

Child Care WAGES® Program Statewide Final Report Fiscal Year 2025

REPORT CONTENTS

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

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

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

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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.

Table 4 – States the number of individuals paid, their programs and the number of children impacted. Please note that these individuals may or may not still be eligible at the end of the year, so this number will likely be different than the number of active participants represented on other tables.

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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 FY25, WAGE\$ was a partnership between participating local Smart Start partnerships, the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

GENERAL PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

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

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

PROGRAM OVERALL IMPACT

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program impacts the community by improving the quality of early care and education for young children. Most evidence suggests there are three primary factors associated with teacher quality: education, stability and compensation. WAGE\$ addresses all three. Through graduated salary supplements, the program helps decrease turnover and encourages the continued educational pursuits of the child care workforce. While supplements alone cannot solve the workforce compensation crisis, they are a critical strategy until early educators receive the base pay, benefits and respect they deserve for the important work they do. As of June 2025, 3,534 child care professionals in 1,661 child care programs from 67 North Carolina counties were active participants in the Child Care WAGE\$® Program. Catawba County returned to WAGE\$ this year for one payment in the second half of the fiscal year.

As of June 2025, 664 of the active participants were reported by their employers as being NC Pre-K teachers and assistants. Of this group, 233 are teachers and 431 are assistant teachers in NC Pre-K classrooms. These individuals work in 438 different child care programs in 66 counties.

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. Forty-one (41) of the participating counties (61%) funded Tier Two or higher for at least half the year, which is down slightly from FY24.

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

Table A: Tier and Income Cap Selections*

	\$17 per hour	\$19 per hour	\$23 per hour	Totals
Tier One	14	11	1	26
Tier One / Tier Two Split	3	0	0	3
Tier Two	4	18	12	34
Tier Two / Tier Three Split	0	0	1	1
Tier Three	0	2	1	3
Totals	21	31	15	67

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

Out of the new FY25 applicants from participating counties that did not qualify for WAGES\$, 38% did not yet have the education needed to participate, and 33% were over the income cap for their county or region. For new applicants to be over income in FY25, their hourly rate would have exceeded their county's income cap *without* stabilization grant assistance.

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

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

Thirty (30) 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 FY25.

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

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.

The turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants for FY25 was only 13%, 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 program goal of 25%. The turnover rate among WAGE\$ NC Pre-K teachers and assistants was 12%.

The participant turnover rate compares favorably to the 38% turnover rate of full-time teachers and assistants in the state's early childhood workforce overall, captured in 2023 workforce data (Child Care Services Association, 2024). The study also states that 23% of all teaching staff indicate they plan to leave the field in the next three years. Continued efforts to make it possible for teachers to stay are essential.

Given the low compensation for early educators, the rate of departure would likely have been much higher without the workforce supports available in North Carolina, including WAGE\$, Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus and the TEACH 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 2023	Program Goal	WAGE\$ FY25
Turnover Rates	31%	38%	25%	13%

It is clear that North Carolina's \$14.42 per hour median rate of pay for teachers and assistants is simply not enough to attract and keep qualified staff. While this rate is an increase from the \$12 per hour rate reported in workforce data from 2019, it has not kept pace with inflation. Someone

earning \$12 per hour in January 2019 would have the buying power of someone earning \$14.70 in January 2024.

Though additional compensation is still needed, the stabilization grants have helped to increase the pay for many early educators. Now that those funds are no longer being issued by the state, many employers may find it difficult to maintain those higher hourly rates going forward. WAGE\$ supplements are a crucial support for early educators and enhance the best compensation employers can offer, making it more feasible for educated professionals to afford to teach children.

Of all WAGE\$ participants statewide with an associate degree focused on early childhood education or higher, only 11% left their programs this past year. Of all participants with less education, 22% 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

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
AAS ECE or higher	10%	13%	13%	12%	11%
Below AAS ECE	19%	19%	21%	26%	22%

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 to provide children and families what they really need.

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.

“WAGE\$ helps with consistency by keeping the staff at the same place, building relationships between teacher and child. The children see the same teachers, and it is good for the program.” (Martin, director)

Education

The WAGE\$ population is well educated, with the bulk of participants having at least a two-year degree. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the active FY25 WAGE\$ participants whose counties have participated two or more years (and 94% of those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms) are being funded for having an Associate Degree with at least 24 birth to five focused semester hours, 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.

Many participants at temporary levels were surveyed during the year to learn more about their educational plans and potential barriers (434 completed calls). Seventy-three percent (73%) indicated that they do still intend to take coursework to remain eligible for their WAGE\$ supplements and 52% said they had completed new coursework since their last submission. WAGE\$ also called a number of recipients to follow up on their original survey and update their education status.

When given a list of possible benefits resulting from WAGE\$, 89% of participants overall who responded to the annual survey agreed that the supplements provide an incentive to seek additional coursework or help make the pursuit of that coursework more financially feasible.

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

*“The WAGE\$ Program encouraged me to keep going further with my education. At 34 years of age, I obtained a bachelor’s degree--something I had given up on previously.”
(Rutherford, director)*

Compensation.

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program increases the compensation of participants through salary supplements. Despite obtained education, compensation in the field continues to be low and is not competitive with many other professions. Stabilization grants made it possible for sites to increase compensation through raises, bonuses and/or benefits. In FY21 (four years ago), 77% of the WAGE\$ participants earned less than \$15 per hour compared to only 24% in FY25. It seems likely that the stabilization grants have contributed significantly to this change. Despite this improvement, the median hourly rate of active WAGE\$ participants is only \$16.82.

Looking only at those participants working in NC Pre-K classrooms, 4% earn less than \$15 per hour.

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

- 54% teachers and assistants
- 90% family child care home providers
- 63% directors and assistant directors
- 83% owners

Even with improved hourly rates, early educators are underpaid for the work they do, which is illustrated by a comparison to the rate of \$22.54 per hour needed for one North Carolina

employee to meet basic, fundamental needs. The needed rate increases to \$37.37 per hour if that adult has one child (Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2025).

The poor compensation across the board highlights the need for salary supplements to attract and retain qualified staff. WAGE\$ survey results support this. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the respondents stated that WAGE\$ encourages them to stay with their current child care programs.

The average six-month supplement payment issued statewide during FY25 was \$1,227. 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 \$614 to \$1,939. The average six-month supplement at each tier level can be seen in Table D below. Thirty-one (31) participating counties were able to fund an increase over their base tier and/or provide year-end enhancements. One Tier One county issued a percentage cut on awards for the year, but was able to issue a small year-end bonus.

Table D: Compensation by Tier

Tiers Funded FY25	Number of Participating Counties by Tier	Average Six-Month Supplement
All Tiers	67	\$1,227
Tier One	26	\$961
Tier One/Tier Two Split	3	\$978
Tier Two	34	\$1,319
Tier Two/Tier Three Split	1	\$1,681
Tier Three	3	\$1,750

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:

- 79% are better able to pay their bills
- 70% are more able to address the basic needs of their families (food/housing)
- 61% rely on the supplements to help address transportation costs
- 58% use the funds to provide additional resources for their classrooms or child care programs

In a separate question, a greater number of respondents (91%) 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. 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. 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.

“WAGE\$ has helped me keep gas in my car so I can get to work and enjoy the children I have been blessed to have in my life. ... WAGE\$ is important because the program helps me pay for many things that my paycheck does not. The supplement always comes at the right time when I just do not know how I am going to make it to the next paycheck.”
(Wilson, teacher)

OUTPUTS

This section highlights the projected outputs of the Child Care WAGE\$® Program across all participating counties for FY25 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 3,500 eligible participants will receive WAGE\$ payments as of June 30, 2025.	Output exceeded. As of June 2025, 4,075 applicants had received WAGE\$ payments.
2	Child Care WAGE\$® staff will conduct 25 outreach opportunities to child care professionals to offer information about the program.	Output exceeded. WAGE\$ conducted 47 outreach sessions.

WAGE\$ payments: Four thousand seventy-five (4,075) participants were paid for completing at least one six-month period on the Child Care WAGE\$® Program during FY25. These participants worked in 1,806 facilities serving approximately 85,855 children. This number is an unduplicated count of supplement recipients. Of these, 743 were NC Pre-K teachers or assistants. Please note that these paid individuals may or may not still be eligible at the end of the year, so this number is different than the number of active participants discussed elsewhere in this report. Nearly 700 applicants are currently on the waiting list, either waiting for funding and/or completing their initial or reactivated six-month commitment period.

Outreach and recruitment: Forty-seven (47) outreach sessions, both virtual and in-person, were done upon request or because of WAGE\$ solicitation during the year. WAGE\$ representatives also discuss opportunities available through Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus and the TEACH 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, 4,520 recruitment emails or mailings were sent to 3,199

sites.¹ 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 specialist inquired about any possible eligible staff not yet accessing a supplement. One director stated this about WAGE\$ staff in her survey response: “They are always very helpful when they call. Very informational. They always ask if we have additional employees we would like to add and guide us through and give us additional information we need for adding employees.”

Information about the WAGE\$ opportunity was added to Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program materials as well as to the CCR&R Council website. WAGE\$ has reached out to technical assistants in other communities to offer training about WAGE\$ and to request their assistance in spreading the word about the supplements. Those efforts will continue in the coming year.

OUTCOME

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

Table F: Outcome

Projected Outcome	Results
By June 30, 2025, the turnover rate of WAGE\$ participants will be less than 25%.	Outcome met. The turnover rate for WAGE\$ participants was only 13%, well below the benchmark of 25%.

This is a positive, strong outcome. The WAGE\$ supplements are essential to help teachers who want to work with young children be able to do that and still take care of themselves and/or their families.

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

PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

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

Survey samples were created based on the number of potential respondents by position in each county. If the pool of participating teachers in a county was between 1 and 50, the entire teacher recipient population was mailed a survey. A 40% sample was drawn when the teacher recipient population was between 51 and 100 and a 25% sample was drawn if the teacher population was

¹ Please note that this number has been corrected since the mid-year report.

101 or more. All participating directors were also surveyed. Directors in counties funding WAGE\$ who were not personally participating but who had staff members on WAGE\$ and/or Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$® Plus were sent a shared survey to assess the impact of salary supplements. They were sampled using the same protocol described for teachers and responses have been integrated into the director feedback. These directors were asked if they had participants on either or both programs and their responses are included only if they indicated WAGE\$ participation or did not know in which program their staff members participated.

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

Overall, 67% of the sampled population completed surveys (1,731 of 2,578), which included the following:

- 67% of participating teachers/family child care home providers (1,025 of 1,527)
- 74% of participating directors (239 of 325)
- 64% of non-participating directors with staff receiving salary supplements² (467 of 726)

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, nearly 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. – 89%
- The WAGE\$ supplement helps ease financial stress. – 98%
- WAGE\$ encourages me to stay with my current program. – 97%
- The WAGE\$ supplement helps me to provide more resources for my program or classroom. – 91%
- Receiving the WAGE\$ supplement makes me feel more appreciated and recognized for my work. – 97%

Ninety-six percent (96%) 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

² Non-participating directors in some cases may have responded about participants in WAGE\$ and/or AWARD\$ Plus, but an effort was made to include responses for the appropriate program.

of options explaining how participation may be beneficial to the children in their programs, including an option stating that no benefits have been noticed, 96% of responding directors indicated that staff participation in WAGE\$ benefits the children in some way. The two most popular examples of impact were that improved morale has created more positive child-teacher interactions and that staff members are seeking more education, which leads to higher quality care for children.

Nearly 100% percent of all respondents stated that they are satisfied with the program and its administration.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of responding directors reported positive attitudes toward 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:

“They have been helpful, professional, and responsive to any questions I’ve had. Their support has made the process smooth, and I appreciate their dedication to assisting early childhood educators.” (teacher)

“They are always professional, helpful, kind and respectful.” (teacher)

“They are always so kind, and eager to help and support WAGE\$ recipients.” (teacher)

“Staff has always been extremely helpful and encouraging as I continue to pursue higher education.” (teacher)

“The staff is exceptionally professional and offers a wealth of informative insights. They present information clearly and thoroughly, showcasing a high level of expertise and attention to detail.” (director)

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 examples of feedback regarding recognition and appreciation.

“The WAGE\$ Program is important to me because it makes me feel appreciated and valued, and that in return helps to motivate and encourage me. It is a source of hope for my life, the children, and the community.” (Cleveland, teacher)

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

The stabilization grants have helped North Carolina's early education workforce increase their hourly wages, with 76% of WAGE\$ participants in our most recent data earning \$15 per hour or more. However, the grant funding has recently ended and it remains unclear whether employers can continue to support higher hourly rates or for how long. Turnover could increase significantly if those rates return to pre-grant levels.

With this uncertainty, it is particularly critical that WAGE\$ participants not lose their salary supplements. During the grant period, participants still indicated they were experiencing financial hardship so moving forward without any type of support would be detrimental.

In FY25, WAGE\$ operated with a special policy that expired in June. Because the stabilization grants were temporary, they have not impacted participant eligibility. The income eligibility for most active participants has been retained; new applicants are assessed based on their hourly rate without grant money applied.

While it is expected that some rates of pay will be reduced, several hundred WAGE\$ participants could lose their eligibility due to income. The income caps chosen by participating partnerships will play an important role in determining future eligibility. With ongoing participant feedback expressing concerns about these caps, the Education and Compensation Advisory Committee recommended a new cap structure for FY26, which Early Years has adopted. The three options of \$17, \$19 and \$23 per hour in FY25 will be \$19, \$23 and \$25 per hour in the coming year. NCPC, DCDEE and local Smart Start partnerships all have representatives on the committee.

Another challenge experienced in FY25 was the capped funding for administration. WAGE\$ welcomes increased funds from participating Smart Start partnerships in order to provide greater compensation to the supplement recipients. However, administrative support must increase when the supplements are increased. It has been an important benefit of WAGE\$ that the full allocation from a local partnership could go directly into the hands of participants. For this year, NCPC was able to support the additional administrative costs that exceeded the level provided by DCDEE, which kept those costs from being directed to partnerships.

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 which explain the funding collaboration between their local Smart Start partnership, DCDEE and NCPC. 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 FY25. 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 would like to express my deep gratitude to the local Smart Start Partnership for providing the funds for the Child Care WAGES® supplement. Thank you for investing in the future of children and the educators who support them. Your continued support is critical in strengthening the early childhood education workforce, and I hope you will keep up the great work in supporting those of us who are committed to making a difference in the lives of young children.” (Duplin, teacher)



Table 1
Demographic Profile of the 3,534 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Race and Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	42	1%
Asian	35	1%
Black or African American	1764	50%
Hispanic or Latino	83	2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	0%
White	1430	40%
Two or more races	114	3%
Other	22	1%
Not Given	42	1%
Gender		
Male	35	1%
Female	3495	99%
Other	3	0%
Not Given	1	0%
Age Range of Participants		
15-19 years	3	0%
20-24 years	135	4%
25-34 years	681	19%
35-44 years	862	24%
45-54 years	825	23%
55-59 years	432	12%
60-64 years	304	9%
65 and over	292	8%
Position		
Teacher	2017	57%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	4	0%
Assistant Teacher	775	22%
Director	246	7%
Director (Owner)	77	2%
Assistant Director	203	6%
Small Home Provider	212	6%
Ages of Children Served*		
Birth up to Three	812	23%
Three to Five	1878	53%
Mixed Ages	844	24%

*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 3,534 Participants in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025

	# of Participants	% of Participants
Education Level		
CDA Credential	16	0%
12 birth to five sem. hours	23	1%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	14	0%
Early Childhood Education Certificate	1	0%
16 birth to five sem. hours	57	2%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	76	2%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	15	0%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	28	1%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	60	2%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	10	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	21	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	68	2%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	15	0%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	111	3%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	17	0%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	79	2%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	11	0%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	1635	46%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	78	2%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	19	1%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	204	6%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	72	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	775	22%
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	20	1%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	108	3%
PhD/EdD including 18 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
Wage Rate**		
Below \$7.25 per hour	172	5%
\$7.25 - \$10.00 per hour	105	3%
\$10.01 - \$13.00 per hour	295	8%
\$13.01 - \$15.00 per hour	467	13%
\$15.01 - \$17.00 per hour	1019	29%
\$17.01 - \$19.00 per hour	790	22%
\$19.01 - \$21.00 per hour	318	9%
\$21.01 - \$23.00 per hour	368	10%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Report End Date		
0 to .99 Years	61	2%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	290	8%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	408	12%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	425	12%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	284	8%
5.00 or More Years	2066	58%

**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 2024 - June 2025



	Programs	Participants
Center	1,445	3,315
1 STAR	13	32
2 STAR	2	5
3 STAR	151	268
4 STAR	358	746
5 STAR	859	2,148
GS-110	44	83
PROB	1	4
PROV	4	6
SPPROV	2	4
Temporary	11	19
Family Provider	216	219
1 STAR	2	2
3 STAR	21	21
4 STAR	148	150
5 STAR	45	46
TOTALS	<u>1,661</u>	<u>3,534</u>



Table 3
Educational Levels Profile of the 3,534 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025



89% 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.

The numbered categories on the left below correspond to their education levels on the salary supplement scale.

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Position	% of Participants Out Of Active
Director	526	100%	15%
Two	2	0%	0%
Three	7	1%	0%
Four	10	2%	0%
Six	8	2%	0%
Seven	12	2%	0%
Eight	238	45%	7%
Nine	16	3%	0%
Ten	38	7%	1%
Eleven	162	31%	5%
Twelve	32	6%	1%
Thirteen	1	0%	0%
Family Child Care Provider	212	100%	6%
Two	2	1%	0%
Three	6	3%	0%
Four	3	1%	0%
Five	2	1%	0%
Six	5	2%	0%
Seven	4	2%	0%
Eight	85	40%	2%
Nine	5	2%	0%
Ten	12	6%	0%
Eleven	67	32%	2%
Twelve	21	10%	1%
Teacher	2796	100%	79%
Two	49	2%	1%
Three	121	4%	3%
Four	90	3%	3%
Five	29	1%	1%

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 Levels Profile of the 3,534 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025

	# of Participants	% of Participants Out Of Position	% of Participants Out Of Active
Six	70	3%	2%
Seven	112	4%	3%
Eight	1402	50%	40%
Nine	76	3%	2%
Ten	226	8%	6%
Eleven	566	20%	16%
Twelve	55	2%	2%

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 2024 - June 2025



4,075 unduplicated participants received a supplement for completing a six month period that ended during this reporting period; these participants worked in 1,806 different child care programs serving approximately 85,855 children.

	Total Paid*	Total Programs	# Of Children 0 to 5
Center	3,830	1,562	84,841
Family Provider	247	244	1,014
<u>Total</u>	<u>4,077</u>	<u>1,806</u>	<u>85,855</u>

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



Table 5
Annual Turnover Summary of the 4,079 Participants
in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025



The annual turnover percentage is based on an overall population of 4,079 participants. This population includes those individuals that were active during the reporting period of July 2024 - June 2025 (3,534) and those whose turnover was reported during this time (545). 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 2024 - June 2025

Total Participants	=	4,079
Active Participants	=	3,534
Left Center	=	545
Turnover Percentage	=	13%



Table 5
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025



	# of Participants	% of Participants
Race and Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	6	1%
Asian	2	0%
Black or African American	262	48%
Hispanic or Latino	17	3%
White	214	39%
Two or more races	26	5%
Other	7	1%
Not Given	11	2%
Gender		
Male	4	1%
Female	541	99%
Position		
Teacher	349	64%
Teacher (Head Start In Home Educator)	2	0%
Assistant Teacher	114	21%
Director	34	6%
Director (Owner)	6	1%
Assistant Director	22	4%
Small Home Provider	18	3%
Education Level		
CDA Credential	1	0%
12 birth to five sem. hours	12	2%
18 general sem. hours including 4 birth to five sem. hours	7	1%
16 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%
24 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	16	3%
70 general sem. hours (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	3	1%
AAS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	11	2%
36 general sem. hours including 12 birth to five sem. hours	6	1%
70 general sem. hours including 6 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
AAS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	5	1%
45 general sem. hours including 18 birth to five sem. hours	14	3%
AAS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%
57 general sem. hours including 24 birth to five sem. hours	24	4%
AAS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	2	0%
BA/BS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	29	5%
MA/MS (less than 6 birth to five sem. hours)	5	1%
AAS including 24 birth to five sem. hours	188	34%
BA/BS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	18	3%
MA/MS including 6 birth to five sem. hours	4	1%
90 sem. hours toward BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	29	5%
BA/BS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	12	2%
BA/BS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	135	25%

Table 5 (cont.)
Profile of Participants who Left their Programs in North Carolina
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025

	# of Participants	% of Participants
MA/MS including 12 birth to five sem. hours	1	0%
MA/MS including 18 birth to five sem. hours	14	3%
Wage Rate		
Below \$7.25 per hour	15	3%
\$7.25 - \$10.00 per hour	14	3%
\$10.01 - \$13.00 per hour	50	9%
\$13.01 - \$15.00 per hour	86	16%
\$15.01 - \$17.00 per hour	155	28%
\$17.01 - \$19.00 per hour	103	19%
\$19.01 - \$21.00 per hour	55	10%
\$21.01 - \$23.00 per hour	67	12%
Years in Child Care Program: Participant's Start Date to Date Ineligible		
0 to .99 Years	24	4%
1.00 to 1.99 Years	87	16%
2.00 to 2.99 Years	105	19%
3.00 to 3.99 Years	84	15%
4.00 to 4.99 Years	37	7%
5.00 or More Years	208	38%
Regulation Type		
1 STAR	8	1%
3 STAR	43	8%
4 STAR	119	22%
5 STAR	348	64%
GS-110	16	3%
Temporary	7	1%
PROB	1	0%
PROV	2	0%
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.



**53 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025**



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
Catawba County Partnership for Children
Cleveland County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Columbus County Partnership for Children, Inc.
Craven Smart Start, Inc.
Down East Partnership for Children
Duplin County 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

*Henderson County



**53 Partner Organizations
Child Care WAGES® Program
July 2024 - June 2025**



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

*Henderson County

Appendix A: Retention

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY25

“WAGES¹ allows me to stay in my field as a teacher. Without it I would have to look for another job.” (Alamance, teacher)

“WAGES helps families feel more confident that their children are being educated well and instills confidence in the program. It is great because our teacher assistants are especially important to the program. Turnover used to be a lot higher for that position because they are some of the lowest-paid staff, but WAGES helps supplement income so that we have no one leaving Pre-K and have people wanting to come to Pre-K. It has helped every one of our teacher assistants to go back and get an associate degree, and one is working on a bachelor's degree.” (Alleghany, director)

“The WAGES Program is my absolute favorite! It helps me and many others working in child care to be successful and stay in the child care field!” (Avery, teacher)

“I have been a family child care home provider for almost 17 years, and a Child Care WAGES[®] participant for most of that time. The funds I receive from the program allow me to continue my child care program and provide much-needed quality care. I am so grateful for WAGES!” (Brunswick, family child care home provider)

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program helps keep great teachers in the classroom by providing financial support. It means more stability for me and better care for the kids.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“WAGES provides financial stability and makes teachers want to remain in the field, therefore helping the teacher to provide excellent care to the children.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“I do not make a lot of money at my job, but I am needed and love my classroom and center. WAGES helps me stay and still take care of my family.” (Cherokee, teacher)

“WAGES is important to me because we are underpaid as teachers, and it increases job stability and security for us.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“WAGES plays a part in keeping staff interested long-term and supporting them. It helps maintain staff and reduce turnover.” (Craven, director)

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program is very important. The program helps early childhood teachers stay in the field. The low salary is one of the reasons teachers leave early childhood. The WAGES Program helps and tries to prevent this.” (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.

“WAGE\$ helps overall morale. Staff members and applicants are encouraged to stay because of WAGE\$, including a retired school teacher who is now on board. She thought she would have to find something else due to pay, but WAGE\$ helped her to stay. That is a success story in and of itself.” (Davidson, director)

“WAGE\$ helps maintain staff and gives them an incentive to stay in child care, which is not paid as much as the school system. Even though we only get the WAGE\$ supplement twice a year, it helps. I stayed in child care when I could have walked away. WAGE\$ is a financial help for me.” (Davie, director)

“WAGE\$ is important because it helps retain workers. Without enough teachers, the programs cannot run efficiently. It also positively affects the children in care to see a constant face and not new faces all the time because of teachers finding other jobs.” (Duplin, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program empowers teachers by providing them with additional income opportunities, enabling them to extend their years at the same day care. This support enhances their financial stability and enriches the care and education they offer.” (Durham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ motivates employees, improves retention, and recognizes teachers’ achievements. It helps contribute to a more engaged and productive workforce.” (Edgecombe, director)

“WAGE\$ allows me to stay open and continue serving my community of young children and families.” (Forsyth, family child care home provider)

“I have had the same staff for years. Because of WAGE\$, I do not have turnover in staff. Praise God!” (Franklin, director)

“The teachers look forward to the supplement checks from WAGE\$ and AWARD\$ Plus. It keeps them motivated and keeps staff here. There’s a waiting period if they go somewhere else, so they have to wait for the check. It keeps them here and engaged so they could go up on the scale.” (Gaston, director)

“We do not make much money working in child care. WAGE\$ and AWARD\$ Plus help encourage staff to stay in child care. The extra funds help staff with their daily living costs.” (Granville, director)

“WAGE\$ and AWARD\$ Plus help with staff retention, which means more qualified participants stay in the field! Many of my teachers with early childhood education degrees have communicated that they could not remain in the field without the supplements.” (Guilford, director)

“WAGE\$ helps minimize turnover, and it helps to have more income added. It helps us to maintain our staff.” (Halifax, director)

“The funds from WAGE\$ are a big help to keep my business going!!” (Harnett, family child care home provider)

“WAGE\$ is important because early childhood education is vital for the children, and this keeps the same teachers around without a big turnover rate.” (Haywood, teacher)

“I have a Bachelor’s Degree in Child Development, and I know I will never make much money from it, so I appreciate the extra money from WAGE\$ that allows me to keep doing what I love: working with preschool age children.” (Henderson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has encouraged me to stay in the county and child care facility where I am currently employed. Students and staff feel secure having the same staff and support, as well as learning the policies and procedures of the facility. Expectations will be met, and a higher quality program will be provided to our families. I am proud of where I serve Head Start families.” (Iredell, teacher)

“I have been able to do things I could not have done without the WAGE\$ supplement. It has encouraged me to stay at the same center, where I encourage others to pursue education and sign up for WAGE\$.” (Johnston, teacher)

WAGE\$ has supplemented the income of our instructional assistants who could leave and become lead teachers at other facilities.” (Lee, director)

“WAGE\$ helps teachers stay at their jobs because they have the money to pay for bills and groceries.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps with consistency by keeping the staff at the same place, building relationships between teacher and child. The children see the same teachers, and it is good for the program.” (Martin, director)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is very empowering. It has helped ease the burden of paying my bills. The supplement has allowed me to stay in the early childhood profession instead of looking for another job that paid more money. Without the supplement, I would have been forced to leave a job that I love to pursue a higher-paying career.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ improves work motivation, encourages job satisfaction, and supports retention in the early childhood education field.” (Montgomery, director)

“WAGE\$ encourages teachers to stay in the field of education, especially if they are passionate about it!” (Moore, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is very important. Helping teachers stay with the same company for years is a great thing. I have had parents tell me that they feel a sense of relief and comfort to see the same teachers working.” (Pitt, teacher)

“Child Care WAGES® is such a blessing to every early childhood educator who has participated in the program. Working in early childhood education is one of the lowest-paid jobs for the essential work we do. Passion is something money cannot buy, but incentives like WAGES keep our passion ignited to continue making a difference in this world. WAGES is my ‘why.’ It is why I recently went back to school, why I don’t feel unseen, why I don’t feel unappreciated, why I don’t feel burnt out, why I’m still working in early childhood education 16 years later, and ultimately why I will continue choosing the early childhood field every day. Passion is a choice, and it is the driving force behind why we do what we do. My passion fuels my dedication, creativity, enthusiasm, commitment, and love of learning with the students I serve. Thank you, WAGES for being a huge factor in keeping my passion ignited.” (Randolph, teacher)

“WAGES encourages staff to stay in their current positions.” (Robeson, director)

“WAGES is very important! It helps decrease the high turnover rate in child care. It is a confusing, chaotic mess when there is a high turnover with staff constantly changing, and it also affects the children when there is instability.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“WAGES has allowed me to stay at my current job and pay bills without fear of being evicted or not having a car.” (Rowan, director)

“WAGES gives teachers more satisfaction and helps us not drift from job to job.” (Sampson, director)

“WAGES is SO VERY IMPORTANT to help retain employees and make them feel appreciated and worthy, because they hold the most important job in the world by helping raise up the next generation!!! America would not be able to operate in its productivity culture if quality child care did not exist!” (Stanly, teacher)

“WAGES is a great incentive to keep me working in child care.” (Surry, teacher)

“WAGES has allowed me to continue working in this field.” (Union, teacher)

“WAGES keeps early childhood teachers from quitting because of the low wages, and it helps them afford bills and education to be more professional with our young leaders in our classroom.” (Vance, teacher)

“WAGES helps me remain in my job and pay my bills. ... WAGES is important because it keeps qualified early childhood teachers from leaving the profession due to low pay.” (Wayne, teacher)

“Those that are on the program are very satisfied. People with child care degrees choose to work at McDonald’s because it pays more than child care, but WAGES helps to keep them in the field and at their centers. It helps them with their financial issues and needs.” (Wilson, director)

“I am very appreciative of the bonus from WAGES. It encourages the staff to stay. Most of my staff have been here for years, and they look forward to it. One is attending her first college classes.” (Yadkin, director)

Appendix B: Education

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY25

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program¹ has provided me with financial support that has reduced stress and allowed me to focus more on my professional growth. It has also motivated me to pursue further education in early childhood development, helping me gain new skills to better support the children in my care.” (Alamance, teacher)

“The WAGES Program has helped me increase my education. It has been a blessing to me in this economy. I believe it can help anyone who would like to better themselves and stay abreast of the most recent skills to excel in the child care profession.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“Receiving a WAGES supplement is incredibly important because it rewards our most educated staff for their education and allows them to stay in our field. Without WAGES we would either see less educated early childhood educators, or early educators would leave child care centers as they completed their education for more competitive salaries.” (Buncombe, director)

“Child care is a low-paying field, so anything supplemental to staff helps! They understand and love that the more education they get, the better the benefit both financially and for the center and children.” (Cabarrus, director)

“WAGES helps people who are struggling in school and working a full-time job. It has made me realize that helping children is not just a job but a career opportunity.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“WAGES provides opportunities for education and skill expansion.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“WAGES is a wonderful program. It helps staff gain the knowledge they need in the classroom to do their jobs the right way and address the developmental needs of the children. It makes them feel important by getting more money.” (Columbus, director)

“WAGES helps me to further my education and learn more about the children’s developmental needs and how to meet them.” (Craven, teacher)

“In this economy, people need extra funds to make it. WAGES is an incentive these teachers deserve. It keeps the morale and confidence up, and goals are met to further their education.” (Cumberland, director)

“WAGES has encouraged me to go further in my education.” (Davidson, 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 WAGES Program helped me plan better for my career and recognize how education could improve my status.” (Durham, teacher)

“WAGES gives staff more motivation to continue in school and continue to do better and reach for higher goals. It benefits them and their families. It keeps them inspired to work with the children in an engaging way. One teacher on staff received her two-year degree and then pursued another two-year degree, and now she is working on a bachelor’s degree.” (Edgecombe, director)

“The WAGES Program is important because the more educated the teachers are, the better it is for the children. It helps those who need to take time off during the day to supplement income. The learning experiences and quality of care go up.” (Forsyth, director)

“The Child Care WAGES® Program has encouraged me to continue my education. This program helped make my dream come true in 2014 when I received my bachelor’s degree. I am so proud to be a part of this program.” (Franklin, teacher)

“Staff are taking classes to expand their knowledge. We let potential candidates know about the WAGES Program and try to have them complete the information. WAGES is means of getting extra bonus money. With stabilization grants gone, WAGES is even more important now.” (Gaston, director)

“WAGES is important to help staff add to their income. We cannot pay like we want to pay, but WAGES supplements some income and encourages them. One staff member has continued her education and will graduate this year. Another one has earned a four-year degree. It helps as they pursue their degrees and helps with our star rating.” (Green, director)

“I was not planning to go back to school but now I have, and I am proud to see what I have accomplished. WAGES has been an extra benefit for me.” (Guilford, teacher)

“I love my job. WAGES has been a motivator to continue school, and it helps support my children.” (Haywood, teacher)

“WAGES has assisted with obtaining resources to better my future and providing information on how I could increase my stipend such as leveling up my education status. ... WAGES is important because it helps staff in various ways to stay afloat. It has helped me out extremely in assisting with bills, resources for my classes, and payment for tuition in some of my courses during my attendance in college.” (Hertford, teacher)

“The WAGES Program is important because it helps early childhood educators when we need it most. It offers the opportunity to buy extra materials for our classrooms. It also gives us the opportunity to go back to school and seek higher education.” (Iredell, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it pushes people in child care to go to school and better themselves for their students and themselves.” (Johnston, teacher)

“In the few years that I have been receiving benefits from the WAGE\$ Program, it has helped me to increase my knowledge in child care. I appreciate every dime that I have received. The children that I have worked with learn from what I have learned. My motto is ‘plant the seed, watch it grow.’” (Lee, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped our teacher assistants to complete their degrees and move into lead teaching roles.” (Lincoln, director)

“Participating on WAGE\$ and AWARD\$ Plus gives teaching staff an incentive for continuing to work in the education field and obtain higher education.” (Macon, director)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it allows present and future educators to receive what they need, such as education, trainings, and resources, to become qualified educators for all children in early child care environments. This program has been a crucial part of my life as an educator because it has allowed me to continue and complete my Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education in May of 2025. This program has made me more qualified as a teacher.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me stay motivated to take more courses.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is an incentive to continue my education, which in turn makes me a better educator.” (Moore, teacher)

“WAGE\$ encouraged me to further my education.” (Nash, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has encouraged me to inspire others to join the child care field. I was able to complete my two-year degree with help from the WAGE\$ Program.” (Richmond, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me financially, and it has encouraged me to continue my education and not give up.” (Robeson, director)

“WAGE\$ pushes me to go to school and to keep my job.” (Rowan, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program encouraged me to keep going further with my education. At 34 years of age, I obtained a bachelor’s degree--something I had given up on previously.” (Rutherford, director)

I am highly satisfied with WAGE\$. It pushes and motivates staff to get into school.” (Sampson, director)

“WAGE\$ has been a great incentive for me to continue my education and remain in the child care field at my current place of employment.” (Stanly, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement is an incentive and encouragement for not just staying at the entry level of education for child care.” (Surry, director)

“WAGE\$ provides incentive for staff to continue their education.” (Transylvania, director)

“WAGE\$ is important because it incentivizes staff to go back to school to complete their education, which in turn helps support them when they are working in the classroom with the children and their families.” (Union, director)

“WAGE\$ helps me stay on top of my education.” (Wayne, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is a great incentive to continue my education and stay at my current school.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps financially to open a door for people if they want to start going to school or go back to school. It is a program of hope for people that may not see a way to do more with their lives and education.” (Wilson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ enhances salaries and encourages staff to earn degrees.” (Yadkin, director)

Appendix C: Compensation

Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY25

“The WAGES Program¹ allows me to catch up on bills that have been overdue without feeling stress about how to get them paid, allowing me to be a better teacher to my students.”
(Alamance, director)

“WAGES makes me a better and more effective teacher. I have more financial stability and cushion. I can focus better on my job instead of worrying about bills and such.” (Alexander, teacher)

“WAGES has helped me because what I make monthly is basically on the poverty level.”
(Alleghany, teacher)

“WAGES helps me stay afloat.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“Early childhood educators are very underpaid. I am a lead teacher making \$16 an hour, whereas if I went to work at the McDonald’s right next door to my child care center I could start off being a supervisor there at \$18 an hour. WAGES helps me stay motivated to keep my job. I love working with children, but this is my only income. WAGES helps me financially as a single mom of four. We deserve a pay raise, but WAGES helps supplement the low wages.”
(Buncombe, teacher)

“WAGES helps financially which helps lower stress. I can perform better to assist children in my classroom. Thank you so much for allowing me to participate in the program. It has been a huge blessing and allowed me to improve my life and start a savings account.” (Burke, teacher)

“WAGES helps cut into financial gaps at home and gives me some room to breathe, even if it’s just for a month. It helps us to stay focused on the children in our classrooms.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program provides a sense of relief to help pay for rent and groceries.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“The opportunity to receive a WAGES supplement is a lifeline to teachers!” (Cleveland, director)

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program has meant a lot to me. The program has helped me when I fall short and struggle with the increasing cost of everything.” (Columbus, 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.

“My supplement from WAGE\$ usually comes just when I need help to meet my financial obligations, like when we have an exceptionally cold winter or higher temperatures in the summer and the utility bills are higher than normal.” (Craven, family child care home provider)

“The WAGE\$ supplement helps ease the financial stress of paying overhead bills and child care costs. ... Child Care WAGE\$® is important because it helps keep the doors open. It has meant a great deal to me, the children in my care, and the early childhood community.” (Cumberland, director)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it helps support teachers financially, whether it is to pay bills, buy groceries, or buy supplies for the classroom. It has helped me pay the bills that have been sitting and waiting to be paid. As a teacher assistant I do not get paid much, but I do love my job and want to continue to work with children. This program has allowed me to have a little extra money for whatever I may need, as my major bills take most or all of my check each month.” (Davie, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has been great for my family. It has been a financial cushion in times when I did not have money from any other source.” (Duplin, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has been a blessing in many ways and in times when I did not know how I was going to pay for electricity and other bills in my household.” (Durham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has given me the opportunity to improve my life financially.” (Edgecombe, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is important because it helps teachers to support themselves, buy supplies for their students, and be free from the stress of not having enough to pay bills.” (Forsyth, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me stay in my apartment.” (Gaston, teacher)

“I rely on WAGE\$ every year to help pay my bills.” (Granville, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me with bills and debt when I am in a financial crisis.” (Guilford, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped with bills and putting food on the table for my family.” (Halifax, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps with paying bills and being able to get a good night’s rest without worrying about repossession. ... WAGE\$ helps me to be less stressed and focus more on the children.” (Harnett, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program has helped me so much over the years with paying bills and taxes. I am very thankful for the program. There was a time that I struggled to provide for my children as a single parent, but with WAGE\$ I was able to buy food and clothing. It is important for teachers and their families!” (Haywood, teacher)

“WAGES\$ gives me extra income for utility bills in the winter.” (Henderson, teacher)

“WAGES\$ has helped me with stress so I can be more present at my job.” (Hertford, teacher)

“WAGES\$ has helped me to maintain health care and pay bills. As I approach my senior years, my health care costs have doubled. WAGES\$ has assisted me financially to continue to get the medical attention I need. For me to take care of children and perform best at my job, I need to take care of myself first.” (Iredell, teacher)

“Unfortunately, this career path does not pay much. The WAGES\$ Program helps ease that deficit for me. When I have less financial stress, I have more time to plan good experiences for my class.” (Johnston, teacher)

“WAGES\$ has helped me become more financially stable.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“I like to use my WAGES\$ supplement to supply things for my classroom when I can, whether it is for educational support or fun activities in the classroom. The kids and I both enjoy it either way.” (Lincoln, teacher)

“WAGES\$ helps provide a healthy lifestyle for me and helps me enjoy and provide for my children that I teach. As a teacher, you enjoy doing things with your children, but things are not as affordable as they used to be. It has helped with financial struggles of getting important things taken care of, such as paying bills and taxes, car issues, and other situations that may arise in life.” (Macon, teacher)

“WAGES\$ has made me feel more at ease with some of my expenses. ... WAGES\$ is important because it gives teachers a bit more breathing room that we typically do not get but desperately need.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGES\$ has eased my worries about not having enough money. ... WAGES\$ helps teachers make it. Teachers are not paid enough for our time and resources to care for children. I believe teachers should be paid more than doctors. We are the base and the foundation of early learning.” (Montgomery, director)

“The WAGES\$ Program provides essential financial assistance and enhances the overall well-being of a historically underpaid group of diligent workers. By offering targeted support, it aims to uplift their economic circumstances, recognizing the hard work they put in and ensuring they receive fair compensation for their contributions.” (Moore, director)

“The WAGES\$ Program is important because it keeps educators of young children safe financially.” (Nash, teacher)

“The WAGES\$ supplement helps me to provide for my family and feel less burdened when it comes to finances.” (Pitt, teacher)

“When staff receive WAGE\$ supplements and can pay their bills, they are less stressed which creates a better environment for the children.” (Randolph, director)

“The WAGE\$ Program helps me and gives me financial hope in the workplace.” (Richmond, family child care home provider)

“WAGE\$ has helped me put food on the table and buy essentials we needed for our home. Money has been hard to come by lately because of car problems and trying to find a place to live, and the money from WAGE\$ helps me put money back so I can have it when needed.” (Robeson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ gives me money that I do not feel guilty about using for all the extra things that come up. It helps me keep more funds for my family to live off of. It is often the only way I get clothes or shoes for myself.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“The transmission went out in my car. I had to catch a ride to work. Thanks to WAGE\$, I was able to get my car repaired. Thank you WAGE\$.” (Rowan, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me feel valued and appreciated for the job I am doing. It keeps me motivated. My pay is not great and sometimes I get overwhelmed and burnt out, so having any additional income really helps calm my mind and reduce stress.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“Receiving money from WAGE\$ helps with financial responsibilities. I feel appreciated, and it makes me feel better about my job.” (Sampson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ provides reassurance and stability to teachers whose financial stressors outweigh their income. It helps to take a weight off our shoulders.” (Stanly, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me get through summer months when I have no income. It also helps me because I am the only one in my household with an income at the moment, and our economy is extremely costly to live in now. I do not think I could make ends meet on my income alone without the WAGE\$ supplement.” (Surry, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps the lowest-paid teachers in our community pay past-due bills.” (Union, teacher)

“I use my WAGE\$ supplement to pay for essentials such as electricity and gas in my car in those long months when my regular paycheck can’t stretch any further. ... The WAGE\$ Program is so helpful. It recognizes that teachers work hard and are paid nowhere near their worth. The supplement helps to make ends meet a little better.” (Warren, teacher)

“I have been employed for almost three years, and I have been able to provide for my son and myself with help from WAGE\$.” (Wayne, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps with catching up when life throws a curveball.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has helped me keep gas in my car so I can get to work and enjoy the children I have been blessed to have in my life. ... WAGE\$ is important because the program helps me pay for many things that my paycheck does not. The supplement always comes at the right time when I just do not know how I am going to make it to the next paycheck.” (Wilson, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me buy food, medication, and gas to get to work. It has helped me pay my rent. ... Child care workers do not make much money, and the WAGE\$ Program helps. It means a lot. It eases my mind to have help. It helps teachers to feel more at ease while at work knowing someone cares about our welfare.” (Yadkin, teacher)

Appendix D: Appreciation/Recognition Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY25

“The financial support and recognition have encouraged me to continue growing professionally, which ultimately benefits the children in my care and the early childhood community.”
(Alamance, teacher)

“The WAGES Program¹ helps me feel appreciated and seen as an early childhood educator!”
(Buncombe, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it makes staff feel valued and less stressed due to financial concerns.” (Burke, director)

“It makes me feel special to know that I am pouring in to my community, and Child Care WAGES[®] gives right back to me.” (Cabarrus, teacher)

“The Child Care WAGES[®] Program has made me feel more appreciated for what I do. It has helped me grow and learn.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“The WAGES Program is important to me because it makes me feel appreciated and valued, and that in return helps to motivate and encourage me. It is a source of hope for my life, the children, and the community.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“The WAGES supplement is something to look forward to. It lets me know what I am doing matters.” (Columbus, director)

“The WAGES Program makes me feel appreciated for what I do. The extra money helps my family in a much-needed way.” (Craven, teacher)

“WAGES lets me know I am valued in what I do.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“Receiving a WAGES or AWARD\$ Plus supplement can be incredibly important for several reasons. It acknowledges the hard work and dedication of staff members who go above and beyond in their roles. This recognition can boost morale and motivation among the team, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention. Often, these supplements are tied to professional development opportunities. They encourage staff to pursue ongoing education and training, which not only benefits them personally but also enhances their skills and effectiveness in their roles. For programs like ours in child care or education, these supplements can improve overall quality. When staff members are recognized and supported, they are more likely to stay in their positions longer, bringing stability and continuity to the program. This, in turn, positively impacts the quality of care and education provided to children. Ultimately, the biggest

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beneficiaries are the children in our care. When staff are motivated, well-trained, and committed, they create a nurturing and stimulating environment. Children thrive in settings where caregivers are engaged and supported, leading to better outcomes in terms of learning, social development, and overall well-being.” (Duplin, director)

“The WAGES Program is more than a monetary incentive. It boosts confidence by validating and appreciating child care educators.” (Durham, director)

“The Child Care WAGES® Program has benefited me greatly from the beginning of my early childhood education journey. I feel appreciated and that my work does not go unnoticed. With pay in the child care field being the way it is, I am sure educators who receive a supplement from WAGES feel compensated for a job well done!” (Forsyth, teacher)

“WAGES reaffirms the importance of the role I play in the lives and development of children and families.” (Gaston, teacher)

“In addition to helping me out financially, WAGES also makes me feel like my work and effort are recognized and appreciated as an early childhood educator. The pay can be very discouraging.” (Guilford, teacher)

“The WAGES Program makes me feel like I matter. Knowing I am appreciated through this program impacts my mental health.” (Halifax, teacher)

“It is such a wonderful thing that someone notices the work we do.” (Henderson, teacher)

“The WAGES Program is important because it addresses a critical issue in early childhood education: the undervaluation of early childhood educators. By offering wage supplements and other forms of support, the program helps to reduce turnover, increase job satisfaction, and retain skilled educators who are crucial in shaping the development of young children. For educators, it provides a tangible recognition of their hard work, making it more sustainable for them to continue in their vital roles. It also helps to alleviate financial stress, which can be a significant barrier to staying in the profession. For the children in care, it translates to better continuity of care, stronger relationships with caregivers, and more experienced teachers who can implement higher-quality educational practices. This, in turn, helps promote better outcomes for children, especially in their critical early years. Finally, the early childhood community benefits from a more stable workforce, stronger professional networks, and a greater focus on the importance of early childhood education. It fosters a culture where educators are valued and supported, which leads to a stronger, more respected profession overall. In sum, WAGES plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of early childhood education, benefiting both the educators and the children they serve.” (Johnston, teacher)

“WAGES gives meaning and value to this job and helps teachers to do better and be better not only for themselves, but for their community and students.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“WAGES is important because it helps aid with financial issues in my household. I love teaching. The children matter to me. WAGES is like a little bonus for working hard and doing a

good job. Good teachers are hard to find, so this program shows that what we do matters.”
(Macon, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes me proud and feel better about the contribution I’m making to our young children, and in return our young children are benefiting from a consistent and caring teacher.”
(Mecklenburg, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel like I mean something, and it helps with family finances and bills.”
(Montgomery, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it helps teachers in so many ways. Teachers are underpaid and overlooked, and WAGE\$ shows teachers that there are people out there that appreciate what we do. We receive extra funds for daily living, to buy classroom materials, to take extra educational courses, etc. The list goes on.” (Moore, teacher)

“WAGE\$ helps me as a child care provider to feel like I am making a difference.” (Nash, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ supplement means a lot to staff. It means they are not overlooked. A lot of people feel overlooked and underpaid. It helps build more confidence in them and makes them feel more respected.” (Pitt, director)

“WAGE\$ makes me feel rewarded and valued more for my accomplishments and over 30 years of service to this center.” (Randolph, director)

“WAGE\$ helps to recognize that we are important.” (Richmond, teacher)

“It is satisfying knowing someone cares about the well-being of workers in child care. ... WAGE\$ helps to assure workers that they are being recognized.” (Robeson, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is important because it recognizes child care staff and shows them they are valued and appreciated. It goes a long way when staff and teachers are in the classroom dealing with various situations and behaviors. Giving them a token of appreciation is an amazing gesture.” (Rowan, director)

“WAGE\$ helps financially and provides self-worth and satisfaction with the early childhood education field.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is important because it makes me a better educator and it makes me feel important. I can provide better for my family.” (Surry, teacher)

“WAGE\$ makes teachers feel appreciated and at ease.” (Union, teacher)

“The WAGE\$ Program is very important and needed in our community. We as educators are underpaid, overworked, and overlooked, and we are truly thankful for this program.” (Wayne, director)

WAGE\$ keeps me encouraged in a profession that is not highly recognized as important.”
(Wilkes, teacher)

“WAGE\$ is a great help in making ends meet with my teaching staff. It also lets the teachers know that they are cared for, and what they do for the students has not gone unnoticed.” (Wilson, director)

“It is important to recognize those who strive for additional education and experiences to become better educators. By offering additional money, WAGE\$ helps to promote that.” (Yancey, director)

Appendix E: Smart Start Messages Feedback Collected from WAGES Surveys FY25

“I sincerely appreciate the support provided by Smart Start through the Child Care WAGES[®]¹ supplements. This funding not only recognizes the value of early childhood educators, but also directly impacts the quality of care and education young children receive.” (Alamance, teacher)

“The supplement provides critical financial support to early childhood educators. It helps retain qualified staff and improve the quality of care for the young children we serve. These funds ensure that dedicated professionals receive well-deserved compensation and reduce turnover in child care centers. This investment in WAGES enhances our workforce and ECE programs and strengthens child development outcomes. Thank you!” (Alexander, teacher)

“I appreciate you very much. You make me feel important and appreciated for the work I do for children.” (Alleghany, teacher)

“Please keep this program. It helps me stay in child care and helps with my finances.” (Brunswick, teacher)

“Thank you for supporting early childhood educators! This supplement makes a real difference by helping us stay in the field and provide consistent, quality care for young children.” (Buncombe, teacher)

“Receiving this money helps me catch up on bills and allows me to fill my food pantry until the next payment.” (Burke, teacher)

“Early childhood educators deeply appreciate this funding. It helps us want to stay in the field.” (Cabarrus, family child care home provider)

“The funds are very beneficial for teachers and help them prioritize their quality of life, education, basic needs, classroom, etc.” (Caldwell, teacher)

“The funds help supplement the income of the families who receive them. The funds for stabilization grants ended, but there was no word on it. WAGES helps with the grant money going away. It helps take away some of the financial stress.” (Clay, director)

“The supplement helps more than you know, and I’m very appreciative.” (Cleveland, teacher)

“Thank you for helping me feel appreciated. Thank you for supporting child care workers. Thank you for helping us live.” (Columbus, teacher)

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“I appreciate you with my whole heart. Without this program, I would not be in school. It rewards me for furthering my education to help young children. Thank you!” (Craven, teacher)

“I cannot stress enough the importance of continuing to fund this program. Teachers work hard. We give everything that we have, and sometimes we give out so much that we do not have anything left for our own children. Funding this program ensures that you will keep quality teachers in the classrooms who love and care for children as if they were their own. Funding this program will also assist teachers in buying consumables that are needed at times. Funding this program allows teachers to do a little bit more for their classrooms, for their kids, for their families, and even for themselves. Please be mindful of the need for this program to set a lot of teachers up for success. They want to get more education to be highly qualified and proficient in every area but cannot always afford to do the things that they would like to do even in their own education, so all of this helps.” (Cumberland, teacher)

“Thank you! WAGE\$ helps me to continue at my job.” (Davidson, teacher)

“I appreciate you providing support to teachers like me who love what they do but struggle to make ends meet. Thank you!” (Davie, teacher)

“I would like to express my deep gratitude to the local Smart Start Partnership for providing the funds for the Child Care WAGE\$® supplement. Thank you for investing in the future of children and the educators who support them. Your continued support is critical in strengthening the early childhood education workforce, and I hope you will keep up the great work in supporting those of us who are committed to making a difference in the lives of young children.” (Duplin, teacher)

“I appreciate the support provided through the WAGE\$ supplement. Thank you for investing in early childhood education, and for recognizing the importance of retaining qualified teachers in the field.” (Durham, teacher)

“WAGE\$ has been great, and I support Smart Start. Keep up the good work.” (Edgecombe, family child care home provider)

“Thank you very much. I am praying on my knees that the WAGE\$ Program never ends. I need you. We need you. Our community needs you, and it will all come back full circle because the children are truly our future.” (Forsyth, family child care home provider)

“Thank you so much for helping to make my dream come true. The Child Care WAGE\$® Program helped me to pay my tuition and continue my education. I could not have done it alone. I received my bachelor’s degree in 2014 thanks to WAGE\$. This funding also helps me to provide extra resources for my classroom when needed.” (Franklin, teacher)

“Thank you. I really appreciate the funding. It helps me not to worry about how I am going to make it without working a second job. It always arrives when I really need it.” (Gaston, teacher)

“I appreciate you very, very much for providing this supplement. I do not and have never taken it for granted. Please let it continue to come, for I am grateful and thankful.” (Granville, family child care home provider)

“Thank you so much for your support. It is extremely helpful. I hope you will be able to continue this program.” (Greene, teacher)

“Thank you, Smart Start, for funding the WAGE\$ Program. I hope that it will be continued for me and others in the coming years. Thank you.” (Guilford, director)

“Thank you for understanding our jobs are challenging. We often find that we are left filling in the gaps with our own money because we do not want our students not to have the education they deserve. Your support is appreciated greatly.” (Halifax, teacher)

“Thank you so much. I was able to repair things on my house, and I will be able to do more repairs with the next check so that our house does not fall down around us.” (Haywood, teacher)

“Thank you for supporting early childhood teachers. This supplement has helped my family financially in important ways. Please continue to support these supplements.” (Henderson, teacher)

“Thank you for providing such a remarkable opportunity for staff members to help our financial standing and maintain our day-to-day lifestyle.” (Hertford, teacher)

“Thank You. With your support I feel appreciated and that you believe in me. Not only are you supportive, but your hearts are dedicated to the children getting the best care and education possible. I admire this. WAGE\$ allows me to meet my medical needs, which enables me to perform my job and strengthens my mental health.” (Iredell, teacher)

“Thank you so much. These funds can be the difference in a family being homeless or not.” (Johnston, director)

“The supplement is absolutely keeping teachers in classrooms and helping to ease financial burdens from other aspects of life.” (Lee, teacher)

“Keep helping educators. The WAGE\$ Program is greatly beneficial and keeps me from changing degrees due to financial stress.” (Lenoir, teacher)

“Thank you for the extra help. We need it. Most of us live in poverty, and this check helps. Most of the staff qualify for food stamps, Medicaid for themselves and their children, and housing assistance.” (Lincoln, director)

“Thank you for helping me to complete my career dreams. I am successful because of this supplement and the opportunities that come with it.” (Mecklenburg, teacher)

“THANK YOU for seeing how important it is to have well-paid teachers.” (Mitchell, director)

“Thank you! Because of this program I can continue pursuing my degree while working without stress.” (Montgomery, teacher)

“I appreciate all the hard work you do to keep this program going. It helps child care providers like me to save money for retirement, pay bills, and buy necessary materials for the children.” (Moore, family child care home provider)

“We could not do what we do without the support of programs like WAGE\$, so we thank you!” (Nash, teacher)

“Thank you. I am very appreciative and grateful for the supplement. It has been a great asset to me and my students.” (Northampton, teacher)

“Thank you for thinking of such a program. Thank you for trying to close the gap. A lot of people do not understand that teachers should be paid more, and others just do not care. Thanks for caring.” (Pitt, teacher)

“Thank you just is not enough. You are making a difference in early childhood educators’ lives.” (Randolph, teacher)

“Thank you so much. The funds you provide are greatly appreciated.” (Richmond, teacher)

“Thank you so very much! The WAGE\$ Program is a lifesaver. Without it I would probably be living paycheck to paycheck, and it would be tight.” (Rockingham, teacher)

“The funds are greatly appreciated and needed. Thank you for supporting our work and recognizing just how important early childhood education really is.” (Rowan, teacher)

“Thank you! The supplement helps me to fill the cabinets and keep my family from being hungry.” (Rutherford, teacher)

“Thank you. Working in child care does not pay a lot, and receiving supplements helps me financially and makes me feel that my job is appreciated. I feel better about my job!” (Sampson, teacher)

“Thank you for seeing the value in the work I do. I will take all the financial appreciation you can muster.” (Stanly, teacher)

“Thank you. This extra source of income means so much to me and my small family. It is such a blessing to receive it! Sometimes I am counting down the days until it comes, but that is just how much I truly need this WAGE\$ bonus! Every time, the Lord sends it right on time and I could not be more thankful for it! Thank you for all the work and dedication you put into this project so we can receive this supplement!” (Surry, teacher)

“Thank you for helping me to meet my financial needs so I can continue working in the field I love.” (Union, teacher)

“The supplements have been important to the early childhood education field. It gives early educators something to look forward to. Our communities need to continue fighting to keep this funding going.” (Vance, teacher)

“Thank you so much for all you do for child care workers. Without you, we may not be able to provide for some of our personal and child care needs.” (Warren, teacher)

“Thank you for allowing me to participate in the WAGE\$ Program. I am thankful for my income, but I still struggle financially. The funding I receive from WAGE\$ helps me to pay bills. I love teaching. It has been extremely rewarding in my life. The money I receive from WAGE\$ helps me to breathe a little easier financially so I can be more clear-minded when I work with my children. In other words, it helps me to be less stressed so I can give my children 100% each day. It also helps me buy little things for my classroom and children.” (Wayne, teacher)

“Please keep the WAGE\$ Program. It helps us so very much. Thank you.” (Wilkes, teacher)

“The supplement means the world to most of us. Living paycheck to paycheck is so heartbreaking, but the love of the children keeps us coming to work day after day. We thank you from the heart of our hearts. Thank you!!!” (Wilson, teacher)

“Please continue the WAGE\$ Program. We are in a county that has only four child care centers. The supplement encourages people to keep working in a center. I appreciate the supplements, too.” (Yadkin, director)