

North Carolina Early Childhood Compensation Collaborative Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers



Children’s earliest experiences are built into their bodies—shaping the brain’s architecture and creating the foundation for future learning. The interactions they have with their early childhood teachers play an essential role in determining how their brains are wired. To build strong brains and support children’s optimal development, early childhood teachers need specialized knowledge and skills.

Compensation is an integral component of attracting and retaining the high-quality early learning workforce needed to prepare children for success. A salary scale tied to education can serve as critical tool to professionalize the early childhood teaching workforce.

BACKGROUND

The North Carolina Early Childhood Compensation Collaborative (Collaborative) was created out of a national project to improve compensation for the early childhood workforce. The Collaborative believes that a statewide, locally-implemented salary scale for early childhood education teachers is an important tool to guide early childhood programs in determining fair salaries that are commensurate with education or certification, and will ultimately help professionalize the early childhood teaching workforce.

The Collaborative recognizes that early childhood teachers are the key to delivering high-quality programs and ensuring positive outcomes for young children and families. Early education teachers must have professional education, skills, and competencies to successfully fulfill their responsibilities and should be compensated for their work. However, too often teachers are woefully underpaid and not recognized as professionals for the important work they do. Consequently, North Carolina is facing a crisis in attracting and retaining qualified early childhood teachers.



SALARY SCALE DEVELOPMENT

The Collaborative developed the attached Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers to help guide the early childhood field in establishing better compensation for the early childhood workforce that is tied to educational attainment. The goal was to develop a standard salary scale that was based on paying parity with entry level teachers in public schools. The scale is intended to be used as a guide and is completely voluntary. For more information on how this scale was designed, please see Attachment A. For the Model Salary Scale, see Attachment B.

The Model Salary Scale was developed by the Collaborative with input from early childhood experts, child care providers and parents. It was then pilot tested by researchers at UNC Charlotte who conducted surveys with child care programs representing different star-licenses and permit types and geographic areas of the state. In addition, the researchers followed up with interviews and focus groups with child care center directors/owners, early childhood teachers and early childhood education organizations. Many agencies across the state collaborated on the development of the scale, including the following:

- Child Care Resource and Referral Council
- Child Care Services Association
- Division of Child Development and Early Education
- MomsRising
- North Carolina Early Education Coalition
- North Carolina Institute for Child Development Professionals
- North Carolina Partnership for Children

The Collaborative recognizes there are important points to consider when a child care program chooses to implement the Model Salary Scale. For example, although the Model Salary Scale does not include benefits in the hourly wage calculation, we recognize the value and cost of providing benefits and do not want to see benefits dropped if a child care programs uses the salary scale to pay better wages. Examples of key benefits to consider are included as Attachment C.



HOW TO USE THE MODEL SALARY SCALE

The Model Salary Scale was designed to set minimum standards for education and compensation to help attract and retain qualified early childhood education teachers. It is based on paying teachers a living wage, and wages that are on parity with the salaries of entry level public school teachers. Because these factors change, the scale will be reviewed and updated annually as needed. Based on input from directors and teachers, the resulting salary scale serves as a model for child care programs wanting to adapt or change their own salary structure. Use of the Model Salary Scale is completely voluntary. Currently, there are no state-level requirements to use the salary scale, however, we know that providing a wage scale that identifies increases related to education is a factor in attracting and retaining qualified staff.

The Model Salary Scale can be used as a tool to address your own program's needs and goals. The following steps are recommended for considering its use:

1. Compare this Model Salary Scale to the one your child care program is already using.

- Does your salary scale differentiate based on educational attainment?
- Using the Model Salary Scale, determine how your current salaries compare to the recommendations. For example, how much does a teacher with an AA degree earn in your program compared to the \$16.01 per hour on the Model Salary Scale?
- Since the Model Salary Scale is based on wages only, benefits should not be used in the comparison.

2. What changes could you make to your existing salary scale to bring it closer to the Model Salary Scale?

- After calculating the cost of bringing your program's salaries in line with the Model Salary Scale and reviewing the program's budget, you can determine if the program can afford to make wage adjustments in line with the Model Salary Scale.
- If your program cannot make the full adjustments based on the scale, you can set a goal of achieving a percentage of the recommended levels. For example, your program could decide to start by implementing the scale at 80% of the recommended levels. This would mean, for example, that a teacher with an AA degree would earn \$12.81 per hour. This approach also can be used to accommodate for regional differences in communities. Determine when your program can begin implementing changes you have identified. This may mean you will phase in implementation of your plan over a period of time.

3. What additional customizations could you consider for your salary scale development?

- How will you account for additional compensation to reflect experience?
- Will you need to adjust for local or regional differences?
- Are you able to offer even higher compensation and include cost of living increases that may be needed to accommodate for inflation?

4. What resources will you need to pay your teachers better wages?

- After your program compares its current salary levels to the Model Salary Scale, you can then calculate what it would cost to bring each position in line with the scale.
- How can your program access additional resources to make these wage changes? Here are some options:
 - Accept children who are supported by child care subsidies to receive state reimbursement.
 - Ask your community to make donations to your program to pay qualified teachers better wages.
 - Explore and join local and state level efforts to increase the funding for early childhood programs.
 - Get to know your decision-makers and elected officials and educate them about what it will take to pay teachers on parity with public school teachers.
 - Include the need for attracting and retaining quality teachers in all advocacy efforts for improving quality for young children.

ATTACHMENT A

Assumptions for Salary Scale Construction:

- **Recommended only:** This scale is recommended as a statewide goal for early childhood programs to work toward an increased level of stability and a more consistent standard of compensation for early education teachers across the state. It sets minimum standards for both education levels and compensation.
- **Wage parity for teachers with a BA/BS degree plus B-K License in early childhood programs with entry level public school teachers:** This recommended scale is based on wage parity with public school teachers. This does not reflect compensation parity since it does not include benefits. This scale reflects the 2022-2023 public school teacher salary scale, and would be adjusted upwards when public school teacher salaries are increased.
- **Education or certification based:** Professional standards and compensation for early childhood teachers should be linked. This recommended scale is built on education, licensure and certification required for public school teachers, and considers the current NC standards for early education teachers set through the state's QRIS system and North Carolina's higher education system.
- **Local variation recognized:** This scale is offered only as a guide and sets expectations for minimum standards in education and compensation. Local early childhood programs are advised to incorporate this scale into their own salary and personnel systems and adjust for regional and local living wage standards. Additional benchmarks or steps can be added based on local use.
- **Professional entry level education/certification:** The scale starts with the Infant/Toddler or Preschool Certificate (issued by the NC Community College System) and a starting salary of \$14.92 per hour. This hourly rate represents the North Carolina statewide average of a living wage as determined by Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/37>.
- **Living wage should be the goal:** All early education teachers should be paid a living wage at a minimum. This is not currently the standard in North Carolina for most early education teachers. The living wage changes and this document reflects the rate established in February 2022. Keep in mind, however, that we have entered inflationary times and higher compensation may be needed to attract and retain qualified staff. As of December 2022, the current federal COLA was 8.7%.
- **Cost-sharing implementation:** The Collaborative does not expect the burden of fair compensation for early childhood teachers to be placed exclusively on the early childhood programs or parents. Rather, the Collaborative recognizes that better compensation can only be achieved when costs are shared between providers, parents, governmental bodies, and other funders as necessary to achieve full implementation of the salary scale.



ATTACHMENT B. MODEL SALARY SCALE FOR EARLY EDUCATION TEACHERS

B-K License Public School			
Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (10 mo.)	Annual Salary (12 mo.)
\$21.35	\$3,700	\$37,000	\$44,400

BA/BS ECE/Child Dev. ¹		
Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (12 mo.)
\$20.28 ²	\$3,515	\$42,180

AAS ECE/Child Dev.		
Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (12 mo.)
\$16.01 ³	\$2,775	\$33,300

Infant/Toddler or Preschool Certificate ⁴		
Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (12 mo.)
\$14.92 ⁵	\$2,586	\$31,034

This scale was developed in consultation and collaboration with the following agencies:



- [1] Includes other BA/BS or AAS degrees with similar early childhood coursework
- [2] 95% of Public School B-K LICENSE
- [3] 75% of Public School B-K LICENSE
- [4] Certificates are offered by the NC Community Colleges and include 5 ECE courses
- [5] This hourly rate represents the North Carolina statewide average of a living wage as determined by Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology as of February 2022: <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/37>

The scale will be reviewed and updated annually as needed.

ATTACHMENT C: Key Benefits for the Early Education Workforce

After increased pay, early childhood teachers cite better benefits as the most important motivator for their remaining in the early care and education field, according to Working in Early Care and Education: the 2019 Workforce Study published by Child Care Services Association. Center directors also cite improved benefits amongst the top five factors impacting their decision to stay in the field.¹

This is not surprising. Across the board, 94% of NC employees say that family-friendly policies help businesses attract and retain talent and keep companies strong.²

In a challenging hiring environment, providing benefits and family-friendly workplace policies can be a competitive advantage for early childhood employers. Recommendations included here are not intended to be comprehensive. Check with your human resources/legal consultant regarding all applicable laws.

Voluntary Benefit	Description
Health and Wellness Benefits	Health benefits can include full or partial payment for health, dental, and/or vision insurance, an Employee Assistance Program, as well as on-site wellness centers, subsidies for joining a gym, and/or health- and fitness-oriented programs for employees, children or spouses.
Paid Family and Medical Leave	Paid family and medical leave refers to the ability to take paid or partially paid leave for a Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) qualifying event including the birth, foster care placement, or adoption of a new child; to care for the employee's family member (through blood or affinity) who has a serious health condition; a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of their job; any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee's spouse, child, or parent is a covered military member on "covered active duty."
Paid Sick Days, Kin Care, and Safe Days	Paid sick days refers to the ability to take paid time off to recover from a short-term illness or seek preventative care. Kin care explicitly names that paid sick day benefits can be used to care for a family member while safe days explicitly names that these benefits can be used to deal with the physical, emotional, or legal impacts of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking or to seek safety for yourself or a family member.
Paid Vacation	Paid vacation refers to a set amount of time that employers provide to employees to use throughout the year, usually with advance notice. When an employee uses a paid vacation day, they don't have to work that day, but they will still receive the same pay as if they had worked. Paid vacation leave does not/should not include the other leave policies above.
Paid Holidays	Paid holidays provide paid time off for certain stated holidays. Often employers follow the official U.S. federal holidays that the U.S. government deems as legal public holidays.
Paid Parental Involvement Leave	Short-term paid leave that allows a parent to take an afternoon or a day off to attend a parent-teacher meeting, school performance, or athletic event, volunteer at a child's school or otherwise take care of a child's needs. Under North Carolina law, workers are guaranteed four <i>unpaid</i> hours per year for involvement with children's school activities, though employers may make this paid time off.
Predictable Scheduling	Predictable scheduling involves ensuring that employees have some control over their scheduled working hours, not changing work schedules without employees' consent, and/or giving employees at least two weeks' notice about changes to their work schedules.
Retirement Benefits	Retirement benefits involve the employer contributing towards savings for the employee's retirement. One of the most common forms of retirement benefit is a 401(k) match where the employer contributes to an employee's 401(k) account. For each dollar the employee saves in their 401(k), the employer wholly or partially matches the contribution, up to a certain percentage of salary.

1. Child Care Services Association. "Working in Early Care and Education: the 2019 Workforce Study." September 2020. https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA_2020_Statewide_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf

2. North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation. "North Carolina Employees Agree: Family-friendly practices are good for business." September 12, 2018. https://files.familyforwardnc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Family-Forward-Research-Report_Online_091218.pdf

Voluntary Benefit	Description
Child Care Support	There are multiple ways employers can provide child care support. These can include providing subsidies/reimbursements or offering onsite child care or emergency/back up child care. One common way child care providers provide this benefit is by offering a spot in the center at a free or reduced rate. Another option is to offer a Flexible Spending Account, a pre-tax account to which employee and employer can contribute.
Disability Insurance	Disability insurance will provide income in the event that a worker is too sick or injured to work. Disability insurance benefits can include full or partial payment coverage for a policy.
Job Sharing	Job sharing is a type of flexible work arrangement in which two people work part-time schedules to complete the work one person would do in a single full-time job, or two or more workers who have unrelated part-time assignments share the same budget line.

Benefits required by state or federal law (not intended to be comprehensive - check with your human resources/ legal consultant for all applicable laws):

Required Benefit	Description
Family and Medical Leave Act	<p>The FMLA entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take <i>unpaid, job-protected leave</i> for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. Employees are eligible for leave if they have worked for their employer at least 12 months, at least 1,250 hours over the past 12 months, and work at a location where the company employs 50 or more employees within 75 miles.</p> <p>Eligible employees are entitled to: 12 work weeks of leave in a 12 month period for the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth; the placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care and to care for the newly placed child within one year of placement; to care for the employee's spouse, child, or parent who has a serious health condition; a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her job; any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a covered military member on "covered active duty;" or 26 work weeks of leave during a single 12 month period to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness if the eligible employee is the servicemember's spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin (military caregiver leave).</p>
Parental Involvement Leave	Under North Carolina law, workers are guaranteed four <i>unpaid</i> hours per year for involvement with children's school activities, though employers may make this paid time off.
Pregnant Worker Accommodations	Pregnant worker accommodations are work adjustments such as more frequent breaks or light carry duty that allow pregnant workers to do their jobs safely, without jeopardizing their health or the health of their babies. These accommodations are required by law under the Pregnant Worker Fairness Act as of June 27, 2023.
Lactation Accommodations	Lactation accommodations are workplace policies that support the ability of a worker to continue to provide breastmilk for their child. By law under the PUMP Act, as of December 29, 2022, employers of ALL sizes are required to provide a reasonable amount of break time and a clean, private, non-bathroom space for lactating workers to express milk for up to one year following the birth of the employee's child.

Additional Resources:

For additional information on benefits and workplace policies including resources, sample policies, and case studies, visit Family Forward NC. <https://familyforwardnc.com>

To learn about how one early childhood program worked to expand their benefits, consider this case study from Charlotte Bilingual Preschool: <https://familyforwardnc.com/case-study/charlotte-bilingual-preschool/>