

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2023-2024

Child Care
WAGES[®]
Program



INTRODUCTION:

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

WAGE\$ provides tiered education-based salary supplements to teachers, directors and family child care home providers working with children from birth to five with the goal of improving the retention, education and compensation of this workforce. While supplements alone cannot solve the 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 child care programs struggle to attract and retain staff in the current employment climate, WAGE\$ can help turn the tide on turnover and decrease the financial stress experienced by an essential workforce.

In North Carolina, WAGE\$ is made possible through a funding collaboration between local Smart Start partnerships that elect to participate and the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Child Care Services Association administers the program for participating counties across the state and extends gratitude on behalf of the participants to these supportive funders. Please see page 11 for a 2023-2024 funder list.



WAGE\$ BENEFITS RECIPIENTS, THEIR EMPLOYERS, THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THEY SERVE AND THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY LIVE

WAGE\$ supplements are issued directly to eligible early educators in participating counties, and they can use those payments in any way that meets their needs. Eighty-one percent (81%) use the supplements to help pay bills. Others pay for basic needs like housing or food, for transportation, classroom resources, health care, child care, school or even recreation/rejuvenation. Participants share a multitude of ways that they benefit from the supplements, but the benefits don't stop there.

Director Davina Woods, who has staff participating on the program, articulated the widespread impact:

"I have had the pleasure of witnessing first hand WAGE\$ benefits to child care programs, child care workers and the child care workforce as a whole. Here is a brief synopsis of my observations:

Establishing a Positive Corporate

Culture: WAGE\$ helps child care programs develop a positive corporate culture by demonstrating a commitment to valuing and investing in our employees. This leads to increased job satisfaction and morale among child care workers, which ultimately benefits the children in our care.

Attracting Educated and Experienced

Practitioners: In today's competitive environment, attracting and retaining educated and experienced child care practitioners is essential for maintaining high-quality programs. WAGE\$ is an excellent marketing strategy, signaling potential employees that our program values their expertise and is willing to invest in their compensation.

Supporting Early Educators: By providing financial support through salary supplements, WAGE\$ helps early educators feel supported, appreciated

and valued for the vital work they do. This leads to increased job satisfaction and motivation, ultimately improving our children's quality of care.

Creating Retention, Stability and

Longevity: High turnover rates in the child care workforce disrupt children's development and outcomes. WAGE\$ helps create retention, stability and longevity among child care workers by offering financial incentives to remain in the profession. This continuity of care benefits children by providing them with consistent relationships and nurturing environments.

Improving Children's Outcomes:

Research has shown that the quality of early childhood education programs significantly impacts children's cognitive, social and emotional development. By supporting child care workers through initiatives like WAGE\$, programs improve overall quality, leading to better outcomes for children regarding school readiness, academic achievement and long-term success.

Overall, WAGE\$ plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of child care programs, supporting the workforce and ultimately improving outcomes for children."

WAGE\$ PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE LESS FINANCIAL STRESS AND ARE MORE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS.

Economic insecurity impacts teacher well-being, and can have consequences for the quality of interactions they have with the children in their care. 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. WAGE\$ enhances their compensation and recognizes their achievements.



“The WAGE\$ Program is very important for child care providers because it helps us to be less stressed when trying to deal with the cost of living. Children benefit when their teacher can give 100% to them and not be stressed over how to pay a necessary bill.”

- teacher

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program has helped supplement my paycheck during times when finances have become scarce. It has gotten me through many times when I was afraid that I would have no money to pay bills or buy groceries. ... WAGE\$ has eased a lot of anxiety regarding finances. Having the supplement has helped enormously for unexpected expenses.”

- teacher

“WAGE\$ is important because providing this service or incentive helps. Knowing that I have a little financial freedom frees my mind. I can be more productive in my class and not worry about not having a bill paid.”

-teacher

“WAGE\$ allows me to stay in the profession I love and helps relieve burdens, which in turn makes my classroom less stressful and more enjoyable.”

- family child care home provider

WAGE\$ ENCOURAGES, SUPPORTS AND REWARDS CONTINUED EDUCATION

89%

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



According to 2023 workforce data, 57% of the early childhood center based teaching staff had at least an associate degree in any field and 42% had earned these degrees specifically in the field.* WAGE\$ plays a role in encouraging, supporting and rewarding educational pursuits.

The education required to receive a supplement ranges from 12 semester hours of early childhood coursework or the National Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential all the way to a doctorate degree. Participants with education below an associate degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours are awarded temporarily and must make educational advancements in order to retain their eligibility. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships may be available to provide financial assistance with the coursework needed. Participants are encouraged to access the benefits of both programs at the same time.

*Child Care Services Association. 2024. Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina, 2023 Workforce Study. Chapel Hill, N.C.

“The WAGE\$ Program inspires me to continue my education. The better educated I am, the better I can help inspire someone else.”

-teacher

“The WAGE\$ Program has been a blessing to my family. It has helped me financially while I went on to complete my bachelor’s and master’s degrees. I am forever grateful.”

-teacher



“WAGE\$ has helped me financially with school, with taking additional trainings to better myself in school and in my classroom.”

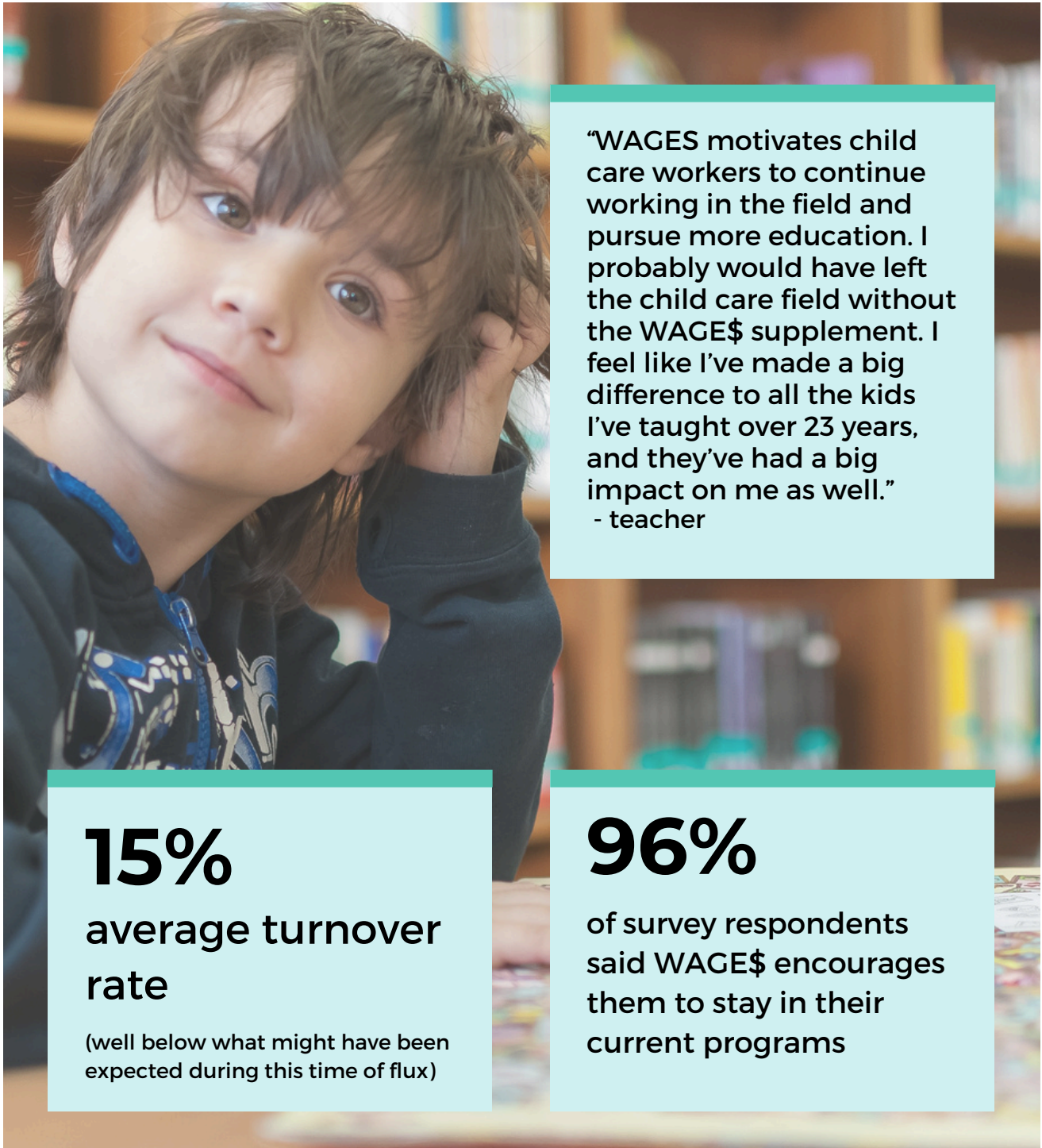
- Dornisha Cherry

WAGE\$ participant Dornisha Cherry has an Associate Degree in Arts and an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education under her belt, and is now pursuing her B-K licensure with a concentration in teacher education. She believes that WAGE\$ has helped her increase her education. Her director encouraged her to get on WAGE\$ initially and she was immediately interested in moving up the scale.

“WAGE\$ has helped me financially with school, with taking additional trainings to better myself in school and in my classroom,” Dornisha said. “It has helped me provide resources to work on the activities the children need. It has absolutely helped me stay in child care because I could get the education I need to provide quality care for children and to keep my position in the center.”

WAGE\$ HELPS PARTICIPANTS STAY IN THE FIELD, GIVING CHILDREN STABLE AND ENGAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS

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



“WAGES motivates child care workers to continue working in the field and pursue more education. I probably would have left the child care field without the WAGE\$ supplement. I feel like I’ve made a big difference to all the kids I’ve taught over 23 years, and they’ve had a big impact on me as well.”
- teacher

15%

average turnover rate

(well below what might have been expected during this time of flux)

96%

of survey respondents said WAGE\$ encourages them to stay in their current programs

“The WAGE\$ Program is important to help those of us who are low-income. We have dedicated our careers not to being rich, but to helping children in our care to be successful individuals. It warms my heart when I see a child light up when they’ve accomplished something that they’ve struggled to do. These funds help me stay in this career that I love.”

- teacher



“WAGE\$ is one of the best programs, if not the best, to help support early childhood centers because staffing and teacher retention are amongst the biggest issues we face.”

- Mikaela Mock

“WAGE\$ is one of the best programs, if not the best, to help support early childhood centers because staffing and teacher retention are amongst the biggest issues we face,” said director Mikaela Mock. “It is so hard to provide a livable wage without charging families an arm and a leg. This goes directly to teachers and helps them stay in their child care program and encourages them to continue their education. And it helps keep centers open. Especially when I was in the classroom, that additional income was critical. Getting those checks was helpful, and it showed how important early childhood is, and how important it is to retain good teachers. I counted on it and I know people take it into account when they consider whether to move to another job.”

WAGE\$ RECOGNIZES THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF EARLY EDUCATORS

WAGE\$ and its funders know how important it is to have an educated teacher who stays in the field. WAGE\$ participants often juggle work, family and school all while trying to make ends meet on a minimal salary. As the essential workforce behind the workforce, early educators make it possible for parents to go to work and are the foundation upon which the nation can build economic success. Their dedication is recognized and rewarded through the WAGE\$ supplement.

“WAGE\$ is important to show child care workers that they are appreciated. The child care field is full of unsung and underpaid heroes who go above and beyond for the children in their care. This extra supplement shows that someone acknowledges their work.”
-teacher

96%

of survey respondents said WAGE\$ made them feel more appreciated and recognized for their work

“WAGE\$ gives educators a sense of appreciation. It lets us know that we are recognized, and we are exactly what this world needs.”
- director



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF WAGES

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
Robeson County Partnership for Children
Rockingham County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Smart Start of Brunswick County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davidson County, Inc.
Smart Start of Davie County, Inc.
Smart Start of Forsyth County
Smart Start of Mecklenburg County
Smart Start of Transylvania County
Smart Start 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



“Thank you will never be enough. This supplement is what keeps me in the field and helps my family survive.”
-teacher



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