipient could have participated in the program in more than one of these time periods.





Pre-COVID-19

The first time period in which outcome areas for T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust counties were analyzed will be called Pre-COVID-19 and spans May 2017 to December 2018. This time period was established as Pre-COVID-19 because neither the scholarship year nor commitment year of recipients who participated during this time coincided with when the pandemic became a major concern in March 2020. Therefore, recipients who completed contracts during this time period would not have been affected by COVID-19 challenges for any of the three outcome areas.

From May 2017 to December 2018, 64 scholarship recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust completed a T.E.A.C.H. contract on either an associate or bachelor's degree/BA Plus comprehensive scholarship. Of that, 40 participated on an associate degree-level scholarship and 24 were on bachelor's degree/BA Plus scholarships.

COVID-19-Commitment Year

The second time period in which outcome data was examined is from May 2018 to December 2019. This time period will be referred to as COVID-19-Commitment Year. Although course enrollment for recipients who completed contracts during this time period would not have been influenced by the pandemic, the commitment year may have been. Therefore, outcome data for this time period will be presented with special attention to the area of retention.

From May 2018 to December 2019, there were 65 scholarship recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust service area who completed an annual T.E.A.C.H. contract on either an associate or bachelor's degree/BA Plus

comprehensive scholarship. There were 43 recipients of an associate degree scholarship and 22 received bachelor's degree/BA Plus scholarships.

COVID-19-Scholarship Year

The next time period of outcome data used for this analysis spans May 2019 to December 2020, or COVID-19-Scholarship Year. Recipients during this period could have been affected by COVID-19 because their contract periods aligned with the pandemic. Thus, course enrollment and completion were likely affected. Shifting from traditional course delivery to online formats presented obstacles to some recipients as they struggled with technology challenges and transitioning to a new way of course delivery in a matter of weeks. In addition, recipients who had young children may have been challenged to complete courses because of the demands of their own children's transition to remote learning. Other personal demands and worries about health and economic well-being were other possible influences on the outcome area of increased education, as taking classes is a commitment of time and energy. During this time period, employers' ability to award compensation could also have presented difficulties. It is also possible that recipients who participated during this time period would have been unable to retain eligibility or fulfill commitment periods because of COVID-19. Because of these issues, the areas of compensation and retention will be specifically examined during this time period.

From May 2019 to December 2020, 66 recipients of comprehensive associate and bachelor's degree/BA Plus scholarships in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust completed annual contracts. Forty-two of those



recipients were on a comprehensive associate degree scholarship and the remaining 24 were participating on a comprehensive bachelor’s degree/BA Plus scholarship.

New COVID-19 Era

The final time period for analysis of program outcomes will be called the New COVID-19 Era (we are hesitant to call it “post-COVID-19” because there are still effects of COVID-19 that will be felt for years to come in the early childhood workforce). However, recipients who participated from May 2020 to December 2021 began scholarships after the pandemic became a significant issue for both employment and course enrollment. Although these recipients are not completely immune to the challenges the pandemic placed on the workforce, they were awarded scholarships after COVID-19 had become a problem. Theoretically these recipients and sponsoring employers understood the expectations of the scholarship

(perhaps because of previous participation) and the challenges of COVID-19 but still decided to participate in the scholarship program.

From May 2020 to December 2021, there were 50 recipients who completed contracts in the Dogwood Health Trust service area who were on the associate or bachelor’s degree/BA Plus comprehensive scholarship programs.

Comparative Analysis of Education Outcomes

When examining the outcome area of increased education, Table 5 shows the average number of credit hours completed by recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust service area who fulfilled the education component of their scholarship program over the four analyzed time periods. The outcomes are also broken down by associate degree and bachelor’s degree/BA Plus scholarships.

Table 5: Average credit hours completed by T.E.A.C.H. participants in the Dogwood Health Trust counties

| Degree Level | Pre COVID-19 (May 2017-December 2018) | COVID-19 Commitment Year (May 2018-December 2019) | COVID-19 Scholarship Year (May 2019-December 2020) | New COVID-19 Era (May 2020-December 2021) |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Associate degree | 13.43 | 13.58 | 17.5 | 15.29 |
| Bachelor’s degree /BA Plus | 16.13 | 15.27 | 14.79 | 16.14 |
| All | 14.44 | 14.15 | 16.7 | 15.66 |



Interestingly, the average number of credits hour completed for associate degree scholarship recipients increased more than 23% from the Pre-COVID-19 period during the year in which COVID-19 had potential to affect course completion, in either enrollment or successful completion of courses. Although it has dropped slightly in the New COVID-19 Era, the associate degree scholarship recipient population has demonstrated a strong motivation to increase credit hours, even while navigating the new world after the brunt of a pandemic. Considering that the scholarship program requires the completion of at least nine credits, associate degree recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust service area are exceeding this expectation by 40% in this New COVID-19 Era. This is especially promising. Not all associate degree scholarship recipients are degree-seeking, with some just taking a few classes to earn credentials or upgrade their knowledge of early childhood. Thus, the outcome area of average credit hours is notable despite the potential effects of the pandemic on this area.

For bachelor’s degree/BA Plus recipients, the average credit hours completed remained fairly steady across all time periods. Although there was a slight dip during the COVID-19-Scholarship Year time period, it was not a significant decline. These recipients are more likely to be degree-seeking and therefore motivated to continue progressing toward their

degree. Bachelor’s degree/BA Plus recipients need to complete at least nine credits annually as well and are exceeding that expectation while receiving T.E.A.C.H. Bachelor’s Degree/BA Plus Scholarships.

Comparative Analysis of Compensation Outcomes

Table 6 shows the average hourly wage increases of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust who completed contracts during one of the four points in time. Data for the whole population as well as associate and bachelor’s degree/BA Plus populations are provided.

As expected, this outcome area was affected by the pandemic. In the **Pre-COVID-19** time period, hourly wage increase percentages for recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust service area were aligned with the statewide average of 9% for associate degree recipients. However, with both the associate and bachelor’s degree/BA Plus scholarship recipients, the percentage of wage increases declined slightly during the **COVID-19-Commitment Year** and **COVID-19-Scholarship Year** time periods. Despite the decrease, the average hourly increase recipients experienced exceeded the program requirements. This demonstrates that despite the challenges of the pandemic on employers, recipients still saw an increase in wages.

Table 6: Average hourly wage increases of T.E.A.C.H. participants in Dogwood Health Trust counties

| Degree Level | Pre-COVID-19 (May 2017-December 2018) | COVID-19-Commitment Year (May 2018-December 2019) | COVID-19-Scholarship Year (May 2019-December 2020) | New COVID Era (May 2019-December 2020) |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Average hourly wage increase | | | | |
| Associate degree | 9% | 6% | 7% | 14% |
| Bachelor’s degree/ BA Plus | 15% | 7% | 6% | 9% |
| All | 11% | 9% | 6% | 12% |



From March 2020 to June 2021, T.E.A.C.H. provided enhanced bonuses to recipients participating in the bonus models and bonuses to those on the raise models, as T.E.A.C.H. anticipated that employers might not have been able to award the mandated compensation due to the pandemic. These supports may have helped keep the average hourly wage increase steady; however, the increases are still a significant indicator that T.E.A.C.H. recipients' compensation rises as their education increases.

The other interesting point is that in the **New COVID-19 Era**, wage increases appear to have rebounded considerably (50%). Despite state stabilization grants and the labor shortage that has driven up hourly wages in many fields, compensation remains an issue that needs to be addressed. In other words, the wage increases are certainly encouraging, but because wages are already low for the early care and education field it should not be concluded that the compensation problem has been solved or does not need continued attention. Furthermore, the sustainability of those wages is uncertain.

Comparative Analysis of Retention Outcomes

Next, Table 7 shows the average turnover rates of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust area who completed contracts across the four points in time. The associate degree and bachelor's

degree/BA Plus turnover rates are also presented separately for each time period.

Clearly, the turnover rates of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the associate degree population. The turnover rates of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust area is slightly higher than the statewide T.E.A.C.H. average of 9% in the Pre-COVID-19 time period, but still lower than the 20% statewide average across the entire early childhood workforce. The associate degree recipient population is vulnerable for a variety of reasons, including that they are more likely to be non-degree seeking and could have less attractive employment situations due to their education level. Therefore, it is not surprising that their turnover rates are higher than the bachelor's degree recipient population, particularly after COVID-19 started.

Recipients of the bachelor's degree scholarship had lower turnover rates during the peak COVID-19 time periods than in the Pre-COVID-19 time period. It is possible that during this particularly difficult time, T.E.A.C.H. recipients of the bachelor's degree scholarship program in the Dogwood Health Trust service area remained with their employers as a means of continuing their education and fulfilling their commitments. Typically, these recipients have higher hourly wages due to their previous

Table 7: Average turnover rate of T.E.A.C.H. participants in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust

| Degree Level | Pre-COVID-19 (May 2017-December 2018) | COVID-19-Commitment Year (May 2018-December 2019) | COVID-19-Scholarship Year (May 2019-December 2020) | New COVID Era (May 2019-December 2020) |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Average Turnover Rate | | | | |
| Associate degree | 12.5% | 16.7% | 16.6% | 7% |
| Bachelor's degree/ BA Plus | 12.5% | 4% | 8% | 9% |
| All | 12.5% | 11.7% | 13.6% | 8% |



education, and therefore remaining employed was more likely for this group. It appears that in the New COVID-19 Era turnover rates have decreased slightly and are closer to what is seen typically statewide for T.E.A.C.H. participants. The promising trend is that the turnover rates are better than the Pre-COVID-19 time period, suggesting somewhat of a stabilization for those in the early childhood workforce participating in T.E.A.C.H. in the Dogwood Health Trust area.

Comparative Analysis of Degree Attainment

When comparing degree attainment across the four points in time spanning Pre-COVID-19 to the New COVID-19 Era, graduation rates of recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust have remained fairly constant. Because recipients enter onto the scholarship program at various points in time and progress toward degree at their own pace, there is no expectation that a certain percentage of recipients will graduate with degrees. Table 8 shows degree attainment numbers across the four points in time.

“When I thought about going back to school, I had no idea how I would pay for this journey, but with the help from T.E.A.C.H. my dream was possible. Having the drive to do this was easy and having help from T.E.A.C.H. made this possible. T.E.A.C.H. was there for me through my whole college experience, without them none of this would be possible. I thank T.E.A.C.H. and everyone who helped me accomplish my dream.”

-Teacher, Bachelor’s Degree program
McDowell County

Table 8: Comparison of Degree Attainment of T.E.A.C.H. participants in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust

| Degree Level | Pre-COVID-19 (May 2017-December 2018) | COVID-19-Commitment Year (May 2018-December 2019) | COVID-19-Scholarship Year (May 2019-December 2020) | New COVID Era (May 2019-December 2020) |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Number of Graduates | | | | |
| Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education | 4 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| Bachelor’s Degree in Child Development or Birth-Kindergarten Education | 1 | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| BA Plus (BK Licensure and post-BA ECE license and graduate degree programs) | -- | 1 | 1 | -- |
| Master’s Degree in Early Childhood Leadership | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Total | 8 | 10 | 13 | 15 |

Discussion

Overall, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program has benefited the early childhood workforce who are living and/or working in counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. From July 2020 to January 2022, 211 scholarship recipients participated. Of those recipients, 191 lived and worked in the Dogwood Health Trust area. Fourteen worked in the area but lived outside of the 18-county area, and six lived in but worked outside of the area. These recipients participated in a variety of scholarship models and attended 11 different community colleges and nine four-year colleges/universities

of the 18 counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, with 85% working directly with young children as teachers or assistant teachers. Recipients worked in a variety of different settings, including for-profit centers and independent not-for-profit, public, faith-based and Head Start programs. The average hourly wages for these recipients was \$14.03 per hour.

In the outcome areas of increased education, compensation and retention, T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust completed an average



in North Carolina. This is a small sample size and is regionally based, so while there are important things to learn from the data analysis, it may have limitations.

Only 17% of these scholarship recipients were people of color and 7% identified as Latinx. Approximately 55% of them were parents; more than 40% of parents were head of single parent households. They lived in 17 and worked in 16

of more than 16 credit hours per year and increased their hourly wages by 9%; 91% of recipients fulfilled their commitments. Of the 211 participants during the time frame reported, 26 of them earned a degree with nearly 70% of those graduates earning a bachelor's degree or higher.

When examining outcome data at the four different points in time, starting with a



pre-COVID-19 point and three additional time points in which COVID-19 may have affected outcomes, it does not appear that COVID-19 has deterred T.E.A.C.H. from meeting program goals in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. Despite the challenges with completing courses during the upheaval of COVID-19 on college campuses and the effect it had on the participants' personal lives, T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust service area were able to complete the normal range of average credit hours. In fact, associate degree recipients completed a higher average number of credits during the peak COVID-19 period. This suggests that these recipients remained motivated to continue course enrollment and may have even taken more courses than normal. Perhaps the greater availability of online courses opened more opportunities to take classes and successfully complete them.

Although wage progression slightly fell short during the peak COVID-19 times, it seems to have stabilized for now. Even though the hourly wage increase was lower than what is seen typically, there were gains made above and beyond the mandated compensation awards. This may be in part due to the enhanced compensation strategies the program offered from March 2020 to June 2021 as well as employers' commitment to compensation for

increased education. Despite the small decline, recipients' hourly wages still increased as they completed classes on scholarship at an acceptable level.

The only outcome area that was slightly problematic for recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust was retention. The statewide average for T.E.A.C.H. recipients is approximately 9%. Interestingly, the turnover rate for the area was slightly higher during the Pre-COVID-19 period (12.5%.) However, it did spike to more than 16% during the critical COVID-19 points in time in which the commitment period could be affected by the instability brought on by the pandemic. As we move into the New COVID-19 Era, it is reassuring that turnover rates of scholarship recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust seem to have stabilized and are closer to the targeted outcome.

Looking at the graduation data for recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, COVID-19 does not seem to have affected this outcome. The number of recipients who earned a degree was fairly consistent across all time periods, with a few more recipients graduating each year since the Pre-COVID-19 time period used as comparison.



Recommendations

This report's findings indicate some key areas to focus on to strengthen the early childhood workforce in the Dogwood Health Trust region. Those include: supporting formal education for early educators, expanding diversity in the workforce, improving compensation and exploring the reasons for turnover in the region's workforce. There are four actionable recommendations that would either help illuminate these areas or provide direct support or shared resources to the early childhood workforce as they advance their education.

1) **Barriers/Needs Assessment Survey**

To fully understand and gain insights into the workforce in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust, a barrier/needs assessment survey of both employers and individuals should be conducted. Looking at the county-specific workforce data in the Dogwood Health Trust area, teaching staff who had at least an associate degree varied with a range of 47% of teachers in Graham County with at least an associate degree to a high of 86% in Polk County. The statewide average is 62%, and only half of the counties in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust exceeded the statewide average. This data suggests two things—overall workforce initiatives such as T.E.A.C.H. are helping some of

the workforce increase their education, and, despite workforce supports, there are still some counties that may need more targeted attention on increasing their workforce's education level.

Examining barriers for individuals and employers in these counties may bring more clarity to the reasons why counties have achieved different outcomes. The information gained from this assessment will provide data on both the individual and systemic barriers to education. Additionally, examining these barriers can provide a better understanding of what individuals and employers need to either advance or support formal education.





2) **Focus Groups**

Once a barrier/needs assessment is conducted, the second recommendation is to convene virtual focus groups for an in-depth exploration of the survey results. Focus groups across the counties in the Dogwood Health Trust region would provide both employers and early childhood educators an opportunity to further discuss these barriers and to express their needs. It would be important to include indigenous individuals working with young children, particularly in the Qualla Boundary where they have been excluded from participating in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program because the state regulatory status of early childhood programs in that area prevent them from accessing the scholarship.

This report's findings—in addition to the most current workforce data—suggest that efforts should be undertaken to increase diversity of the early childhood workforce in the Dogwood Health Trust service area. Although people of color make up approximately 10.1% of the general population in western North Carolina according to 2020 census data, approximately 17% of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust are people of color. At the time of this report, a regional analysis of the early childhood workforce had not been completed and published. However county-level racial demographics from the 2019 North Carolina Child Care Workforce Study are available, and show a wide range of racial diversity between counties. For example, the counties with a higher distribution of people of color working in the early childhood field were Polk with 29% followed by Macon and

Swain with 28%. Five counties in the Dogwood Health Trust service area did not have any people of color working in early care and education programs. As for T.E.A.C.H. participants, for example, there was only one who identified as an American Indian, and in a county like Swain where 29.1% of the general population and 23% of the early childhood workforce are American Indian, data show that more of this population could be served. Thus, focus groups would provide rich qualitative data that can be used as a basis for addressing any barriers and needs.

3) **Additional Incentives**

A third recommendation is to consider providing additional incentives to early educators who make reasonable progress toward higher education. When paired with incentives offered through T.E.A.C.H. and other workforce initiatives such as the Child Care WAGE\$® and Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® programs, it could make a crucial difference in further advancing the education level of early educators in the Dogwood Health Trust service area and keeping them in the workforce. The average hourly wage of T.E.A.C.H. recipients (including administrators and community specialists) in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust was \$14.03, and for teaching staff it was \$13.49. When looking at the county workforce data from 2019 for only teachers, there is some disparity in hourly wages across the region, with a low of \$9.00 in Avery County and a high of \$14.30 in Polk County. Furthermore, in 16 of the 18 counties in the Dogwood Health Trust area, the average hourly wage was below the average hourly wage of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the entire region.



Considering the important and specialized work the early childhood workforce is expected to perform, the average wages paid are insufficient. The difference between the workforce data and the T.E.A.C.H. recipient data also suggests that compensation-based incentives can help increase hourly wages. Thus, additional incentives may motivate more individuals to attain the education needed to be more effective. Incentives could also be offered to employers who sponsor T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients. These direct incentives could help employers with the compensation component and would ensure a set commitment period to help reduce turnover when paired with the T.E.A.C.H. program.

4) **Outreach and Recruitment**

A final recommendation is to engage with Child Care Services Association and T.E.A.C.H. on targeted outreach in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. This targeted outreach would help

increase awareness of the T.E.A.C.H. program in this part of the state and how it helps improve education and compensation and reduce turnover in the early childhood workforce. The turnover rate of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in the Dogwood Health Trust area is currently 8%, which is well below the average turnover rate in 14 of the counties in the region. For example, 54% of teachers in Madison County and 39% of teachers in Graham County left their employer within a year of when the data was collected. The low turnover rate demonstrates T.E.A.C.H.'s effectiveness. Therefore, targeted outreach, especially to counties with higher turnover rates, would provide informational resources to individuals and employers and encourage enrollment. To ensure equitable services and supports, it is important to make intentional efforts to include vulnerable populations such as people of color and first-generation students in any collaborative outreach and recruitment plans with T.E.A.C.H.

Conclusion

The early childhood workforce provides a valuable function to our society. With high quality child care, parents are able to go to school or work to support their families. Children who have quality early childhood experiences are more likely to be ready for school and less likely to have negative outcomes later in life according to an abundance of research. Those early experiences are more likely to be high quality when teachers have formal education. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® North Carolina Scholarship Program's vision and design were created to ensure that well-educated and well-compensated professionals remain in the field.

This report has provided a demographic profile of recent scholarship recipients living and/or working in the 18-county Dogwood Health Trust area. In addition, information

on employment, degree level and college of enrollment was presented to provide more context to the recipient population in this area. This report also expounded upon the outcome areas of increased education, compensation and retention along with degree attainment of these current recipients and included a comparative analysis of these outcome areas over four points in time spanning from pre-COVID-19 to a new COVID-19 era. The final section offered a discussion of recommendations based on this report's findings to better support the early care and education workforce in the counties served by Dogwood Health Trust. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program's multifaceted approach helps ensure high quality early childhood experiences for children and families, and thereby strengthens communities for future success.





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