

Child Care WAGE\$® Program

Statewide Final Report

Fiscal Year 2022

REPORT CONTENTS

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

Program Description – Includes a brief overview of the program and its funding support.

Statewide Program Eligibility – Highlights primary requirements to participate in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.

Program Overall Impact – Reviews the WAGE\$ impact by providing a summary and select tables for the following categories:

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

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

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

Smart Start – Describes the notification procedures for recipients regarding Smart Start's supplement funding.

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Table 2 – Lists the participation results of active participants by the star rating or license status of employing child care facilities.

Table 3 – Identifies the number of participants funded at each education level by general position category and indicates the percentage of participants at permanent levels *or* who have submitted coursework during the reporting period.

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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 FY22, WAGE\$ was a funding partnership between Smart Start and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

STATEWIDE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

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

- work in a county that uses Smart Start funds to support the Child Care WAGE\$® Program
- work in a licensed child care program (center, home or public school site)
- work at least 10 hours per week with children birth to five
- earn at or below the income cap selected by the funding partnership (out of available options)
 - \$23 per hour (available as of January 2022)
 - \$19 per hour
 - \$17 per hour
 - \$15 per hour (no longer available as of July 2022)
- have a level of education funded on the Child Care WAGE\$® scale (from regionally accredited schools)
- work at least six months in the same child care program
- be employed at this same child care program when funding is available and a final confirmation has been completed

PROGRAM OVERALL IMPACT

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program impacts the community by improving the quality of early care and education for young children. Most evidence suggests there are three primary factors associated with teacher quality: education, stability and compensation. WAGE\$ addresses all three. Through graduated salary supplements, the program helps decrease turnover and encourages the continued educational pursuits of the child care workforce. The compensation is critical, particularly now as North Carolina and the entire nation battle the “great resignation” and employees around the country demand higher pay, better working conditions and respect. As of June 2022, 3,431 child care professionals in 1,571 child care programs from 61 North Carolina counties were active participants in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program. Three of these counties joined in the last quarter of the fiscal year.

Of these individuals, 99% are women and 58% reported being a person of color and/or Latinx. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the participants work in four and five star licensed centers or homes.

As of June 2022, 545 of the active participants were reported by their employers as being NC Pre-K teachers and assistants. Of this group, 151 are teachers and 394 are assistant teachers in NC Pre-K classrooms. These individuals work in 369 different child care programs in 57

counties. Of these, 100% 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 (participants are eligible only if they earn at or below the selected cap). With partnership support, WAGES\$ was able to offer increased compensation in many communities. Last year, 55% of the participating counties funded Tier Two or higher for the full year compared to 59% in FY22.

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

Table A: Tier and Income Cap Selections*

	\$15 per hour	\$17 per hour	\$17/\$23 per hour	\$19 per hour	\$19/\$23 per hour	\$23 per hour**	Totals
Tier One	4	10	0	4	1		19
Tier One / Tier Two Split	2	4	0	0	0		6
Tier Two	1	15	1	12	2		31
Tier Two / Tier Three Split	1	0	1	0	0		2
Tier Three	0	2	0	0	0	1	3
Totals	8	31	2	16	3	1	61

**Numbers represent unduplicated counties participating in each category. When two income caps are shown, it reflects the decision to move to a higher cap when offered in January 2022.*

***This county joined in the last quarter of the year and selected the highest cap at that time.*

In order to help partnerships handle budget constraints and keep the WAGES\$ supplements a possible option for early childhood professionals in their counties, the Education and Compensation Advisory Committee approved several county-level eligibility and/or payment options. Partnerships may:

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

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 FY22.

- Cut administrator time only – three counties

- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars only – 15 counties
- Cut administrator time and those working in sites with fewer than three stars – two counties
- Cut administrator time and those at level two on the scale – two counties
- Cut administrator time, those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – three counties
- Cut those working in sites with fewer than three stars and those at level two on the scale – two counties

Two counties implemented a percentage cut in payments. Twenty-eight (28) counties were able to fund either a percentage increase over their base tier 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 has been a significant issue for early childhood programs in the past year. Employers are challenged to find teachers at all, let alone keep them for extended periods of time. This issue was apparent during the height of COVID-19 and became even more problematic as what has been called the “great resignation” began to impact most industries. Early childhood, because of its extremely low pay, may have been particularly susceptible to these increased losses. As one director said in her survey response, “During COVID, it has been hard to get and keep staff, so anything to increase morale and salary has been important.” The stabilization grants provided by the state to help child care programs survive can be used to provide compensation and benefits to try and curb turnover and make the field more attractive. WAGE\$ is another strategy that can help make it more possible for committed teachers to stay despite the trend. 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 FY22 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 also 14%.

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

The WAGE\$ turnover rate covers all eligible positions, including part-time employees, and is not a straightforward comparison to the workforce study data in general. Additionally, it is expected that the WAGE\$ 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	WAGE\$ FY22
Turnover Rates	31%	21%	25%	14%

With directors reporting difficulty finding and keeping staff, particularly qualified staff, in the wake of the pandemic, it is clear that North Carolina’s \$12 per hour average rate of pay for teachers and assistants is simply not enough. WAGE\$ helps address retention and makes it more possible for educated professionals to afford to teach young children, particularly in this current landscape.

Of all WAGE\$ participants statewide with an associate degree focused on early childhood education or higher, only 13% left their programs this past year. Of all participants with less education, 19% left their programs. This figure may differ for the workforce not receiving higher compensation through supplements, but it appears that if salaries are supplemented or teachers are more fairly compensated, those with higher education will not leave at a higher rate, which is a common belief. In fact, for the past several years, retention has been *better* among the more highly educated participants, as shown in Table C below.

Table C: Turnover by Education

	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
AAS ECE or higher	13%	13%	11%	10%	13%
Below AAS ECE	20%	17%	17%	19%	19%

Research makes it clear that children need stable and engaging relationships with the best-educated teachers to help facilitate their development during these most critical years. The higher retention of this educated group of WAGE\$ participants is key; the field must aspire to stabilize this group in order to provide children and families what they really need. With the confusion and uncertainty children have experienced during COVID-19, having stable teachers who can engage in best practice will be more important than ever.

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

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

Education

The WAGE\$ population is well educated, with the bulk of participants having at least a two-year degree. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the active FY22 WAGE\$ participants whose counties have participated at least two years (and 89% of those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms) are being funded for having an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher based on the WAGE\$ scale *or* have submitted documentation during the year to verify their pursuit of additional coursework. The WAGE\$ Program has a number of temporary award levels, which require that participants with lower education advance up the scale to remain eligible.

A sample of participants at temporary levels was surveyed during the year to learn more about their educational plans and potential barriers. Out of 337 completed calls this year, 77% indicated that they do still intend to take coursework to remain eligible for their WAGE\$ supplements and 51% said they had completed new coursework since their last submission. Only a handful identified barriers during these surveys. Of those that did, 52% (11) indicated that financial concerns were the biggest challenge. When participants share this barrier, WAGE\$ staff provide information on the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program.

When given a list of possible benefits resulting from WAGE\$, 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. Participants do recognize WAGE\$ as an incentive to pursue additional coursework.

When examining education by ethnicity across all participating counties, 78% of the participants who reported being a person of color and/or Latinx have earned an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, its equivalent or higher on the WAGE\$ scale compared to 79% of the White/European American participants. WAGE\$ is encouraging a diverse population to pursue education. Given the diverse population of children attending child care in North Carolina, this educational equity is very important. The Children’s Equity Project encouraged states and tribes to adopt or expand WAGE\$ with funds from the American Rescue Plan Act as a way to address

equity in the early care and education workforce.¹

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.

“WAGE\$ gives me a sense of pride by supporting me in continuing my education. You will always do your best if you have someone to support you. WAGE\$ always supported me, and it made me happy knowing someone had my back. ... I think the Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because there are so many out there that want to continue their education but need the positive push and support to do so. WAGE\$ offers that push, praise, and support.” (Cumberland, 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. In FY22, WAGE\$ responded to DCDEE’s request to protect the eligibility of WAGE\$ participants who might have received increased compensation resulting from the time-limited stabilization grants. The pre-stabilization grant hourly rates of active participants were used to determine eligibility for the year. Based on income data using this temporary policy, 41% of the active WAGE\$ participants earn less than \$13 per hour. Sixty-seven percent (67%) earn less than \$15 per hour, which is the minimum starting rate for many employers, including Target. Target’s start rate for some employees can be as much as \$24 per hour.

While some partnerships utilized the \$15 income cap, restricting participation for those that earn more, this is still an alarming percentage. The \$15 income cap will no longer be available as of July 2022. The challenge of hiring new teachers highlights the ongoing compensation plight of the field. Even in the best of times, early educators are severely underpaid for the work they do, which is illustrated by a comparison to the rate of \$33.10 that may be needed for one North Carolina employee with one child to meet basic, fundamental needs (Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). Looking only at those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms, 63% earn less than \$15 per hour. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the NC Pre-K teacher assistants and 37% of the teachers earn less than \$15 per hour.

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.

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

The average six-month supplement payment issued statewide during FY22 was \$1,203. Many partnerships prioritized the WAGE\$ compensation, including providing carry forward funds to support higher awards. The average payment amount includes all participating counties and all applicable tiers. Since the supplements are based on the education earned, the average will vary by county even within the same tier category. The average six-month supplements statewide ranged from \$484 to \$2,294. The average six-month supplement at each tier level can be seen in Table D below. In the Tier One category, two counties are included that issued one payment at a percentage cut. Twenty-eight (28) counties overall provided increases over their base tier awards.

Table D: Compensation by Tier

Tiers Funded FY22	Number of Participating Counties by Tier	Average Six-Month Supplement
All Tiers	61	\$1,203
Tier One	19	\$855
Tier One/Tier Two Split	6	\$971
Tier Two	31	\$1,231
Tier Two/Tier Three Split	2	\$1,595
Tier Three	3	\$1,976

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:

- 81% are better able to pay their bills
- 72% are more able to address the basic needs of their families (food/housing)
- 66% rely on the supplements to help address transportation costs
- 62% use the funds to provide additional resources for their classrooms or child care programs

In a separate question, a greater number of respondents (89%) 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.

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

OUTPUTS

This section highlights the projected outputs of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program statewide for FY22 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 WAGE\$ payments as of June 30, 2022.	Output exceeded. As of June 2022, 4,018 applicants had received WAGE\$ payments.
2	Child Care WAGE\$® staff will conduct 18 outreach opportunities to child care professionals to offer information about the program.	Output exceeded. WAGE\$ conducted 36 outreach sessions.

WAGE\$ payments: Four thousand eighteen (4,018) participants were paid for completing at least one six-month period on the Child Care WAGE\$® Program during FY22. These participants worked in 1,698 facilities serving approximately 74,720 children. This number is an unduplicated count of supplement recipients. Of these, 638 were NC Pre-K teachers or assistants. More than 500 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: Thirty-six (36) outreach sessions, mostly virtual, were done upon request or as a result of WAGE\$ solicitation during the year. WAGE\$ representatives also discuss opportunities available through Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® 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, nearly 12,600 recruitment emails or mailings were sent to 3,388 sites. WAGE\$ also sent recruitment information to Smart Start partnerships, resource and referral agencies, community colleges and Head Start grantees in participating counties. Follow-up calls were made to many of the non-participating sites to verify receipt of the email/packet, answer questions and encourage participation. During each employment confirmation completed with a participating site, the counselor inquired about any possible eligible staff not yet accessing a supplement.

OUTCOME

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

Table F: Outcome

Projected Outcome	Results
By June 30, 2022, 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 particularly encouraging given the current reports of an overall teacher shortage.

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

PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

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

Survey samples were created based on the number of potential respondents by position in each county. If the pool of participating teachers in a county was between 1 and 50, the entire teacher recipient population was mailed a survey. A 40% sample was drawn when the teacher recipient population was between 51 and 100 and a 25% sample was drawn if the teacher population was 101 or more. All participating directors were also surveyed. Directors in counties funding WAGE\$ who were not personally participating but who had staff members on WAGE\$ and/or Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® were sent a shared survey to assess the impact of salary supplements. 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 also mailed surveys. One final attempt was made to secure non-respondent surveys via phone in counties with low response rates. All respondents were given the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for professional resources.

Overall, 67% of the sampled population completed surveys (1,418 of 2,125), which included the following:

- 67% of participating teachers/family child care home providers (882 of 1,316)
- 74% of participating directors (137 of 184)
- 64% of non-participating directors with staff receiving salary supplements² (399 of 625)

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

Sample responses

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of responding WAGE\$ participants indicated that their receipt of a supplement had an impact on either their inclination to stay in the field or on their pursuit of further education. When asked to examine a list of possible benefits resulting from the Child Care WAGE\$® Program and indicate whether or not they are true for the respondent, 98% indicated that WAGE\$ either encourages them to stay in their current programs or to pursue further education. Responses to the individual options were as follows, listed in survey order:

- WAGE\$ helps me feel more satisfied with my job. – 96%
- WAGE\$ is an incentive for me to seek additional education and/or it helps make pursuing coursework more financially feasible. – 87% (93% of those at temporary levels)
- The WAGE\$ supplement helps ease financial stress. – 98%
- WAGE\$ encourages me to stay with my current program. – 96%
- My WAGE\$ supplement helps me to provide more resources for my program or classroom. – 89%
- Receiving the WAGE\$ supplement makes me feel more appreciated and recognized for my work. – 97%

Ninety-five percent (95%) of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGE\$ benefits the children in their centers in some way. When asked to select from a list of options explaining how participation may be beneficial to the children in their programs, including an option stating that no benefits have been noticed, 95% of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGE\$ benefits the children in some way. The most popular example of impact was that improved morale has created more positive child-teacher interactions. Over half of the directors indicated that staff members are seeking more education, which leads to higher quality care for children.

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

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of responding directors reported positive attitudes toward WAGE\$ in their child care programs.

For those respondents who had the opportunity to speak with the WAGE\$ staff, nearly 100% of those who have had interactions found the staff to be pleasant and helpful. Many respondents took the opportunity to share additional comments about their interactions with staff. Not only did the respondents report that they received helpful and pleasant customer service, but many also talked about how important the encouragement from staff has been in terms of participation in the program and pursuit of education. A few examples of participant feedback are listed below:

“Everyone that I have encountered has been so friendly and helpful. I was so overcome with joy when I received a postcard from a staff member saying how proud they were of me. I work so hard and feel like no one sees me, they all just expect me to do. It was so nice to get that card even though this person doesn’t know me.” (teacher)

“[Our counselor] is always so quick to respond, cheerful and incredibly helpful. This is the easiest program to interact with!” (teacher)

“Staff I have encountered have been very helpful and you can most definitely tell they enjoy helping others and love what they do!” (teacher)

“[Our counselor] has been nothing but kind, responsive, supportive and generous with her time and expertise. We are so grateful!” (director)

“When I wanted to throw in the towel, WAGE\$ staff attitudes and appreciation for what I do helped encourage me to stay in the fight. They treat you like a valuable person.” (family child care home provider)

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

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

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

The early childhood field is in turmoil with unprecedented teacher shortages. Directors share in calls that they are overwhelmed and are desperately seeking anyone to fill their vacancies so they can serve the children waiting for care. Managing this crisis has become the major focus for many directors, leading some to question whether supplements could be provided to those without the required education. One director, for example, said, “The center is more concerned with having any staff who are willing to stay than necessarily having educated staff.” WAGE\$, though, is about compensation that helps build quality. Children still need educated, qualified teachers who can provide stable and engaging relationships.

The inability to attract and retain teachers has also prompted many directors to see the supplements as a necessary benefit, but one that needs to be increased to turn the tide on turnover. According to one director, “Even with the supplements, the money just isn’t enough to pay teachers what they’re worth.” Similarly, there are continued calls for increased income caps to ensure that early educators can continue to participate. One participating director explained, “I feel like I’m at a crossroads with WAGE\$ because of the salary cap. I’m at the top tier of the cap and I feel like I’m holding on by the tips of my fingernails at this point. There needs to be a cap and supplement increase in order to keep teachers employed. Every day it’s becoming harder to

stay in this industry only making \$19/hr. Please increase WAGE\$ asap if you want to keep teachers on board.”

As of January 2022, WAGE\$ offered participating partnerships a higher income cap option: \$23 per hour. Counties will be able to expand WAGE\$ eligibility if they choose to do so, and the \$15 cap will be officially eliminated as of July. WAGE\$ also has three supplement tiers and additional spending strategies to enable partnerships to invest more in their workforces, to increase the supplements provided. It is hoped that with carry forward money and new Smart Start funds, that partnerships will choose to enhance compensation amounts available through WAGE\$.

Stabilization grants offered by DCDEE gave child care programs the critical opportunity to increase staff compensation. Those raises had the potential to make participants go over the income cap, thus losing their eligibility. However, DCDEE requested that participants stay eligible regardless of these increases since the grants are time limited. Policies were implemented to use the hourly rates earned prior to the stabilization grants to determine eligibility, giving the field an opportunity to receive more competitive compensation overall.

WAGE\$ was pleased to accept new counties in FY22. However, the new Smart Start funds that made participation possible for some was not available until late in the year. As a result, WAGE\$ had three months to recruit, process and pay new applicants. The timeline was challenging, and participation will certainly grow in future months, but WAGE\$ was very excited to provide supplements to these deserving early educators and begin relationships with new partners.

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 FY22. 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.

“I have been operating my family child care home for almost 14 years and I attribute my ability to stay in the field and with my program to WAGE\$. The supplement from the WAGE\$ Program is much needed and so appreciated. Thank you!” (Brunswick, family child care home provider)



Table 1
Demographic Profile of the 3,431 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Race*		
White	1421	41%
Black or African American	1742	51%
American Indian or Alaska Native	14	0%
Asian	19	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0%
Two or more races	39	1%
Not Given	141	4%
Other	54	2%
Ethnicity*		
Not Given	88	3%
Black/African American	1	0%
Latinx	135	4%
Not Latinx	3207	93%
Gender		
Male	33	1%
Female	3398	99%
Age Range of Participants		
15-19 years	4	0%
20-24 years	156	5%
25-34 years	763	22%
35-44 years	787	23%
45-54 years	831	24%
55-59 years	365	11%
60-64 years	299	9%
65 and over	221	6%
Not Given	5	0%
Position		
Teacher	2004	58%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	7	0%
Assistant Teacher	763	22%
Director	158	5%
Director (Owner)	84	2%
Assistant Director	167	5%
Small Home Provider	248	7%
Ages of Children Served**		
Birth up to Three	884	26%
Three to Five	1755	51%
Mixed Ages	792	23%

*1973 participants identify as Latinx or as a person of color, which is 58% of the active population that provided data (3377 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 3,431 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022**

	# of Participants	% of Participants
Education Level		
12 birth to five sem. hours	32	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	57	2%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	120	3%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	10	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	49	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	78	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	96	3%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	10	0%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	116	3%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	18	1%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	114	3%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	15	0%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	1571	46%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	87	3%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	19	1%
PhD/EdD including 6 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	182	5%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	66	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	662	19%
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	14	0%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	84	2%
PhD/EdD including 18 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
Wage Rate***		
Below \$7.25 per hour	185	5%
\$7.25 - \$9.99 per hour	194	6%
\$10.00 - \$12.99 per hour	1019	30%
\$13.00 - \$14.99 per hour	893	26%
\$15.00 - \$16.99 per hour	795	23%
\$17.00 - \$19.00 per hour	345	10%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Report End Date		
0 to .99 Years	188	5%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	405	12%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	362	11%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	365	11%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	259	8%
5.00 or More Years	1852	54%

***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 2021 - June 2022



	Programs	Participants
Center	1,321	3,178
1 STAR	14	36
2 STAR	1	1
3 STAR	152	253
4 STAR	312	651
5 STAR	788	2,123
GS-110	35	78
PROB	1	2
PROV	5	13
SPPROV	4	10
Temporary	9	11
Family Provider	250	253
3 STAR	21	21
4 STAR	171	172
5 STAR	56	58
Temporary	2	2
TOTALS	<u>1,571</u>	<u>3,431</u>



Table 3
Educational Award Levels Profile of the 3,431 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022



87% have a permanent level on the scale (AAS ECE or above) or are continuing their education as documented by coursework taken since original application to WAGES submitted in the current fiscal year. Participants need time to continue their education and move up the supplement scale, thus the percentage includes only those counties who have participated for two or more years.

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Position	% of Participants Out Of Active
Director	409	100%	12%
Two	3	1%	0%
Three	5	1%	0%
Four	11	3%	0%
Six	4	1%	0%
Seven	14	3%	0%
Eight	172	42%	5%
Nine	7	2%	0%
Ten	39	10%	1%
Eleven	132	32%	4%
Twelve	22	5%	1%
Family Child Care Provider	248	100%	7%
Two	1	0%	0%
Three	9	4%	0%
Four	4	2%	0%
Five	1	0%	0%
Six	5	2%	0%
Seven	14	6%	0%
Eight	99	40%	3%
Nine	5	2%	0%
Ten	16	6%	0%
Eleven	75	30%	2%
Twelve	19	8%	1%
Teacher	2774	100%	81%
Two	85	3%	2%
Three	106	4%	3%
Four	123	4%	4%
Five	28	1%	1%
Six	97	3%	3%
Seven	105	4%	3%

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 3,431 Participants
 in North Carolina
 Child Care WAGES® Program
 July 2021 - June 2022**

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Position	% of Participants Out Of Active
Eight	1429	52%	42%
Nine	95	3%	3%
Ten	193	7%	6%
Eleven	469	17%	14%
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 2021 - June 2022



4,018 unduplicated participants received a supplement for completing a six month period that ended during this reporting period; these participants worked in 1,698 different child care programs serving approximately 74,720 children.

	Total Paid*	Total Programs	# Of Children 0 to 5
Center	3,750	1,432	73,605
Family Provider	268	266	1,115
<u>Total</u>	<u>4,018</u>	<u>1,698</u>	<u>74,720</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 3,995 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022



The annual turnover percentage is based on an overall population of 3,995 participants. This population includes those individuals that were active during the reporting period of July 2021 - June 2022 (3,431) and those whose turnover was reported during this time (564). 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 2021 - June 2022	
Total Participants	= 3,995
Active Participants	= 3,431
Left Center	= 564
Turnover Percentage	= 14%



Table 5
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Race		
White	239	42%
Black or African American	264	46%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	1%
Asian	7	1%
Two or more races	21	4%
Not Given	22	4%
Other	7	1%
Ethnicity		
Not Given	11	2%
Latinx	22	4%
Not Latinx	531	93%
Gender		
Male	4	1%
Female	560	98%
Position		
Teacher	388	68%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	2	0%
Assistant Teacher	132	23%
Director	12	2%
Director (Owner)	3	1%
Assistant Director	17	3%
Small Home Provider	10	2%
Education Level		
12 birth to five sem. hours	5	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	14	2%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	14	2%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	2	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	5	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	16	3%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	7	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	22	4%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	6	1%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	25	4%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	3	1%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	24	4%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	3	1%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	235	41%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	16	3%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	32	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	12	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	104	18%

**Table 5 (cont.)
 Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
 Child Care WAGES® Program
 July 2021 - June 2022**

	# of Participants	% of Participants
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	6	1%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	10	2%
Wage Rate		
Below \$7.25 per hour	11	2%
\$7.25 - \$9.99 per hour	30	5%
\$10.00 - \$12.99 per hour	190	33%
\$13.00 - \$14.99 per hour	169	30%
\$15.00 - \$16.99 per hour	125	22%
\$17.00 - \$19.00 per hour	39	7%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Date Ineligible		
0 to .99 Years	42	7%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	77	14%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	101	18%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	68	12%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	55	10%
5.00 or More Years	221	39%
Regulation Type		
1 STAR	2	0%
3 STAR	40	7%
4 STAR	109	19%
5 STAR	390	69%
GS-110	11	2%
Temporary	5	1%
PROV	6	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.



**47 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022**



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



**47 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2021 - June 2022**



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

*Henderson County



Appendix A: Retention Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY22

“WAGES¹ keeps quality people in the field. It is the single best program for encouraging qualified people and furthering education.” (Alamance, director)

“WAGES is important because child care providers and early childhood teachers and assistants do not get the pay they deserve or need, even though we provide a really important service to the community. This money helps us continue to do the job we were called to do.” (Alexander, teacher)

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

“I definitely feel it is beneficial for the teachers in this field where people are needed so much, but it’s not a high-paying career. This program gives the people who really care about kids and early education a chance to stay in this field. Some may not be able to stay in the field without the support from this program.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“The pay for child care is very low and the WAGES Program definitely helps me continue working in the field.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“Teaching young children is a very important job, one in which the pay is not great - especially if you have just started. WAGES enables people who truly work with children to stick with it and not have to give up on it because they can’t support their families.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it makes me feel appreciated for my work. It has made me feel accomplished in my job, and it makes me stay in the child care field.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“WAGES has allowed me to stay in a career I love.” (Columbus, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it supports what we do in the child care field, and it helps teachers to stay long-term. I appreciate the incentive pay, because this program cares about the community and that I can make a difference for the children that I teach.” (Craven, teacher)

“WAGES is so important because I can keep my staff and get more candidates for the center. It keeps my staff motivated.” (Cumberland, director)

“It helps to improve the quality of life for teachers in our program, and it helps to keep educated teachers in our program.” (Davidson, director)

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.

“The supplements are a positive way to appreciate the hard work and consistency of teachers, and an incentive for further education.” (Davie, director)

“This program is very important. As a teacher, at times we don’t feel seen and our needs aren’t always seen as important. This program makes it worth staying in this field.” (Durham, teacher)

“I think it is very important because it is designed for teachers to have a stable relationship with children and better education so that low-income teachers can provide materials to enhance young children’s learning. It means a lot to me in that children benefit from more consistent teachers who are qualified and stay in the profession to provide care, trust, and promote learning at the early stages.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“We have had the same employees for the last eight years, and we have had four or five stars for the last 10 years. Thank you WAGE\$.” (Halifax, director)

“WAGE\$ has assisted me financially in an area that I need it most, and it has definitely made me remain consistent in my current program for years.” (Harnett, teacher)

“The pay for Head Start teachers is below a livable wage. Receiving WAGE\$ makes it possible for teachers to remain with the program doing what they love and still being able to make ends meet financially.” (Haywood, director)

“Child care is a low-paying and a lot of the time disrespected field. It is really sad that McDonald's pays more than child care teachers make. WAGE\$ is a blessing to teachers that choose to stay in this field as well as an encouragement to others to get their degree.” (Henderson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ allows me to stay in child care rather than go work for Amazon or Target for better compensation.” (Iredell, teacher)

“This program has been great for the staff, and it has built morale and helped keep steady staffing. Thank you so much!!” (Jackson, director)

“It helps me stay focused and stick with the same job. It has really helped me a lot.” (Johnston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ motivates me to stay in this job in spite of the current challenges faced. Knowing I will receive a supplement encourages me to stick with my program and continue to be the best teacher I can be. It has been a godsend when it comes to being able to pay some unexpected bills! It truly has made a difference in my personal and professional life by easing financial stress, which in turn allows me to focus on being an effective Pre-K teacher.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps compensate for the differences in pay between private NC Pre-K and public NC Pre-K. ... WAGE\$ helps supplement the lower income of private center child care work. When I obtained my bachelor’s degree the WAGE\$ supplement helped offset the

wage difference. I am not as likely to seek other employment for better wages.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“Child care employees are often single mothers who need all the help they can get. Being able to offer them the supplement means a lot to them. I’ve had the same set of lead teachers for the past five years and it’s a huge selling tool for potential parents.” (Nash, director)

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

“WAGE\$ is vital. One can barely get by on teacher wages, which is one reason the quality of education has gone down. A lot of people leave this profession or do not want to enter into it because of the poor wages. WAGE\$ has helped me to continue doing the job I love.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“Without WAGE\$, I would have to get a different job that pays more to live. I have a bachelor’s degree and get paid \$10/hour.” (Rowan, teacher)

“When teachers are appreciated monetarily, it helps us focus more on the children and less on finding careers that pay more.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program really gives child care employees the incentive to stay in the field. It’s widely known child care workers are not high on the pay scale, and our job is so important in shaping the future. The WAGE\$ Program is like a ‘thank you for everything you do, and we see the hard work you put in.’” (Stanly, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement helps me to stay with my current program even though I could make more money somewhere else. I love and value my job and the work that is done at our school.” (Surry, teacher)

“Early childhood educators, especially teaching assistants, are underpaid for the work they do. These supplements show that their continued commitment to their work is valued and encourages long-term employment, which is directly tied to better service provision for children and families.” (Swain, director)

“WAGE\$ helps people continue their career in this field.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“This supplement is very beneficial to my staff that are overworked and underpaid. It helps to keep them teaching and giving the children stability.” (Wayne, director)

“WAGE\$ provides incentive to stay in the job I love as opposed to finding a better-paying job, since the pay in early education is minimal!!” (Wilkes, teacher)

“It is important to supplement our teachers with the additional funding due to low salaries. The staff looks forward to the additional income, and they are very excited about participating in the program. WAGE\$ is an asset to our program, and it is listed on our job flyers as a benefit for working as a child care teacher. Our children benefit because the staff turnover is low.” (Wilson, director)

“I feel that it is important because it encourages me to stay in the early childhood field.”
(Yancey, teacher)



Appendix B: Education

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY22

“WAGES¹ is an important program because child care work does not pay teachers what they are worth. It’s nice to have a program that rewards them for continuing their education and bettering themselves. When teachers feel appreciated and stay in a center for a long period of time, it is beneficial for the children.” (Alamance, director)

“WAGES helps keep educators in the field and become more knowledgeable because they climb the steps with more education, which in return brings more incentive.” (Alexander, teacher)

“I always tell my staff, ‘Once you qualify, IT'S FREE MONEY!!!!’ It is a great program that helps my staff with finances, allows them to further their education, and helps pay for tuition and books.” (Avery, director)

“Child care education is always evolving, and best practices are constantly changing. It is important to learn new ways to best serve our kids and their needs. There is so much more trauma and poverty in our school system now - taking classes in how to help children dealing with these issues has been immensely helpful. Also, it is important for our kids to see that teachers go to school too - that learning is a lifelong opportunity.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“WAGES gave me a way to go to school. ... WAGES helps those who can’t usually attend school find a way.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“WAGES is a BLESSING! It opens up opportunities for the early childhood community to further their careers without having to choose between work and school. I am able to do both to better myself. It has allowed me to reach my life goal of being a first generation college graduate!” (Caldwell, teacher)

“WAGES motivates my staff to keep going, making my job more rewarding as they meet their goals. ... WAGES has added a monetary reward to keep the staff pushing for higher education and allows the staff to gain more knowledge to apply in the center. It definitely helps with job retention as well!” (Cleveland, director)

“Receiving a WAGES supplement is very important because not only does it give an individual an incentive to increase their education, but it also provides a sense of satisfaction knowing that you are providing even better quality care.” (Columbus, director)

“WAGES gives me a sense of pride by supporting me in continuing my education. You will always do your best if you have someone to support you. WAGES always supported me, and it made me happy knowing someone had my back. ... I think the Child Care WAGES[®] Program is important because there are so many out there that want to continue their education but need the positive push and support to do so. WAGES offers that push, praise, and support.” (Cumberland, 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.

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has helped me to pay for my education. I am in school right now earning my bachelor’s degree. By having a higher education level, I will be a more effective teacher in the classroom to the students and employees at my job.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has encouraged me to continue my education, get my bachelor’s degree, and feel good about my job. It makes me feel appreciated.” (Franklin, teacher)

“It was encouraging to see that my Associate’s in Early Childhood Education is seen as an important part of a child’s education.” (Gaston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps to show appreciation for the hard work and effort teachers put into gaining higher education. It also helps us to encourage the staff to seek higher education and provides a salary supplement many facilities cannot offer.” (Granville, director)

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

“Child Care WAGE\$® currently is helping me work toward my bachelor’s degree in the field of early childhood education.” (Harnett, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important because it recognizes my achievements. Because I got my bachelor’s degree, I will get more money.” (Henderson, teacher)

“It has made a world of difference in my staff’s decisions on furthering their education. The pay in this field is so low, and this program gives them the extra monetary support they need.” (Iredell, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has allowed me to continue my education with no financial hardship, and it also helped pay for a class or two for my daughter. I am very appreciative for it.” (Lee, teacher)

“Before WAGE\$, I was only able to take one class a semester, which would put me getting my degree so far into the future it was disheartening. When I transferred to WCU and got WAGE\$ in the same semester it changed everything. It meant that I could finish my degree and finally become a teacher. For the children in my care, my education has helped me to be a better educator and advocate for them.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“The benefits encourage me to continue my education to reach level 11. As a single mom, I was able to provide for my children.” (Macon, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me educationally by learning how to better work with children. It has also helped me financially.” (Martin, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me to be able to continue my education worry-free about student loans. ... WAGE\$ helps me get more education I can use with the children I teach in my center. It helps ease my mind when I have extra money to put towards my bills.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important and it should keep on going. It gives us teachers some kind of relief knowing that the bonus comes. We know that when we take early childhood classes, we will get an increase. It’s money that we’re guaranteed - as long as there’s funding.” (Nash, teacher)

“It encourages staff to further their education with an incentive as goals are met. Not only does the staff benefit, but most of the children in our program benefit.” (Richmond, director)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has allowed me to continue my education, which I could not afford to do alone. It has helped me to provide items for my classroom that were much needed. The program gives me hope and a sense of self-worth and pride to be able to teach and move forward toward my bachelor’s degree - especially in these demanding and troubling times (COVID-19, teacher shortage, bus driver shortage, etc.). I am thankful and grateful for what the program has done and is doing in my life and career.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important because it helps give motivation to teachers in early child care. It makes us feel appreciated and gives us a push to continue our education. If teachers get more education, it gives us better skills and knowledge to use in the classroom, which benefits the children in our care.” (Rowan, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped ease the stress of going to school.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel that my education was worth the stress, and it helps me want to keep going.” (Surry, teacher)

“WAGE\$ motivated and encouraged me to further my education and not just to stop with an associate’s degree. It allowed me to provide extra things for my classroom and my household as well.” (Wayne, teacher)

“It is important due to the fact that everything is so stressful for those making under \$13 per hour. My teacher assistants are appreciative of any extra supplement available to them. They are all going back to school to become teachers.” (Warren, director)

“It’s an incentive to go to school and an incentive to stay with one center.” (Yancey, teacher)



Appendix C: Compensation Feedback Collected from WAGES[®] Surveys FY22

“WAGES¹ helps me provide for me family when I come up short. ... This program is important because it allows us as educators to broaden our classrooms to make learning more fun and keep the children happy.” (Alamance, teacher)

“WAGES[®] is really a helpful supplement when prices keep going up and our pay does not. ... WAGES[®] is important because this field is challenging yet rewarding. Unfortunately those of us who truly love what we do find it challenging when we are making less money than the people we are helping. WAGES[®] provides breathing room in these uncertain times, ESPECIALLY now that there is a shortage in educators.” (Alexander, teacher)

“It so easy to apply and the rewards are awesome. ... It helps me financially. It makes up for the lower salaries in my area. My payments always come when I have extra bills to pay, which is so helpful. I have also bought a computer with mine to help while I was in school.” (Avery, director)

“WAGES[®] helps me to get extra stuff for the classroom and kids - I created a garden for my kids and they love it! I can do little things that brighten their day, and it also helps with my own education.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“Making more money decreases stress when it comes to folks making below or right at the living wage. Financial compensation is incredibly important for people to be able to do this job.” (Buncombe, director)

“The program is important because it provides some financial relief for people who work in an industry that simply cannot compensate the true value/worth of its workers.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“WAGES[®] has meant the world to me not only in my job, but personally, by adding additional financial support for my family. It’s a wonderful program and I hope it continues for a long time.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“Happy employees lead to a happy workplace, and WAGES[®] definitely makes you happy.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“WAGES[®] is important because some staff that are enrolled in the program are struggling financially but want to meet goals and make something better for themselves and their families. The more educational goals are met, it shows the parents that we are highly educated.” (Columbus, director)

“When you work 12-hour shifts five days a week and make less than four dollars an hour, it is encouraging when you receive funds from WAGES[®].” (Craven, family child care home provider)

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\$ has helped me make up funds where this low wage job has failed.” (Cumberland, director)

“Knowing WAGE\$ is there takes a lot of stress off of me financially. It helps out a lot.” (Davie, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has allowed me to purchase needed items that helped improve my teaching style and focus on teaching my students in a less stressful environment. ... WAGE\$ has had a wonderful impact on my ability to focus on the health and development of my students. I strive to be the best professional I can be for them and their families. With the financial help from WAGE\$, I can say that I have become a more effective teacher.” (Durham, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important to me because it helps me to operate a great child care facility. With the funds I receive from WAGE\$ I can purchase items to help educate the children. The program has given me hope knowing that there is help during these very trying times. The children are delighted to have professional and educated teachers, and I can offer incentives to the staff. The supplement is much needed and it has been a blessing to many providers. Parents are happy when their children are happy. Education, staff, and a loving, professional environment have been achieved with the help of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program.” (Forsyth, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me out a lot with personal bills and school needs. I thank God for your help. Sometimes it is hard for me to pay my bills, but the money that I get is a blessing to me. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. I can’t say thanks enough.” (Franklin, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps supplement the low pay that I receive. I believe the WAGE\$ Program helps teachers feel less stressed financially; therefore, they are able to be more present with their students.” (Gaston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me catch up on my bills when I fall behind.” (Granville, teacher)

“It allows me to be able to concentrate more on the job and less on personal financial stressors.” (Halifax, teacher)

“As a home provider, I work long hours and oftentimes alone. WAGE\$ helps me to bring someone in so that I can take a much-needed break. It also allows me to meet personal needs of the children in my child care home with things such as socks, coats, etc.” (Harnett, family child care home provider)

“During this horrible time with COVID, WAGE\$ is much appreciated for medical purposes.” (Haywood, teacher)

“WAGE\$ allows me to enter work free of stress and allows me to focus solely on doing what I can to best help the people I serve.” (Henderson, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has been a good source for supplementing the teachers’ income. It helps with their gas, food, bills and gives them a night out. This helps our teachers not to worry so much about everyday life challenges when you know you have funds coming from WAGE\$. Thank you so much for blessing our teachers so that they can be a blessing to our children.” (Herford, director)

“WAGE\$ has helped me in so many ways. I could be in a bind when it comes to bills, and then a check from WAGE\$ would come and I would be so relieved.” (Iredell, teacher)

“WAGE\$ gives me a good feeling, like I’m able to do the job without feeling pressure or stress with the money situation.” (Johnston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me as a single mom with only my income. When my tires were bad, there was no extra money, and then the WAGE\$ check came in the mail. It was a blessing. WAGE\$ is a great benefit and keeps me at my job.” (Lee, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped my family financially as I pursue my dream job of teaching preschool.” (Macon, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps with some costs that otherwise my income could not pay for. I have been able to help provide materials that help children to learn in each developmental domain. It provides a security to know that I’m impacting a child’s future.” (Martin, teacher)

“The extra funds help me to stay focused on the children instead of my bills.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“The incentives always come during a time when money is tight and I am struggling to make it from one check to the next, so it really helps to have that.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“It is very important to keep morale boosted and put well-deserved monies in the pockets of our staff members. Our teachers are excited twice a year to receive the WAGE\$ supplement because it helps them continue to pay for their day-to-day cost of living. For those staff members that have children, it helps them to purchase much-needed materials for their children.” (Nash, director)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it gives low-income teachers hope. It helps us make ends meet at home as well as work. You are able to buy materials and resources that the children need.” (Northampton, teacher)

“A knowledgeable and well paid staff work harder and better and take pride in their work. ... It is so important to have qualified people who are compensated well take care of our youngest members of our society. It’s a blessing to have WAGE\$ and T.E.A.C.H. to support with this.” (Pitt, director)

“WAGE\$ really makes you feel valued, and it undoes a lot of financial stress.” (Randolph, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me in many ways. I have received this supplement a few times now, and each time I am able to place some of the funds into my savings and pay off any bills that come up unexpectedly. It also helps me feel valued and appreciated in my work. This is especially true now that times are changing and there is more strain on the education field.” (Richmond, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is very important because it improves teachers’ low wages compared to the public school systems. Early childhood educators should earn more money to cover basic needs and not be stressed thinking about how we are going to pay our bills. We are the educators of children who are the future of the country. We help them to learn, grow, and develop in all areas. They need the best teachers, and we need better pay.” (Rowan, teacher)

“WAGE\$ decreases financial stress. ... WAGE\$ is helpful in stretching my paycheck.” (Vance, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me keep a roof over my head, food on my table, and clothes on my back. ... It’s a start to a better life for me.” (Wayne, teacher)

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

“I think that early childhood providers are currently not provided with the appropriate means to get through life. However, we continue to get up and go to work because we love what we do. I think having these supplements in place makes us feel that it is worth our passion, and when times do get hard, we don’t feel like we need to let go of something we love.” (Wilson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is a wonderful supplement to our pay. I am able to buy supplies to make my classroom fun and keep us up-to-date with current learning materials.” (Yancey, teacher)



Appendix D: Appreciation/Recognition Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY22

“WAGES¹ shows my worth and that people care about early childhood education.” (Alamance, teacher)

“Receiving WAGES is important especially during this time, as we are seeing a shortage of people entering into the field of early childhood education. Receiving the supplements allows workers to see that the work they do is noticed and they are valuable to the families and children they serve.” (Alexander, director)

“WAGES makes you feel appreciated, and it shows that people do care about how much you love the children and how much you want to make a positive impact in their lives.” (Alleghany, director)

“WAGES has made me feel appreciated in my job, like what I do really does make a difference.” (Avery, teacher)

“It makes me feel like child care is a profession, and I do not see myself as just a babysitter like most people think. ... I am proud to receive the recognition and it makes my job feel important.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“WAGES is important because child care workers are extremely underpaid. I worked through the pandemic without my center closing one time. We opened our doors to emergency responders and other essential workers when they had nowhere to send their children. Having a bonus that shows appreciation for our work is important to keep teachers in the field.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“The program helps me feel appreciated and valued for what I do. That means a lot.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it makes me feel appreciated and enables me to enhance my program for the children in my classroom. It’s good for ECE professionals as a whole because it provides support in a profession that doesn’t typically pay well.” (Craven, teacher)

“The WAGES Program is an encourager. I’ve told others how the program is there to make providers feel good about the work we do. This is not an easy career, and we need all the encouragement we can get.” (Cumberland, family child care home provider)

“WAGES is important for child care workers to feel appreciated for all we do, especially now with COVID issues. Most of us work very hard to be great caregivers, and it is nice to be recognized.” (Davidson, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it makes teachers feel valued and important for what they are doing. It also is very helpful.” (Davie, 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\$ creates a sense of pride. We are being recognized for our important work and level of education.” (Forsyth, director)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel established and appreciated in my position.” (Gaston, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps teaching staff to feel more motivated and appreciated.” (Haywood, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped increase my self-worth. To know I am appreciated and my hard work in my education and my program is acknowledged helps my self-esteem.” (Henderson, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program over the years has helped me feel like child care workers are appreciated and recognized for the great work we do.” (Hertford, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program is beyond a financial help. In a field where we are overworked and underpaid, the WAGE\$ program makes me feel supported and appreciated.” (Iredell, teacher)

“It is important to recognize dedicated and quality early childhood educators for the important work that we do daily!!!” (Jackson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps to validate my job.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“WAGE\$ lets me know that I am appreciated and valued for the work I do in child care.” (Martin, teacher)

“Early childhood education does not receive the support or recognition it deserves. WAGE\$ helps us to feel valued and important by paying us as professionals.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“In a profession that receives so little appreciation for their hard work and dedication, it is deeply appreciated when you are rewarded for your work.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“The supplement increases morale, makes staff feel more professional and valued, and provides funds to support typically low salaries. I am delighted to direct staff to this program since I cannot currently offer salary increases.” (Nash, director)

“WAGE\$ is important because it helps those working in the early childhood field feel recognized and helps them feel as if what they are doing is important.” (Randolph, teacher)

“WAGE\$ lets me know that being in the child care field is important and our job matters.” (Richmond, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has given me more confidence in the field I work in, because programs like this ensure child care workers feel appreciated.” (Stanly, teacher)

“I think WAGE\$ helps staff feel valued and confirms the work done is worthwhile and important. This in turn helps us to do better and worry less. This all benefits the children we care

for and teach. Ultimately that is the goal: for our children to have the best environment for learning and growth.” (Surry, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is a self-esteem builder and makes you feel empowered. This is a way to recognize our work; often we do not get recognized.” (Transylvania, teacher)

“Having a team that supports what you do and cares enough to make sure you are compensated gives you joy and enhances the joy of teaching.” (Warren, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me to feel like we matter as much as other educators.” (Wayne, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me feel like I am doing a good job and that others outside of the children I work with and their families feel I am important.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because the supplement gives me a sense of worth. I am compensated because of my education and my service. That’s important to me! I am able to keep my bills paid and save as well. I am also able to provide whatever I need for the children in my care without asking the parents or my center for help/funds. The WAGE\$ Program is such a blessing. Thank you.” (Wilson, teacher)



Appendix E: Smart Start Messages Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY22

“These supplements are so vital to our staff. Thank you for this tangible support.” (Alamance, teacher)

“Thank you for your support. Please continue to support us. It makes our jobs less stressful and easier to manage.” (Alexander, teacher)

“I really appreciate your generosity and your continued support to teachers in early childhood. It means a lot that you want to help and believe in us. THANK YOU!!!” (Alleghany, director)

“Thank you a million times, thank you!” (Avery, teacher)

“I have been operating my family child care home for almost 14 years and I attribute my ability to stay in the field and with my program to WAGES¹. The supplement from the WAGES Program is much needed and so appreciated. Thank you!” (Brunswick, family child care home provider)

“WAGES really helps and is greatly appreciated! I love my career and the supplement helps me to be able to afford staying in it!” (Buncombe, teacher)

“The supplement is great and thanks for showing us that what we do is important.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“We are very blessed to have these funds and they are very important to helping us keep our doors open.” (Caldwell, family child care home provider)

“Find a way to increase funding. I am hoping that the bonus grants we have been receiving are somehow transitioned into the WAGES Program.” (Clay, director)

“Thank you so much for your financial support in helping me be successful in this line of work!” (Cleveland, family child care home provider)

“These funds are greatly appreciated. They have come at times when I was truly desperate to make ends meet for my family. Thank you.” (Columbus, teacher)

“I am grateful for the support given and it helps make me a better teacher. I can’t thank you enough!” (Craven, teacher)

“Please keep it! Thank you. It’s a wonderful incentive. Staffing issues are challenging, and this helps.” (Cumberland, 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 for giving the incentive to continue doing what I love. Because of WAGE\$, I am able to support my own family and I’m able to keep rates low, which is a benefit to the families I serve.” (Davidson, family child care home provider)

“I am beyond grateful and cannot thank you enough for making this a priority for early educators.” (Davie, teacher)

“Thank you so much for the additional supplement. It means so much to have a fund designed especially for early childhood educators who receive much less than what they deserve. Thank you!” (Durham, teacher)

“Thank you so much for caring and appreciating our work.” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“Thank you! Your support and appreciation for child care teachers is awesome. Most are not looked at as professionals, but you respect us and our hard work. The supplement is greatly appreciated in a field that is underpaid.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“This is one of the best programs. It gives teachers something to look forward to. This program motivates teachers to continue their education, which provides high-quality child care programs.” (Franklin, teacher)

“I appreciate the Lincoln and Gaston Partnership, Governor Roy Cooper, all of our legislators, and WAGE\$ for their support through Smart Start. I am very grateful and appreciative for all they do for their educators who are a part of the program.” (Gaston, teacher)

“I would like to say thank you, Smart Start. They make a difference in my life, therefore I can make a difference in a child’s life.” (Halifax, teacher)

“Thank you! Please continue to SHOW us we are important by continuing to fund this program. We are on the frontlines every day! It’s so necessary.” (Harnett, teacher)

“THANK YOU and please don’t stop these supplement payments.” (Haywood, teacher)

“These funds are helping in every way possible! I can’t thank you enough for this support! You are heroes!” (Henderson, teacher)

“Thanks so much for looking for ways to compensate teachers.” (Hertford, teacher)

“I would like to thank the funders of the WAGE\$ Program for having our backs. ECE teachers do not do this job for the money, as you can tell by how much we are paid and the long hours that we work. We do it because we love it. Having the extra support from this program allows us to continue to do what we love. I appreciate all the hard work it takes to fund this program and appreciate that they continue to keep this program going for us.” (Iredell, teacher)

“Thank you. In the times we are in now, WAGE\$ sometimes helps put food on my table.” (Johnston, director)

“Thank you for showing that we matter.” (Lee, director)

“This program is so beneficial. Early childhood educators are not paid enough to pursue their education, let alone pay for bills and expenses. With this program, educators are able to gain more knowledge and skills, while also having more financial security that also improves their work ethic and approach.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“Thanks for providing the extra funding. Your contributions are used for making sure that my facility’s needs are met. Again, thank you!!” (Martin, director)

“I would like to thank Smart Start for giving us this extra incentive. I've been in the early childhood field for over 20 years, and I definitely see the changes that have been made to better help teachers get to the next level of education. With this program I was able to obtain my associate’s degree and now looking into my bachelor’s. Thank you so much.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“It can help the whole community by supporting one of their needs. They need child care workers.” (Mitchell, teacher)

“The supplement has helped me personally and I appreciate the moral and financial support WAGE\$ has provided.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“Thank you for the supplement! It has helped me and knowing you care is appreciated!” (Nash, teacher)

“These funds are a support system for low income families that struggle.” (Pitt, teacher)

“Thank you for helping me finish school and supply for the needs of my family, and for the help paying my bills and feeling successful in my job.” (Randolph, teacher)

“Thank you for valuing us and the work that we do! This supplement not only helps us but helps our families and our classrooms as well.” (Richmond, teacher)

“I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. This has been a lifesaver and enabled me to stay in this job. This program is so essential for child care providers.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“I really appreciate the supplement. It has helped me financially and made me feel appreciated. I do plan to further my education in the near future! Thank you for the supplement, but even more for your help to keep pushing me to gain more knowledge in early childhood education!” (Rowan, teacher)

“Thank you so much for making my future and the futures of others I help a lot brighter. It is people like you who bring a little light in a dark place, and I thank you for that.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“Thank you so much Smart Start Partnership for making my life so much easier and stress-free. God bless.” (Stanly, teacher)

“Thank you for caring and supporting us, because at an in-home center, there are no benefits or raises. You really can’t praise yourself, so with the bonus (as I call it), I feel seen.” (Surry, family child care home provider)

“I am so very thankful for anything! Teaching does not pay a lot, but it is my love, and I am so grateful to work with children! Each one is special and unique. They all bring new ideas and excitement to our world. I want to teach them and encourage them to make their mark on the world. They are destined to do great things!” (Transylvania, teacher)

“Thank you, thank you, thank you! The supplements are a big help in a profession where the pay is low.” (Wayne, teacher)

“Thank you for supporting the Child Care WAGE\$® supplement program. This has really helped me stay in this field of work.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“I would like to thank you all for showing appreciation for all the hard work that teachers put into their children and careers. I thank you from my heart for everything. You have no idea how thankful I am.” (Wilson, teacher)

“It does help me and my classroom. You'll never know how much I truly appreciate my WAGE\$ check. It helps me to get to those kids, and I love it. I love it because it makes me do more and get more for them.” (Yancey, teacher)