

Child Care WAGES® Program

Statewide Final Report

Fiscal Year 2023

REPORT CONTENTS

The Child Care WAGES® final report includes a detailed narrative, data tables to support many of the findings discussed and appendices that showcase participant feedback. Please see below for more information on the report's contents, which are listed in the order they are presented.

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Program Eligibility – Highlights primary requirements to participate in the Child Care WAGES® Program.

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

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

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Program Challenges – Summarizes the primary challenges faced within the reporting year.

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is an education-based salary supplement program for teachers, directors and family child care home providers. The education, position and work schedule for each applicant are assessed to determine the annual award. To encourage consistency, installments based on half of the annual award are issued after each six-month period the participant completes in the same early care and education program. Because these supplements reward teacher education and continuity of care, children ages birth to five benefit from more stable relationships with better educated teachers. WAGE\$ provides compensation that helps build quality. In FY23, WAGE\$ was a funding partnership between Smart Start and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

GENERAL PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for at least one six-month payment during the fiscal year, applicants must:

- work in a county that uses Smart Start funds to support the Child Care WAGE\$® Program
- work in a licensed child care program (center, home or public school site)
- work at least 10 hours per week with children birth to five
- earn at or below the income cap selected by the funding partnership (out of available options)
 - \$23 per hour
 - \$19 per hour
 - \$17 per hour
- have a level of education funded on the Child Care WAGE\$® scale (from regionally accredited schools)
- work at least six months in the same child care program
- be employed at this same child care program when funding is available and a final confirmation has been completed

PROGRAM OVERALL IMPACT

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program impacts the community by improving the quality of early care and education for young children. Most evidence suggests there are three primary factors associated with teacher quality: education, stability and compensation. WAGE\$ addresses all three. Through graduated salary supplements, the program helps decrease turnover and encourages the continued educational pursuits of the child care workforce. While supplements alone cannot solve the workforce compensation crisis, they are a critical strategy until early educators receive the base pay, benefits and respect they deserve for the important work they do. As of June 2023, 3,535 child care professionals in 1,638 child care programs from 63 North Carolina counties were active participants in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program. Burke County joined WAGE\$ for the first time in FY23 and Yadkin returned to the program. Of these individuals, 99% are women and 58% reported being a person of color and/or Latinx. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the participants work in four and five star licensed centers or homes.

As of June 2023, 609 of the active participants were reported by their employers as being NC Pre-K teachers and assistants. Of this group, 415 are teachers and 194 are assistant teachers in NC Pre-K classrooms. These individuals work in 416 different child care programs in 59 counties. Of these, 99% are women and 53% indicated they are Latinx and/or a person of color. Ninety-eight percent (98%) work in four and five star licensed centers.

Participation Overview

Smart Start partnerships were given options for their participation that included tier selection (award amounts increase with higher tiers) and income cap requirements. Thirty-nine of the participating counties (62%) funded Tier Two or higher for the full year and five additional counties moved from Tier One to Tier Two in January.

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

Table A: Tier and Income Cap Selections*

	\$17 per hour	\$19 per hour	\$23 per hour	Totals
Tier One	10	8	1	19
Tier One / Tier Two Split	2	3	0	5
Tier Two	8	14	12	34
Tier Two / Tier Three Split	0	0	1	1
Tier Three	1	3	0	4
Totals	21	28	14	63

**Numbers represent unduplicated counties participating in each category.*

Out of the new FY23 applicants from participating counties that did not qualify for WAGE\$, over half did not yet have the education needed to participate, but 22% were over the income cap for their county or region.

To help partnerships handle budget constraints and keep the WAGE\$ opportunity in place for early childhood professionals in their counties, the Education and Compensation Advisory Committee approved several county-level eligibility and/or payment options. Partnerships may:

- Fund only those working in sites with at least three stars *or* fund only those working in sites with at least four stars.
- Eliminate funding for administrator/director time. Directors are still eligible for time spent in the classroom.
- Eliminate funding for participants at level two on the WAGE\$ scale (which includes, for example, 12 semester hours of birth to five focused coursework).

Twenty-seven (27) counties implemented one or a combination of these strategies. Please note that income caps are not discussed here; partnerships *must* choose an income cap each year. See below for additional information on the eligibility cuts applied for FY23.

- Cut administrator time only – three counties
- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars only – 16 counties
- Cut administrator time and those working in sites with fewer than three stars – two counties
- Cut administrator time and those at level two on the scale – two counties
- Cut administrator time, those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – three counties

- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – one county

One partnership (two counties) implemented a very small percentage cut to one payment, but the second payment was issued in full. Twenty-five (25) counties were able to fund a percentage increase over their base tier and/or provide year-end enhancements.

Turnover

Turnover numbers for the Child Care WAGE\$® Program reflect active participants who left their child care programs, as identified in confirmations completed with employers during the fiscal year.

If participants leave their program and resume eligibility at a new site, they will not be factored into the report at all until they have completed a full six-month period at their new site. Once participants receive a supplement, they will again be recognized as an active participant. Only participants for whom WAGE\$ could have impacted the decision to stay or leave are factored into the turnover data. For example, participants who become ineligible for reasons other than leaving their child care programs (i.e. change of position within the program, center closure) are not considered turnover.

Anecdotally, turnover continues to be a problem for early childhood programs. Employers are challenged to find teachers at all, let alone keep them for extended periods of time. One director, for example, said, “We used to see a lower turnover but these days, turnover is bad. No one wants to work without a high pay rate on the spot. ... The workforce is a challenge right now.” The stabilization grants provided by the state have in many cases been used to provide compensation and/or benefits to try and curb turnover and make the field more attractive. WAGE\$ is another strategy that can help make it possible for committed teachers to stay despite the trend. One director stated, “With the shortage of teachers and/or people entering the field of early childhood, I believe the supplements will encourage those that are currently in the field to remain there and can attract new people. Also, it shows an appreciation for those that are currently in the field.” Another said, “In a field where the wages are incredibly low, this type of supplement is crucial to attracting and retaining staff.” Having compensation strategies like these will be an essential part of the solution to rebuild and stabilize the workforce going forward.

The turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants for FY23 was 14%, a significant overall improvement compared to the 31% full-time teacher turnover rate in North Carolina prior to WAGE\$ becoming a statewide opportunity (Child Care Services Association, 1998). This rate is also below the goal of 25%, originally established within Smart Start’s Performance Based Incentive System, renamed Community Early Childhood Profile - Smart Start Measures of Impact. Perhaps most importantly, this rate is well below what might have been expected during this time of flux. The turnover rate among WAGE\$ NC Pre-K teachers and assistants was 13%.

The participant turnover rate compares favorably to the 21% turnover rate of full-time teachers and assistants in the state’s early childhood workforce overall, captured in 2019 pre-pandemic data (Child Care Services Association, 2020). A new workforce study is currently underway. Given the low compensation for early educators, the rate of departure would likely have been

much higher without the workforce supports available in North Carolina, including WAGES, Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program.

The WAGES turnover rate covers all eligible positions, including part-time employees, and is not a straightforward comparison to the workforce study data in general. Additionally, it is expected that the WAGES population of educated professionals would typically have more job opportunities than the child care workforce at large. A comparison of turnover data can be seen in Table B below.

Table B: Turnover Rate Comparison

	Statewide Workforce Pre-Program	Statewide ECE Workforce 2019	Original PBIS Goal	WAGES FY23
Turnover Rates	31%	21%	25%	14%

With directors reporting difficulty finding and keeping staff, particularly qualified staff, it is clear that North Carolina’s \$12 per hour average rate of pay for teachers and assistants is simply not enough. Since this rate was reported in the 2019 workforce study, stabilization grants have helped to increase the pay for many early educators. However, the funds currently used to support those increases are temporary and it is unclear if or how employers will be able to maintain those rates once the grants are no longer available. WAGES supplements are a crucial support for early educators and enhance the best compensation employers can offer, making it more feasible for educated professionals to afford to teach children.

Of all WAGES participants statewide with an associate degree focused on early childhood education or higher, only 13% left their programs this past year. Of all participants with less education, 21% left their programs. This figure may differ for the workforce not receiving higher compensation through supplements, but it appears that if salaries are supplemented or teachers are more fairly compensated, those with higher education will not leave at a higher rate, which is a common belief. In fact, for the past several years, retention has been *better* among the more highly educated participants, as shown in Table C below.

Table C: Turnover by Education

	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
AAS ECE or higher	13%	11%	10%	13%	13%
Below AAS ECE	17%	17%	19%	19%	21%

Research makes it clear that children need stable and engaging relationships with the best-educated teachers to help facilitate their development during these most critical years. The higher retention of this educated group of WAGES participants is key; the field must aspire to stabilize this group to provide children and families what they really need.

In addition to statistical data showing an impact on retention, WAGES\$ participants shared through evaluation feedback that supplements play a role in the decision and ability to stay in the field. See Appendix A for selected survey comments regarding retention.

“WAGES\$ encourages teachers to stay with their programs and continue to do this important work despite the fact that the pay for this job generally undervalues how important early childhood educators are within our society. We are paid as ‘babysitters’ and not educators. Until wages for this pivotal work increase across the board, the WAGES\$ Program helps teachers like me to make ends meet and to remain with teaching.” (Brunswick, teacher)

Education

The WAGES\$ population is well educated, with the bulk of participants having at least a two-year degree. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the active FY23 WAGES\$ participants whose counties have participated two or more years (and 92% of those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms) are being funded for having an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher based on the WAGES\$ scale *or* have submitted documentation during the year to verify their pursuit of additional coursework. The WAGES\$ Program has a number of temporary award levels, which require that participants with lower education advance up the scale to remain eligible.

A sample of participants at temporary levels was surveyed during the year to learn more about their educational plans and potential barriers. Out of 372 completed calls this year, 74% indicated that they do still intend to take coursework to remain eligible for their WAGES\$ supplements and 50% said they had completed new coursework since their last submission. Out of the 66 respondents that identified barriers, half indicated that they face time constraints that make it difficult to further their education and 23% have financial concerns. When participants share this barrier, WAGES\$ staff provide information on the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program.

When given a list of possible benefits resulting from WAGES\$, 87% of participants overall who responded to the annual survey, and 93% of those funded at temporary levels, agreed that the supplements provide an incentive to seek additional coursework or help make the pursuit of that coursework more financially feasible.

When examining education by ethnicity across all participating counties, 79% of the participants who reported being a person of color and/or Latinx have earned an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher on the WAGES\$ scale compared to 81% of the White/European American participants. WAGES\$ is encouraging a diverse population to pursue education and helping to retain these early educators. Given the diverse population of children attending child care in North Carolina, this educational equity is very important. The Children’s Equity Project encouraged states and tribes to adopt or expand WAGES\$ with funds from the American Rescue Plan Act as a way to address equity in the early care and education workforce.¹

¹ Meek, S., Iruka, I. U., Catherine, E., Yazzie, D., Gilliam, W., McIntosh, K., Fernandez, V., Blevins, D., Jimenez Castellanos, O., & Garcia, G (2021). Advancing Equity in Early Care and Education Systems with the American

Through survey feedback, participants and directors with participating staff took the opportunity to express the importance of education and how WAGE\$ has made a difference in their educational pursuits. See Appendix B for samples.

“The WAGE\$ Program encouraged and helped me to stay in the early childhood education field and continue my studies. I graduated with a bachelor of science degree and am currently enrolled in the master’s program for early childhood psychology. I am better able to serve the children, the families and the community, which impacts our society.” (Craven, teacher)

Compensation

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program increases the compensation of participants through salary supplements. Despite obtained education, compensation in the field continues to be low and is not competitive with many other professions. Stabilization grants have made it possible for sites to increase compensation through raises, bonuses and/or benefits. In FY21 (two years ago), 77% of the WAGE\$ participants earned less than \$15 per hour compared to only 35% in FY23. It seems likely that the stabilization grants have contributed significantly to this change. Unfortunately, the stabilization grants are temporary and many employers will have difficulty maintaining higher rates without assistance. Despite this improvement, the median hourly rate of active WAGE\$ participants is only \$15.50.

Looking only at those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms, 13% earn less than \$15 per hour. Fifteen percent (15%) of the NC Pre-K teacher assistants and 10% of the teachers earn less than \$15 per hour.

DCDEE approved temporary policies to protect the eligibility of WAGE\$ participants who might have received increased compensation resulting from the time-limited stabilization grants. The eligibility of active participants has been retained based on pre-stabilization grant rates, but WAGE\$ has collected official rates up to the chosen income caps for reporting purposes. The following were reported to have enhanced compensation as a result of these grants:

- 61% teachers and assistants
- 91% family child care providers
- 69% directors and assistant directors
- 81% owners

Even in the best of times, early educators are severely underpaid for the work they do, which is illustrated by a comparison to the rate of \$35.73 that may be needed for one North Carolina employee with one child to meet basic, fundamental needs (Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2023).

Rescue Plan Act. The Children’s Equity Project. Retrieved from:
<https://childandfamilysuccess.asu.edu/cep/initiatives/advancing-equitythrough-american-rescue-plan-act>

The poor compensation across the board highlights the need for salary supplements to attract and retain qualified staff. WAGE\$ survey results support this. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the respondents stated that WAGE\$ encourages them to stay with their current child care programs.

The average six-month supplement payment issued statewide during FY23 was \$1,219. The average payment amount includes all participating counties and all applicable tiers. Since the supplements are based on the education earned, the average will vary by county even within the same tier category. The average six-month supplements statewide ranged from \$678 to \$2,139. The average six-month supplement at each tier level can be seen in Table D below. In the Tier One category, two counties are included that issued one payment at a very small percentage cut. Twenty-five (25) counties provided increases over their base tier awards.

Table D: Compensation by Tier

Tiers Funded FY23	Number of Participating Counties by Tier	Average Six-Month Supplement
All Tiers	63	\$1,219
Tier One	19	\$929
Tier One/Tier Two Split	5	\$1,152
Tier Two	34	\$1,246
Tier Two/Tier Three Split	1	\$1,598
Tier Three	4	\$1,954

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of evaluation respondents statewide indicated that receiving a WAGE\$ supplement helps ease financial stress. When asked about the financial impact, recipients selected from a list of potential benefits. A sample of responses is below:

- 82% are better able to pay their bills
- 71% are more able to address the basic needs of their families (food/housing)
- 65% rely on the supplements to help address transportation costs
- 58% use the funds to provide additional resources for their classrooms or child care programs

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

Economic insecurity impacts teacher well-being, and can have consequences for the quality of interactions they have with the children in their care. Studies continue to highlight how stress and adversity can affect the health of teachers and thus how effective they can be in promoting the supportive environments and engaging interactions children need. Especially now, easing financial stress is critical for the participants, their families and for the children they serve.

Throughout the survey, respondents discussed the importance of this additional compensation. Please see Appendix C for sample comments.

"It is extremely important to support the dedicated teachers and staff working with children. We are grossly underpaid, and every little morsel of financial relief we can get is a huge gift. It helps our overall well-being to be able to pay that bill we have had to skip or the car payment that is overdue. These financial stressors can be consuming and stressful. Having that stress while trying to give your best self and whole self to the children we serve is taxing and much harder than if we are not worrying about over-drafting our bank accounts." (Buncombe, teacher)

OUTPUTS

This section highlights the projected outputs of the Child Care WAGES® Program across all participating counties for FY23 and the program's effectiveness in reaching these goals. Primary results are shown in Table E below followed by additional detail as applicable.

Table E: Outputs

	Projected Output	Results
1	Approximately 3,050 eligible participants will receive WAGES payments as of June 30, 2023.	Output exceeded. As of June 2023, 4,122 applicants had received WAGES payments.
2	Child Care WAGES® staff will conduct 18 outreach opportunities to child care professionals to offer information about the program.	Output exceeded. WAGES conducted 40 outreach sessions.

WAGES payments: Four thousand one hundred twenty-two (4,122) participants were paid for completing at least one six-month period on the Child Care WAGES® Program during FY23. These participants worked in 1,799 facilities serving approximately 84,077 children. This number is an unduplicated count of supplement recipients. Of these, 713 were NC Pre-K teachers or assistants. Please note that these paid individuals may or may not still be eligible at the end of the year, so this number is different than the number of active participants discussed elsewhere in this report. More than 775 applicants are currently on the waiting list, either waiting for funding and/or completing their initial or reactivated six-month commitment period.

Outreach and recruitment: Forty (40) outreach sessions, both virtual and in-person, were done upon request or because of WAGES solicitation during the year. WAGES representatives also discuss opportunities available through Infant-Toddler Educator AWARDS® Plus and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program, thus giving audience members an opportunity to learn about all three initiatives. In some cases, staff from the supplement and scholarship programs provide joint outreach sessions.

In addition to the outreach listed above, 7,478 recruitment emails or mailings were sent to 3,191 sites. WAGES also sent recruitment information to Smart Start partnerships, resource and referral agencies, community colleges and Head Start grantees in participating counties. Follow-up calls were made to many of the non-participating sites to verify receipt of the email/packet, answer questions and encourage participation. During each employment confirmation completed with a participating site, the counselor inquired about any possible eligible staff not yet accessing

a supplement.

OUTCOME

Table F below details the primary outcome of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

Table F: Outcome

Projected Outcome	Results
By June 30, 2023, the turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants will be less than 25% (the goal originally established within Smart Start's Performance Based Incentive System).	Outcome met. The turnover rate for WAGE\$ participants was only 14%, well below the benchmark of 25%.

This is a positive, strong outcome; a higher turnover rate was expected as nearly all industries continue to be challenged by staffing issues. The WAGE\$ supplements are essential to help teachers who want to work with young children be able to do that and still take care of themselves and/or their families.

This outcome is measured through employment confirmations completed as each participant concludes a six-month commitment period on the program. The information regarding turnover is entered into a database that produces the percentage.

PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

The information below reflects the impact of WAGE\$ from the perspectives of participants and their employers. Salary supplement recipients and center directors who did not receive supplements but who had recipients among their staff participated in an annual evaluation of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

Survey samples were created based on the number of potential respondents by position in each county. If the pool of participating teachers in a county was between 1 and 50, the entire teacher recipient population was mailed a survey. A 40% sample was drawn when the teacher recipient population was between 51 and 100 and a 25% sample was drawn if the teacher population was 101 or more. All participating directors were also surveyed. Directors in counties funding WAGE\$ who were not personally participating but who had staff members on WAGE\$ and/or Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus were sent a shared survey to assess the impact of salary supplements. They were sampled using the same protocol described for teachers and responses have been integrated into the director feedback.

All participants in the sample who had email addresses on file with WAGE\$ were invited to complete the survey online. Reminder emails were sent to encourage online response. Those who did not participate online or who did not have email addresses on file were mailed surveys. One final attempt was made to secure non-respondent surveys via phone in counties with low response rates. All respondents were given the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for professional resources.

Overall, 69% of the sampled population completed surveys (1,660 of 2,417), which included the following:

- 72% of participating teachers/family child care home providers (1,020 of 1,425)
- 69% of participating directors (180 of 260)
- 63% of non-participating directors with staff receiving salary supplements² (460 of 732)

Sample responses

Nearly 100% of responding WAGES participants indicated that their receipt of a supplement had an impact on either their inclination to stay in the field *or* on their pursuit of further education. When asked to examine a list of possible benefits resulting from the Child Care WAGES® Program and indicate whether or not they are true for the respondent, nearly 100% indicated that WAGES either encourages them to stay in their current programs or to pursue further education. Responses to the individual options were as follows, listed in survey order:

- WAGES helps me feel more satisfied with my job. – 95%
- WAGES is an incentive for me to seek additional education and/or it helps make pursuing coursework more financially feasible. – 87% (93% of those at temporary levels)
- The WAGES supplement helps ease financial stress. – 98%
- WAGES encourages me to stay with my current program. – 96%
- The WAGES supplement helps me to provide more resources for my program or classroom. – 90%
- Receiving the WAGES supplement makes me feel more appreciated and recognized for my work. – 97%

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGES benefits the children in their centers in some way. When asked to select from a list of options explaining how participation may be beneficial to the children in their programs, including an option stating that no benefits have been noticed, 97% of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGES benefits the children in some way. The two most popular examples of impact were that improved morale has created more positive child-teacher interactions and that staff members are seeking more education, which leads to higher quality care for children.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of all respondents stated that they are satisfied with the program and its administration.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of responding directors reported positive attitudes toward WAGES in their child care programs.

For those respondents who had the opportunity to speak with the WAGES staff, nearly 100% of those who have had interactions found the staff to be pleasant and helpful. Many respondents took the opportunity to share additional comments about their interactions with staff.

² Non-participating directors in some cases may have responded about participants in WAGES and/or AWARDS Plus.

Not only did the respondents report that they received helpful and pleasant customer service, but many also talked about how important the encouragement from staff has been in terms of participation in the program and pursuit of education. A few examples of participant feedback are listed below:

“Grace, patience and flexibility are what I am grateful for from the staff.” (director)

“[Our counselor] is always uplifting, quick to communicate, and kind. I really appreciate her work!” (director)

“My interactions have always been very easy and pleasant. It feels like the WAGE\$ staff is rooting for me to continue trucking along as I am furthering my education and working toward my degree.” (teacher)

“[Our counselor] is absolutely amazing and the sweetest lady ever! She treats you like you make the biggest difference in the world. She is always so grateful and thanking me for the time I put into child care.” (teacher)

“Staff has always been professional, friendly, welcoming and respectful.” (teacher)

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of responding participants indicated that, as a result of WAGE\$, they feel more appreciated and recognized for their work. Recipients and directors with participating staff continue to emphasize the importance of the recognition and appreciation associated with the receipt of the WAGE\$ supplements and the impact this has on self-esteem, professionalism and morale. Not only are these things significant in themselves, but they enhance the likelihood that participants will stay in the field and seek additional education.

Participating teachers also used the survey to explain that they feel valued by their directors when they share information about the WAGE\$ opportunity. For example, one teacher said, “Child Care WAGE\$® has been a financial blessing. I feel appreciated and recognized for my work by my director. Child Care WAGE\$® is one way my director shows appreciation for my work. I worked at another child care facility and was not told about WAGE\$.” See Appendix D for further examples of feedback regarding recognition and appreciation.

“WAGE\$ helps me feel valued for the work I do. ... WAGE\$ is important to the morale of the school. It makes coming to work, being there for the kids and feeling valued more attainable. I am able to have less of a financial burden, which allows me to be fully present for the children.” (Henderson, teacher)

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

As teachers continue to face compensation that is not commensurate with their skill and education, many participants express their hope that the WAGE\$ supplement amounts will be increased. Examples are shared below. Partnerships have the opportunity to increase the compensation levels they fund within the current WAGE\$ system and CCSA will work with any funder interested in adjusting the amounts offered. An increase in the base tier amounts would

also be advantageous for participants and is something WAGE\$ will discuss with its advisory committee.

“A cost of living increase would be highly recommended to cover the rise in inflation.” (teacher)

“I am happy with the supplement that I am being provided. With inflation this year and not a raise on the job to compensate for the increase in prices on items, it’s hard to save or even pay bills. I would love it if WAGE\$ would increase the supplement we all receive.” (teacher)

“I wish it was more money. I think we need an increase.” (teacher)

The income caps are a common concern expressed by survey respondents and this year was no exception. Although WAGE\$ has implemented temporary policies to retain the eligibility of active participants based on pre-stabilization grant hourly rates, the calls to increase income caps continue.

“I really appreciate the supplement and I want it to continue. I would like for the hourly rate to be increased so that if we’re given a raise, we are still eligible to receive WAGE\$. I would like for eligibility [in my county] to be at \$20 hourly, not \$17.” (teacher)

“I feel that in [my county] the cut off should be raised above \$17/hr due to inflation, cost of living, and raises.” (teacher)

“I feel that the ‘limit’ that the teacher can make is too low. Prices of everything have gone up so much that even with raises we are still struggling to make ends meet.” (teacher)

“The \$17 per hour income cap limits higher-educated staff from receiving salary supplements from WAGE\$.” (director)

With the support of the Education and Compensation Advisory Committee, which includes participating Smart Start partnerships and DCDEE, WAGE\$ will be adding the National CDA to the salary supplement scale for FY24. Staff are working to update all program and outreach materials and the website in preparation for rolling out this new opportunity. Partnerships have all been notified about this change so that they can also spread the word locally. The many steps required to make and promote this change are expected to result in multiple new applicants next fiscal year.

SMART START

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program works hard to publicize the collaboration with local partnerships and identifies the funding sources in a variety of ways. Special notices are sent in conjunction with payments stating which specific Smart Start partnership, along with the Division of Child Development and Early Education, provides funding. The county/region partnership is listed on hard copy check stubs and labels are attached to payment letter envelopes to identify the funder. Emails are sent to recipients to inform them when payments have been

mailed or deposited, crediting the funders. The Child Care WAGE\$® fact sheets, application-based program agreements and letters clarify the funding arrangement for the program and WAGE\$ representatives explain the funding for the program in presentations. Finally, the program evaluations state that the funds for the Child Care WAGE\$® supplements are provided by local Smart Start partnerships and respondents are given the opportunity to share messages regarding the supplements with their local Smart Starts. See Appendix E for a sample of those messages for FY23. Please note that, in addition to the sample comments included, a large number of recipients shared their gratitude through “thank you” messages that are not listed.

“Thank you doesn’t say enough for what receiving the Child Care WAGE\$® supplement means to us. It truly makes me feel seen and appreciated for my work – like it has been acknowledged and people know how very important it is. The supplements help my family and my little work kiddos more than you’ll ever know. So from the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU!!!” (Rowan, teacher)



Table 1
Demographic Profile of the 3,535 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Race*		
White	1477	42%
Black or African American	1790	51%
American Indian or Alaska Native	22	1%
Asian	25	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0%
Two or more races	44	1%
Other	51	1%
Not Given	125	4%
Ethnicity*		
Not Given	133	4%
Latinx	144	4%
Not Latinx	3258	92%
Gender		
Male	32	1%
Female	3501	99%
Not Given	2	0%
Age Range of Participants		
15-19 years	3	0%
20-24 years	131	4%
25-34 years	732	21%
35-44 years	862	24%
45-54 years	856	24%
55-59 years	387	11%
60-64 years	303	9%
65 and over	257	7%
Not Given	4	0%
Position		
Teacher	2050	58%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	5	0%
Assistant Teacher	742	21%
Director	201	6%
Director (Owner)	89	3%
Assistant Director	208	6%
Small Home Provider	240	7%
Ages of Children Served**		
Birth up to Three	864	24%
Three to Five	1829	52%
Mixed Ages	842	24%

*2035 participants identify as Latinx or as a person of color, which is 58% of the active population that provided data (3486 participants).

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

Participants are identified by their primary position. Directors or assistant directors may only be funded for time in the classroom depending on county choice.

Table 1 (cont.)
Demographic Profile of the 3,535 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023

	# of Participants	% of Participants
Education Level		
12 birth to five sem. hours	20	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	29	1%
Preschool Certificate	1	0%
Early Childhood Education Certificate	5	0%
16 birth to five sem. hours	49	1%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	85	2%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	10	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	36	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	74	2%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	10	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	19	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	100	3%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	11	0%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	128	4%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	26	1%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	112	3%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	9	0%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	1584	45%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	82	2%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	22	1%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	197	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	79	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	733	21%
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	18	1%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	94	3%
PhD/EdD including 18 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
Wage Rate***		
Below \$7.25 per hour	165	5%
\$7.25 - \$9.99 per hour	90	3%
\$10.00 - \$12.99 per hour	407	12%
\$13.00 - \$14.99 per hour	591	17%
\$15.00 - \$16.99 per hour	1119	32%
\$17.00 - \$18.99 per hour	688	19%
\$19.00 - \$20.99 per hour	300	8%
\$21.00 - \$23.00 per hour	175	5%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Report End Date		
0 to .99 Years	55	2%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	443	13%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	420	12%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	318	9%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	303	9%

***The first category under Wage Rate reflects those earning below North Carolina's minimum wage, typically home providers or owners whose income is dependent upon revenue.

Table 1 (cont.)
Demographic Profile of the 3,535 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023

	# of Participants	% of Participants
5.00 or More Years	1996	56%

***The first category under Wage Rate reflects those earning below North Carolina's minimum wage, typically home providers or owners whose income is dependent upon revenue.



Table 2
Child Care Center Profile for North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023



	Programs	Participants
Center	1,397	3,293
1 STAR	17	39
2 STAR	1	1
3 STAR	168	291
4 STAR	323	667
5 STAR	820	2,159
GS-110	39	79
PROB	5	11
PROV	8	15
SPPROV	4	10
Temporary	12	21
Family Provider	241	242
3 STAR	21	21
4 STAR	163	164
5 STAR	56	56
Temporary	1	1
TOTALS	<u>1,638</u>	<u>3,535</u>



Table 3
Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,535 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGE\$® Program
July 2022 - June 2023



88% have a permanent level on the scale (AAS ECE or above) or are continuing their education as documented by coursework taken since original application to WAGE\$ submitted in the current fiscal year. *Participants need time to continue their education and move up the supplement scale, thus the percentage includes only those counties who have participated for two or more years.*

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Position	% of Participants Out Of Active
Director	498	100%	14%
Two	1	0%	0%
Three	16	3%	0%
Four	10	2%	0%
Six	11	2%	0%
Seven	21	4%	1%
Eight	195	39%	6%
Nine	14	3%	0%
Ten	47	9%	1%
Eleven	155	31%	4%
Twelve	27	5%	1%
Thirteen	1	0%	0%
Family Child Care Provider	240	100%	7%
Two	1	0%	0%
Three	9	4%	0%
Four	4	2%	0%
Five	1	0%	0%
Six	6	3%	0%
Seven	8	3%	0%
Eight	92	38%	3%
Nine	7	3%	0%
Ten	13	5%	0%
Eleven	75	31%	2%
Twelve	24	10%	1%
Teacher	2797	100%	79%
Two	47	2%	1%
Three	115	4%	3%
Four	106	4%	3%
Five	28	1%	1%
Six	94	3%	3%
Seven	125	4%	4%
Eight	1418	51%	40%

Positions are categorized into the groups listed above. For example, both assistant teachers and teachers are shown in the teacher category.

Table 3 (cont.)
Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,535 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGE\$® Program
July 2022 - June 2023

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Position	% of Participants Out Of Active
Nine	83	3%	2%
Ten	216	8%	6%
Eleven	521	19%	15%
Twelve	43	2%	1%
Thirteen	1	0%	0%

Positions are categorized into the groups listed above. For example, both assistant teachers and teachers are shown in the teacher category.



Table 4
Total Participants that Received a Supplement in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023



4,122 unduplicated participants received a supplement for completing a six month period that ended during this reporting period; these participants worked in 1,799 different child care programs serving approximately 84,077 children.

	Total Paid*	Total Programs	# Of Children 0 to 5
Center	3,853	1,533	82,982
Family Provider	270	266	1,095
<u>Total</u>	<u>4,123</u>	<u>1,799</u>	<u>84,077</u>

* This may reflect a duplicated number of people paid if participants moved between a center and a home and were paid from both locations. Refer to the number at the top for an unduplicated count of people paid.



Table 5
Annual Turnover Summary of the 4,134 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023



The annual turnover percentage is based on an overall population of 4,134 participants. This population includes those individuals that were active during the reporting period of July 2022 - June 2023 (3,535) and those whose turnover was reported during this time (599). Active participants meet all eligibility requirements and have worked at least six months in their child care programs. Active participants might also include individuals who have left a child care program, but have since worked six eligible months in a new site. (These “reactivated” participants are not factored into the report at all until they have completed this six month period.) The annual turnover percentage is obtained by dividing the total number of participants who left their center into the total number of participants.

People who became ineligible for other reasons (i.e. position change within center, became over-income due to raise, center closure, noncompliance with the program’s income documentation guidelines, failure to obtain necessary coursework) are not included in the table. They have been removed from the overall total and the turnover numbers since they were no longer eligible for the Child Care WAGES® Program, and the supplement could not have been an incentive for them to stay.

Individuals who left their child care programs and those who became ineligible due to other reasons may or may not have been paid during the current fiscal year for completing one or more commitment periods. However, they have all been paid at some time during their participation on WAGES and thus earned active status prior to becoming ineligible.

Annual Turnover July 2022 - June 2023

Total Participants	=	4,134
Active Participants	=	3,535
Left Center	=	599
Turnover Percentage	=	14%



Table 5
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Race		
White	269	45%
Black or African American	278	46%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	0%
Asian	2	0%
Two or more races	8	1%
Other	11	2%
Not Given	29	5%
Ethnicity		
Not Given	39	7%
Latinx	33	6%
Not Latinx	527	88%
Gender		
Male	10	2%
Female	587	98%
Non-binary	1	0%
Not Given	1	0%
Position		
Teacher	413	69%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	1	0%
Assistant Teacher	133	22%
Director	11	2%
Director (Owner)	4	1%
Assistant Director	24	4%
Small Home Provider	13	2%
Education Level		
12 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	8	1%
16 birth to five sem. hours	3	1%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	24	4%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	4	1%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	16	3%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	23	4%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	20	3%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	6	1%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	28	5%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	26	4%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	5	1%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	209	35%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	31	5%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%

Table 5 (cont.)
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023

	# of Participants	% of Participants
PhD/EdD including 6 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	33	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	14	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	114	19%
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	15	3%
PhD/EdD including 18 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
Wage Rate		
Below \$7.25 per hour	9	2%
\$7.25 - \$9.99 per hour	21	4%
\$10.00 - \$12.99 per hour	140	23%
\$13.00 - \$14.99 per hour	123	21%
\$15.00 - \$16.99 per hour	176	29%
\$17.00 - \$18.99 per hour	91	15%
\$19.00 - \$20.99 per hour	24	4%
\$21.00 - \$23.00 per hour	15	3%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Date Ineligible		
0 to .99 Years	60	10%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	126	21%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	77	13%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	93	16%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	50	8%
5.00 or More Years	193	32%
Regulation Type		
1 STAR	8	1%
3 STAR	47	8%
4 STAR	119	20%
5 STAR	390	65%
GS-110	22	4%
Temporary	4	1%
PROB	4	1%
PROV	4	1%
SPPROV	1	0%

* The first category under Wage Rate reflects those earning below North Carolina's minimum wage, typically home providers or owners whose income is dependent upon revenue.



**49 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023**



Alamance Partnership for Children
Alexander County Partnership for Children
Alleghany Partnership for Children
Alliance for Children (Union County)
Blue Ridge Partnership for Children
Buncombe Partnership for Children, Inc.
Burke County Smart Start, Inc.
Cabarrus County Partnership for Children
Caldwell County Smart Start
Cleveland County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Columbus County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Craven Smart Start, Inc.
Down East Partnership for Children
Durham's Partnership for Children
Franklin Granville Vance Smart Start, Inc.
Guilford County Partnership for Children
Halifax-Warren Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.
Harnett County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Hertford-Northampton Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.
Iredell County Partnership for Young Children, Inc.
Lee County Partnership for Children
Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children, Inc.
Montgomery County Partnership for Children
North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education
North Carolina Partnership for Children
Partners for Children & Families Inc. (Moore County)
Partnership for Children of Johnston County, Inc.
Partnership for Children of Lenoir and Greene Counties
Partnership for Children of Lincoln/Gaston Counties
Partnership for Children of the Foothills
Randolph County Partnership for Children
Region A Partnership for Children
Richmond County Partnership for Children
Rockingham County Partnership for Children, Inc.

*Henderson County



**49 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2022 - June 2023**



Smart Start of Brunswick County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davidson County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davie County, Inc.
Smart Start of Forsyth County
Smart Start of Mecklenburg County
Smart Start of Transylvania County
Smart Start of Yadkin County, Inc.
Smart Start Partnership for Children, Inc.*
Smart Start Rowan, Inc.
Stanly County Partnership for Children
Surry County Early Childhood Partnership
The Partnership for Children of Cumberland County
The Partnership for Children of Wayne County, Inc.
Wilkes Community Partnership for Children
Wilson County Partnership for Children

*Henderson County

Appendix A: Retention

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY23

“The WAGES Program¹ has allowed me to continue to work at the job I love. One of my friends works in Chapel Hill and makes at least \$5 more per hour than I do. He has encouraged me to come to Chapel Hill so I can pay all my bills, but I have been able to stay afloat with my WAGES check by paying a little extra on my bills when my check arrives.” (Alamance, teacher)

“With the shortage of teachers and/or people entering the field of early childhood, I believe the supplements will encourage those that are currently in the field to remain there and can attract new people. Also, it shows an appreciation for those that are currently in the field.” (Alexander, director)

“I was going to seek other employment, but I didn’t want to lose my Child Care WAGES® supplement.” (Alleghany, director)

“This program helps provide support to the underrated hard work in child care! This program has kept me in the child care field and without it I would most likely have to find a better-paying career.” (Avery, teacher)

“WAGES encourages teachers to stay with their programs and continue to do this important work despite the fact that the pay for this job generally undervalues how important early childhood educators are within our society. We are paid as ‘babysitters’ and not educators. Until wages for this pivotal work increase across the board, the WAGES Program helps teachers like me to make ends meet and to remain with teaching.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“WAGES has truly helped me stay in my job and feel worthwhile.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“WAGES helps me to continue going on really hard days! ... It encourages me to stay at the center I’m at and helps prevent turnover.” (Burke, teacher)

“In a field where the wages are incredibly low, this type of supplement is crucial to attracting and retaining staff.” (Cabarrus, director)

“For my staff, it has been an incentive to continue their education and keep working in preschool rather than moving into a K-2 position in our school district.” (Caldwell, director)

“It keeps people at their jobs so the kids are used to familiar faces and learn from the same person instead of people changing jobs frequently!” (Cleveland, teacher)

“Every time I want to give up, I think, ‘It is almost time for my WAGES supplement check,’ and that keeps me hanging in there a little longer.” (Columbus, teacher)

“WAGES is very important because it helps teachers with low income stay in their current position. If it wasn’t for the WAGES Program, I would be struggling to save money and do home

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

repairs. Many teachers have to take a second job or leave the field for more money.” (Craven, teacher)

“I think WAGE\$ is important because it helps people like me, who really love what they do, to stay in this field without the stress of financial burdens. A lot of times people leave because of the pay.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“I think the WAGE\$ Program has been the one thing that has encouraged qualified teachers to stay in child care settings.” (Davidson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me stay with one job.” (Davie, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is a strong motivator to continue working at the same site and to continue working in Durham. It is a financial help and gives me something to look forward to in a stressful career.” (Durham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ whole-heartedly helps retain teachers.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“As we all know, child care teachers work hard and have a huge impact on children’s abilities to perform in elementary school, but we are some of the lowest-paid employees. WAGE\$ has helped me to feel noticed for my education, hard work and dedication. It also helps me to consider staying at my current place of employment with people I love instead of leaving for a higher-paying job.” (Franklin, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps to retain quality teachers.” (Granville, director)

“WAGE\$ has afforded me the rewarding opportunity to stay with the same employer and continue to provide continuity of care for our young children. When the community knows that teacher retention rates are important and not high turnover rates, it gives them a sense of stability for their children and a sense of reliability for working parents.” (Guilford, teacher)

“Child Care WAGE\$® is important because it helps reduce teacher turnover. Many teachers are burnt-out and need to feel that they are noticed and valued.” (Halifax, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me to continue providing quality child care services.” (Harnett, family child care home provider)

“I enjoy my job and have been doing it for 25 years, and WAGE\$ helps me stay at my job.” (Haywood, teacher)

“I probably wouldn’t still be working in child care if not for the WAGE\$ supplement. ...WAGE\$ is important because it helps to educate child care workers and prevent turnover, so children can have good, steady workers in the field.” (Henderson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps address the problem of low wages and boosts annual income, which keeps staff from floating.” (Iredell, director)

“I have been on the WAGE\$ Program since 1999. It has made me feel valued, and it is one of the main reasons why I have remained with my organization for 26 years!” (Jackson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has benefitted my family in many ways. I was able to stay with the same child care center for 17 years, which benefits children by providing stability in their preschool years.” (Johnston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important because it gives me motivation to keep doing what I love to do and to better my future and education for the children I love to teach.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me to keep up with bills. Without it, I would no longer be able to teach.” (Macon, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped the center retain staff.” (Martin, director)

“Without WAGE\$, I don’t think I would be in child care.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ provides incentive for staff to continue working with young children.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important to keep dedicated child care professionals like me in the field. It has inspired me to seek higher education in early childhood development. Perhaps most importantly, the program makes me feel needed, which in turn shows when I enter the class each morning.” (Moore, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement makes me want to continue to work in early childhood. Early childhood teachers make very low salaries, and this helps encourage me to continue to work with young children.” (Nash, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has kept me in the same center for 18+ years. The longevity really speaks to families – especially the ones where I have taught all of their children, and now I’m getting to the place where I’m teaching my former students’ children.” (Pitt, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has been a strong incentive to stay with my current employer.” (Randolph, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is so important to encourage people to stay in their job – especially when teachers are not valued as much and get low pay in this country. People get paid more as store clerks in a lot of places, and teachers do so much work. They often give up their own time and buy their own supplies, and they are underappreciated. Teachers are quitting and now there is a big demand for them. This program helps with this problem in a big way!!” (Rockingham, teacher)

“Child care workers don’t get paid the best, so WAGE\$ has helped me to make a way financially while still being able to do what I love.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has kept me from seeking employment elsewhere. The two-time bonuses are very much needed!” (Stanly, teacher)

“WAGE\$ definitely makes me feel more appreciated. I love my job, and this program allows me to stay working as a teacher assistant. I could make more money using my degree in another position, but I feel strongly that I can make a difference in Pre-K.” (Surry, teacher)

“WAGE\$ rewards educators and makes it possible for them to do their chosen jobs, which matter so much to us all.” (Vance, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important because teaching our children is an important job, and teachers and teacher assistants are not paid nearly enough for our services. This program has helped me to stay on top of my bills. It has helped me to stay in the job that I love and not look elsewhere for a job that pays more.” (Warren, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped with staff retention and morale. It is a great program!” (Wayne, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped to keep me in this career.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes more people want to come work in this field. ... The WAGE\$ Program helps to make early childhood programs more successful and have less turnover.” (Wilson, teacher)

“Employees consider WAGE\$ an incentive to stay in the same center.” (Yadkin, director)

“WAGE\$ gives me motivation to stay at my current job.” (Yancey, teacher)

Appendix B: Education

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY23

“This supplement is important to our staff because child care professionals are undervalued and underpaid. This is a great encouragement for teachers who further their education, which benefits the children in our centers and gives confidence to parents who know that their children are being taught by well-informed teachers.” (Alamance, director)

“WAGES¹ has meant a lot to me because it has shown me that Alexander County and the state of North Carolina appreciate my work in early childhood education. It has also served as an incentive to further my education in the field. I’m currently working on my master’s degree to reach the top level of WAGES, because this will help me purchase more resources to use in my class. It has always come when it was needed most.” (Alexander, teacher)

“WAGES has meant a lot to my staff who work hard to provide quality care and still continue their education.” (Brunswick, director)

“WAGES gives staff the opportunity to increase their education level, which can translate to an increase in pay and professionalism. This increases teacher morale and confidence.” (Caldwell, director)

“WAGES has helped me stay on track with classes and want to take extra classes!” (Cleveland, teacher)

“The WAGES Program has assisted me with learning more in my field and becoming a valued employee. I would also like to thank the program for assisting me in obtaining my degree along with another employee here. We both graduate in May!” (Columbus, director)

“The WAGES Program encouraged and helped me to stay in the early childhood education field and continue my studies. I graduated with a bachelor of science degree and am currently enrolled in the master’s program for early childhood psychology. I am better able to serve the children, the families and the community, which impacts our society.” (Craven, teacher)

“The WAGES Program has helped me set educational goals that I can afford to meet.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“WAGES has pushed me to continue with my Associate’s Degree in Early Education.” (Davidson, teacher)

“WAGES has helped the teachers stay motivated to increase their knowledge about child care and bring the knowledge they gain to the classroom so the children can receive high quality care.” (Durham, director)

“WAGES helped me to succeed in getting my degree, and I feel great about my accomplishments in school.” (Forsyth, teacher)

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

“Being educated is power, and WAGE\$ makes it possible.” (Gaston, teacher)

“It is very helpful when you want to return to school. It helps out with the cost of books and other supplies.” (Greene, teacher)

“Getting the WAGE\$ supplement is important for many reasons. The main reason is so that the participants feel appreciated – not just a sense of accomplishment when completing more education, but also when they receive the supplement and know that their hard work throughout their time in school doesn’t go unrecognized.” (Haywood, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps encourage teachers to further their education. It also helps pull in teachers who have a higher education level to the child care profession.” (Henderson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped a lot of staff members go back to school who cannot afford to go back on their own.” (Johnston, director)

“WAGE\$ has pushed me to achieve a new level of education and to encourage my fellow teachers to do the same.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ not only attracts new staff to the program, but it keeps them in the program. It also gives an amazing incentive to further their education and knowledge. That is amazing in itself; along with T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, WAGE\$ is an awesome benefit!” (Randolph, director)

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

“WAGE\$ has helped me continue my educational goals and work toward my degree.” (Rockingham, director)

“WAGE\$ motivates teachers to stay in the field and become more educated, and we can learn more to use in the classroom with children.” (Rowan, teacher)

“WAGE\$ encourages my staff to further their education, which helps them improve conditions for themselves and their families. Educated staff also bring more to classroom.” (Rutherford, director)

“Receiving a WAGE\$ supplement has helped to support the teacher assistant in our program. She is working towards her Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, which is leading to positive changes for the teacher, the assistant and the children.” (Stanly, director)

“WAGE\$ is important because it helps teachers to pay for classes and books that allow them to gain the knowledge and experience to reach the children in their classrooms.” (Union, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has provided a way for my staff to increase their education, which increases their salary and benefits!” (Wayne, director)

“A lot of times preschool staff are treated differently than K-12 teachers. The WAGES Program provides encouragement for preschool teachers to continue our education and not feel like we are so different.” (Yadkin, teacher)

Appendix C: Compensation

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY23

“WAGES¹ helps me to pay my bills so I’m not at work wondering how I’m going to make it paycheck to paycheck.” (Alamance, teacher)

“I think WAGES is a very important program. Early childhood care and the need for early childhood educators are extremely important. The pay is not great, and this adds stress to the educator. This financial help makes things a little easier and helps more people stay in the profession.” (Alexander, teacher)

“WAGES helps relieve financial burdens.” (Alleghany, teacher)

“WAGES helps me in too many ways to count! Mostly it helps me feel comfortable in my life when it can get very stressful!” (Avery, teacher)

“The WAGES supplement has helped me in emergency situations like paying my rent or getting food for my children.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“When I received my first WAGES payment in the fall, it literally paid my electric bill. I had been stressing about having to skip paying until the next month, which would have put me three months behind. I was able to catch up and maintain. ... It is extremely important to support the dedicated teachers and staff working with children. We are grossly underpaid, and every little morsel of financial relief we can get is a huge gift. It helps our overall well-being to be able to pay that bill we have had to skip or the car payment that is overdue. These financial stressors can be consuming and stressful. Having that stress while trying to give your best self and whole self to the children we serve is taxing and much harder than if we are not worrying about over-drafting our bank accounts.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“WAGES relieves stress which helps me focus more on teaching.” (Burke, teacher)

“WAGES is important to me because it means I have gas in my tank to get to work so I can care for my kids at school. It means I can pay for my medications and buy groceries. All of these things are important so that I can do my job each day.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“We are paid so little. WAGES helps make ends meet a little closer.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“WAGES is a wonderful program because it supplements our salaries. It is important because of the impact it has on so many lives. Children in child care benefit from additional toys and supplies for their rooms. Families of teachers benefit from extra funds to help with groceries, utilities, housing costs, transportation, and family activities such as vacations. WAGES has allowed me to purchase extra resources for my classroom to enhance the learning environment.” (Cleveland, teacher)

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

“WAGE\$ is very important because it helps me catch up on my bills and buy food in my home, and I’m able to buy supplies for my classroom.” (Columbus, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me to stay afloat financially.” (Craven, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it compensates employees of a job that usually underpays its staff. With the money received, a person can purchase simple staples for everyday survival, continue their education, have a sense of worth or appreciation and have extra on hand for emergencies.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“WAGE\$ allows those who want to teach children to be able to do that and afford their families’ needs.” (Davie, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me not only to be a better teacher but also a better parent to my own children. The money helps with basic necessities and gas to get to work. Thank you so much for the benefits. ... I feel teachers are underpaid – especially preschool teachers. It is lots of hard work. If the center owner is struggling, the employees should not have to feel it. WAGE\$ helps teachers because we know we have money coming in, so we can try to make it until we receive it.” (Durham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ increases compensation for an inequitable pay system. It is a great supplement that increases morale and retention while promoting higher education.” (Edgecombe, director)

“We care for children and families. WAGE\$ helps us care for our own families. We count on the supplements in Forsyth County.” (Forsyth, director)

“WAGE\$ helps to supplement the raises that we give the staff. With costs of everything increasing – food, child care, clothing, rent, mortgages, etc. – these funds are much needed.” (Franklin, director)

“WAGE\$ helps bridge the gap between low pay and financial responsibility.” (Gaston, family child care home provider)

“Teachers and people who work in education are so undervalued on a day-to-day basis, and their paychecks reflect that. Having this program helps me feel like I can be financially more secure and allows me less stress day-to-day knowing I have this extra money in my bank account.” (Guilford, teacher)

“Child Care WAGE\$® pushes me to want to do and pursue more in education. I have the means to purchase supplies for the classroom. I’m able to teach effectively and the children are more excited. When the child is excited about learning, it spills over to the family and community. Everyone benefits from this program.” (Halifax, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is definitely an added benefit – especially when I have exhausted funds to cover bills and make ends meet. This supplement has really helped me when I do get it – especially with a family of four.” (Harnett, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is very important. I have used it to avoid charging a fee to a parent who was on vouchers and struggling. I have also used it to pay for eye insurance for myself so I could afford glasses.” (Henderson, family child care home provider)

“WAGE\$ came at a time when I was ready to give up. It gave me the push to climb a little higher and hang on a little longer.” (Hertford, teacher)

“Child Care WAGE\$® is important because it has increased my ability to support myself and my family. The children in my care have benefited from this program by receiving new learning materials to explore.” (Iredell, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it offers financial help to those who desire to work with young children in a field that does not pay well – regardless of the education you attain. I have a bachelor’s degree and work with one-and two-year-olds. I enjoy the younger children and the lower ratio of students. I can give quality care, and the financial supplement encourages me to keep running the race and try to make a difference.” (Johnston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important to me because it has helped me pay some bills when I didn’t know how I was going to pay them. It has also helped with gas to get to work, to my doctors’ appointments, etc. It’s a great program.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me to pay for things that have come up unexpectedly. It makes me feel appreciated for the work I do with children, and it helps to offset the high cost of living in these times of hardship.” (Macon, teacher)

“I love everything about the WAGE\$ Program! It’s a shame that there even has to be a program to supplement my income so that I can live, but I’m so thankful that there is! There is so much wrong with the educational system and how little value society and companies put on early education. ... The system is broken, and I’m so thankful to have WAGE\$ fighting in my corner. We have a long ways to go, but WAGE\$ makes it a little bit easier to continue to do the work I love.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“Cost of living has increased, and COVID has made for a more stressful living environment. WAGE\$ has taken some of the stress away and made surviving economically less painful.” (Moore, director)

“WAGE\$ is important because it helps many of us be better prepared in our classroom. It allows us to obtain more resources for our students. WAGE\$ has helped me be a more effective and resourceful educator.” (Northampton, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement helps to provide more resources for my day care and my classrooms. I thank you for everything. Thank you for the help and support so we can learn more to better educate our young children that are in our care. It takes the pressure off and removes a lot of stress, and I can relax more so I can be ready for my day care kids.” (Pitt, family child care home provider)

“Child Care WAGE\$® has helped me not lose focus on my ‘why.’ I am constantly asked why I won’t go into the school system to make more money. Money cannot buy happiness and purpose! My purpose is in early childhood education. I have no doubt that it is my calling.” (Randolph, teacher)

“It means so much to receive a supplement from WAGE\$. We are not paid a lot, and this helps so much with life in and out of the classroom.” (Richmond, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps to cover some benefits that my employer doesn’t offer, like insurance and 401k.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“I struggle financially as a single parent, so this extra income from WAGE\$ is a huge benefit for me.” (Rowan, teacher)

“WAGE\$ relieves stress from the high cost of living. It makes doing what I do easier for me at this point in life. I really appreciate all the money I receive.” (Rutherford, family child care home provider)

“It’s like Christmas every time I see that extra money from WAGE\$. It seems to always be there when I need it.” (Stanly, teacher)

“The supplement helps me pay bills that I might have stressed about if I didn’t participate in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.” (Surry, teacher)

“Early childhood education staff are underpaid in our state for the essential work they do. WAGE\$ helps to counteract that.” (Swain, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has made it possible to take some stress off feeding my children and paying my rent. It also has inspired me to continue my education.” (Union, teacher)

“In today’s economy, any extra funds are much needed and appreciated. It is hard for some to make ends meet, and supplements such as these help the cause.” (Vance, director)

“When you’re on your last dollar, a WAGE\$ supplement helps out a lot – not only in the workplace but at home too. ... WAGE\$ helps me in my classroom and outside my classroom. Without it, I would truly struggle.” (Wayne, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me to keep my head above water financially.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“It has helped me not to struggle from paycheck to paycheck.” (Wilson, teacher)

Appendix D: Appreciation/Recognition Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY23

“WAGES¹ has been instrumental in assisting our program with maintaining staff morale with the salary supplements. As a result, the staff feel respected as educated professionals and see their work as a valuable contribution to enabling our state’s workforce to grow and thrive.”
(Alamance, director)

“WAGES shows staff that getting an education in this field is valued, which I think is very important. I also think that it makes the staff who receive it feel as though they are working in a field that values education and makes it feel like they are working in an environment where professionalism is valued.” (Buncombe, director)

“WAGES helps the staff feel that they are teachers instead of babysitters. They may not make the same hourly wages as public school teachers, but with these supplements they feel like they are just as important.” (Burke, director)

“WAGES lets the staff know that their job is valued and worth the compensation.” (Cabarrus, director)

“WAGES helps me feel like I’m important and my job matters. ... It’s important to let early childhood teachers know their job is noticed and they make a difference in the community.”
(Caldwell, teacher)

“WAGES makes child care workers feel valued.” (Clay, teacher)

“WAGES helps morale. The more teachers who apply and receive financial support, the more positive morale becomes.” (Cleveland, director)

“WAGES helps not only to boost the morale of the staff, but to strengthen the quality of services that are provided to our children and families.” (Columbus, director)

“WAGES really helps me feel appreciated and that what I do matters.” (Craven, teacher)

“WAGES is a positive way of showing appreciation for the work that we do each day contributing to the positive growth of children in our care.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“The WAGES supplement shows staff that education is valued, and it shows that this profession is valued and needed!” (Davie, director)

“I feel more confident in being a child care teacher – even when others say I’m not a real teacher.” (Durham, teacher)

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

“I think early education is so important, and the teachers who dedicate their career to this age deserve to be recognized for their achievements. This program shows us that our work is important.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“Child Care WAGE\$® has been a financial blessing. I feel appreciated and recognized for my work by my director and WAGE\$ is one way my director shows appreciation. I worked at another child care facility and was not told about WAGE\$.” (Franklin, teacher)

“Child care workers often feel undervalued or even invisible. The WAGE\$ Program gives recognition to teachers who do their best each day to provide quality care for our future.” (Gaston, teacher)

“Staff often feel that the work they do is devalued and not important. The amount of compensation made available to early childhood educators does not reflect the value of the work that they do for young children. Receiving WAGE\$ helps to place a greater focus on ‘good beginnings’ for young children and the invaluable people who provide quality care for them.” (Guilford, director)

“WAGE\$ gives me a sense of pride in being appreciated for my work.” (Halifax, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me feel valued for the work I do. ... WAGE\$ is important to the morale of the school. It makes coming to work, being there for the kids and feeling valued more attainable. I am able to have less of a financial burden, which allows me to be fully present for the children.” (Henderson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important because it makes me feel appreciated and motivates me on the job. It gives me a purpose.” (Hertford, teacher)

“The support from WAGE\$ impacts my life greatly. I want to stay in the early child care field because I love working with children. I feel very secure and positive about being an educator since receiving the WAGE\$ supplement. It feels like my job is viewed as important and is appreciated.” (Johnston, teacher)

“Sometimes low-paid teachers don’t feel appreciated, but with these additional funds, I feel like I matter to someone.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is very important because it makes you feel appreciated knowing that others value you as an educator.” (Mecklenburg, family child care home provider)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel appreciated and makes me want to be the best at doing my job. It lets me know that I’m respected in my career field. It has helped me and given me self-esteem. The money is wonderful, but the self-worth has done so much more!!!!!! I am helping shape young Americans. The supplement has helped me to live more comfortably, and I’ve been able to help bless other people! Oh, what a wonderful feeling!!!!” (Moore, teacher)

“I think WAGE\$ helps validate teachers’ work, and being recognized for those efforts financially is encouraging and shows support for them.” (Nash, director)

“It is important for teachers feel cared for. The WAGE\$ Program has helped many teachers to feel important.” (Randolph, teacher)

“WAGE\$ shows teachers that we are appreciated for all the work we do to enhance the educational development of young children.” (Richmond, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program gives me a sense of worth and helps me to apply my knowledge and abilities to my career.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is so important because teachers work hard for our degrees and to stay committed to our employers, so to be able to receive Child Care WAGE\$® is like important people saying, ‘Thank you! We see you; we acknowledge what you do and your work is so important!’ The supplement helps our families and our work families in more ways than you’ll ever know!!! ❤️” (Rowan, teacher)

“It is important for employees to feel appreciated and seen – especially in a profession that doesn’t tend to get the most respect or pay.” (Stanly, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel that I make a difference and that I am valued. I love making a difference in the lives of children.” (Surry, teacher)

“It is important that our teachers feel valued for the very important job that they do every single day!” (Swain, director)

“It is so nice to be recognized by WAGE\$. As preschool teachers, we are not seen by the public as teachers, and that is reflected in our salaries. The supplement gives us hope and helps fill in deficits.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“Unfortunately, as a society we do not value the preschool years of children’s learning. This results in extremely nominal wages for the profession. WAGE\$ helped me to feel seen, and it helped me to provide for myself and my classroom. WAGE\$ helped us - I told others about the program - to feel valued for the important work that we do. Thank you so much.” (Union, teacher)

“I have been a teacher in child care, and it takes dedication and hard work to be in the classroom. I spent a lot of time and money on materials to make my room more engaging. Early childhood still has the stigma with some parents as being babysitting, and the supplemental pay creates a sense of pride for early childhood teachers.” (Vance, director)

“WAGE\$ brings awareness to the importance of this field of work and education.” (Wayne, teacher)

“WAGE\$ lets me know that I am valuable as a teacher and my job is important. I am able to give my kids a great start for life.” (Warren, family child care home provider)

“WAGE\$ has helped me feel more important and acknowledged in my field of work.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“Child care staff do not make what they are worth, so having the WAGE\$ Program to supplement their income means a great deal to them. It makes them feel valued and rewarded in their efforts to seek higher education.” (Wilson, director)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program helps caregivers feel acknowledged and important. It also helps us out financially – for our own needs and our classroom needs.” (Yadkin, teacher)

“Child care is a very stressful but much-needed field of work. WAGE\$ helps me and my staff feel appreciated and valued. It has helped SO much!” (Yancey, director)

Appendix E: Smart Start Messages Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY23

“This is an incredible bonus to all that have used their degree in early childhood education to help benefit young children.” (Alamance, teacher)

“I could not do this job without your help. My family and I really appreciate all you are doing to help keep this program going.” (Alexander, teacher)

“This program is absolutely necessary for child care providers to fill in the gap of low wages. Thank you for helping us feel appreciated!” (Alleghany, teacher)

“I would like to thank you for this program. I would also like to ask you to keep the program going for child care workers.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“This funding is nothing short of life-saving and sustaining for many early childhood educators, and in turn for the children we serve.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“These bonuses are essential to helping teachers fund their classrooms and avoid needing a second job.” (Burke, teacher)

“Thank you for offering this opportunity for child care workers. Our work is so important, but it isn’t a job that provides wealth. Seldom are the things that are meaningful. I love my job and I’m grateful to have help with my income so I can keep doing it.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“Thank you for trying to keep good, educated teachers in the classroom. These are the people we need who end up leaving because they can make more money without even using their degree.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“We truly thank you for noticing the hard work educators put into the early childhood programs. We thank you for your support!” (Clay, teacher)

“I would like to thank you for your support of early childhood education. These early formative years are so important and WAGES¹ plays a big role in providing resources for the children and in the retention of staff. Staff retention is very important with young children. Child care providers that feel appreciated and recognized for their work will be happier, more productive employees. This leads to happier, well-adjusted children.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“Thank you. We work hard for these centers and get paid so much less than other workers. This supplement is a very good way to keep good teachers in child care.” (Columbus, teacher)

“Thank you. Your funding has helped so many teachers continue doing the job they love while providing much-needed help to their own families.” (Craven, teacher)

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

“Thank you so much for the support you give. Hopefully it will never end. Our job isn’t easy, and it is nice to know we are not in it alone. Thanks for appreciating us.” (Cumberland, family child care home provider)

“I really appreciate the supplement. It helps us maintain staff and encourages education.” (Davidson, director)

“WAGE\$ has given me a sense of appreciation, and I feel that I am where I need to be.” (Davie, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement is very much needed. It is a game-changer. I wouldn’t know what to do if I didn’t receive it.” (Durham, director)

“This is a wonderful program and I hope it stays around for a long, long time!” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“I would like to thank you for providing this program to help us make our jobs easier and to become more proficient in teaching our children.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“I would like to thank Smart Start for the wonderful help they are providing for teachers like me and others. Thank you so much.” (Franklin, teacher)

“I’m grateful for this funding for child care teachers as an incentive to help them on their educational journey.” (Gaston, teacher)

“Thank you very much for the additional supplement. It has really helped me out with continuing my education.” (Greene, teacher)

“This supplement is vital to helping people in the child care industry by providing them with much-needed support. As we all know, the wages one earns in child care are not very competitive with other jobs, and this supplement helps to make that more even.” (Guilford, teacher)

“I am thankful someone cares enough to help support the teachers who work with the children.” (Halifax, teacher)

“Thank you so much. This has changed my life and others’ as well. This has helped me to stay in the field I love, and I feel more appreciated and valued.” (Harnett, family child care home provider)

“WAGE\$ has kept staff at my center and helped motivate them to go to school.” (Haywood, director)

“The supplement helps financially and mentally, and WAGE\$ motivates me to stick with my job.” (Hertford, teacher)

“The supplement has changed my life in a positive way, and I greatly appreciate all of the funders of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.” (Iredell, teacher)

“Thank you for recognizing and supporting this program over the years and helping to recognize the work that we do daily as dedicated professionals.” (Jackson, teacher)

“Thank you so much for working hard to provide comfort for us. It helps a lot with taking care of bills so that I feel relief about financial issues. Before WAGE\$, I kept thinking about changing jobs and leaving the educational field, but teaching is my passion. I love working here and I would like to stay as long as I can. Thank you so much for your time and effort!” (Johnston, teacher)

“I feel like WAGE\$ has been a huge help all the around.” (Lee, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps child care centers keep people educated in their field.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“Thank you very much for supporting us. We have a very hard job, and I see fewer and fewer people applying to work in this field. The extra bonuses from WAGE\$ definitely help.” (Lincoln, director)

“This is a genius incentive to keep people in the child care field and furthering their education.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“Thank you for the WAGE\$ Program. It has been very helpful.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“Please keep providing this help. It is greatly appreciated to help keep good workers in child care, because some employees don’t make enough wages and look for other opportunities. This really helps me want to stay in child care, the field I love.” (Moore, teacher)

“Thank you so very much for the supplement. It came in handy for my family when I didn’t have money for things like food and electricity.” (Nash, teacher)

“Thank you for the assistance. It is definitely a great help to me. It helps me to be better prepared in my classroom and provide my students with resources.” (Northampton, teacher)

“It’s incredibly important for child care workers to receive supplemental income because many are leaving the field for more pay and less work. It’s not easy to do what we do, and it’s extremely difficult to find people willing to work hard for less pay than they could make elsewhere.” (Pitt, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has without a doubt changed my life. I have found purpose, and my daughter is in the process of finding hers through me being able to pay for her education with the WAGE\$ supplement I receive.” (Randolph, teacher)

“It means a lot that there’s a program that actually cares and helps staff at different centers feel like they are important and not just an employee.” (Richmond, teacher)

“What you do counts! WAGE\$ has made a difference in my life. ☺ Thank you.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“Thank you doesn’t say enough for what receiving the Child Care WAGE\$® supplement means to us. It truly makes me feel seen and appreciated for my work – like it has been acknowledged and people know how very important it is. The supplements help my family and my little work kiddos more than you’ll ever know. So from the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU!!!” (Rowan, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement has really helped me a lot in so many ways. I really appreciate each and every check.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“I just want to say thank you. Without this extra boost in my income I would barely make it. These bonuses are important and helpful to my family!” (Stanly, teacher)

“Thank you for all the worthwhile effort that you have put into this program!! I am grateful for this supplement to help me through my teacher assistant job in Pre-K. It has afforded me many opportunities and helped my family get through many obstacles that my regular paycheck could not afford! Helping me acquire more schooling was a big plus with this supplement! Thank you again for this wonderful opportunity to receive this every six months! Thank you!” (Surry, teacher)

“THANK YOU. We need this because we are underpaid and make what a fast food restaurant pays. Not that fast food workers are not important, but we are teaching the next generation.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“Please continue this partnership. It has been very helpful to me financially. It is also good to see that my love and dedication to children are appreciated.” (Union, teacher)

“The supplement helps me to pay my bills and make it through the summer and winter months. I thank all of you very much!” (Vance, teacher)

“Thank you so much. The supplements always arrive at the perfect time. I greatly appreciate your contributions that help with resources and life.” (Wayne, teacher)

“The supplement is so greatly appreciated. There have been so many times it has helped my family in a time of necessity.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“Thank you for thinking about early childhood educators and providing this incentive. It really makes me feel more appreciated and want to further my education and gain more knowledge.” (Wilson, teacher)

“This supplement is great encouragement. It helps with financial strain from pursuing continuing education.” (Yadkin, teacher)

“I am so thankful for the WAGE\$ supplement check. I appreciate it so much. It helps me in so many different ways.” (Yancey, teacher)