

## What is STEP\$?

STEP\$ (Supporting Teachers' Earnings & Progress) is the Division of Child Development and Early Education's (DCDEE) salary supplement program for full-time infant-toddler lead teachers, teachers and family child care providers. DCDEE provides the funding for the program and Early Years is the administrator. Through education-based salary supplements, STEP\$ is designed to increase retention, education and compensation.

## Who is eligible to receive a salary supplement?

Per DCDEE requirements, to be eligible for a STEP\$ supplement, applicants must:

- Work as a lead teacher, teacher or family child care provider 40 hours per week with infants, 1-year-olds or 2-year-olds.
- Earn at or below \$16.00 per hour.
- Work in a licensed child care center or home.
- Have a level of education on the STEP\$ supplement scale.

## How much will I receive?

Salary supplements are tied to the recipient's level of education. Awards are issued in two six-month payments, each after the participant completes an assigned six-month commitment period in the same child care program.

## What do I have to do to participate in STEP\$?

Eligible infant-toddler educators must submit the STEP\$ application, pay documentation and official transcripts or an active CDA Credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. If applying with the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential, an official transcript or the DCDEE-awarded certificate is accepted. The DCDEE-issued letter may be accepted for Credential equivalency. Visit the website for more information and to access the application.

## How are supplements received?

Payments are issued following commitment period completion to eligible participants who have met the requirements. Commitment periods run from mid-month to mid-month and are established by Early Years for each participant using application date, start date and education documentation. Payments are based on half of the annual award amount and are contingent upon funding availability. STEP\$ staff must verify that participants have worked in their child care programs during the preceding six months before payments can be issued. Payments are issued after Early Years has received the necessary funding from DCDEE.

## Do I have to pay taxes on the supplement?

The salary supplement is income. Participants will be mailed an IRS-1099 form at the end of January as needed in accordance with IRS guidelines. Recipients are responsible for reporting and paying any personal income taxes due.

## If I work in a child care center, what is the center's responsibility?

A child care center must agree to provide verification of an applicant's employment status and income and agree not to use participation in the program to offset normal pay increases. The center is not responsible for providing the salary supplement should funding no longer be available.

## How can I increase the level of the supplement?

Participants in STEP\$ may increase their supplement amounts by gaining more education. The TEACH Early Childhood® scholarship program offers scholarships to early care and education professionals who want to earn course credits. Contact TEACH at Early Years (919-967-3272) for more information. Participants are encouraged to send STEP\$ an updated official transcript after completing a higher level on the scale so the award can be increased.

## Will I receive a supplement if I move to another child care program?

Payments are issued to participants after completion of an eligible six-month period in the same child care program. If a participant moves to another licensed child care program and meets all eligibility requirements, then the commitment period must be reset based on reapplication and the employment date at the new site. This policy is designed to encourage more stability for the children in care. Reapplication is also required annually and priority is given to those who have not yet received supplements, so it is possible that participants will not be able to complete a fundable six-month commitment period within the same fiscal year if they leave the program from which they originally applied.

## Do I have to reapply to remain eligible?

DCDEE requires annual reapplication to be eligible for a STEP\$ supplement. Reapplication materials should be sent to Early Years. Eligibility will be reassessed each year. The next fiscal year begins in February and applications will not be accepted before January 2. Any applications postmarked prior to that date will be considered for the current fiscal year only. If participants are reapplying and are not first-time applicants, they will not need to resubmit education documentation unless additional coursework has been obtained. Payment dates may be dependent upon previously paid commitment periods.

## Can I participate in both STEP\$ and WAGES (or a local supplement program)?

STEP\$ applicants can only participate in one salary supplement program. Submitting an application indicates that the applicant is choosing STEP\$ if eligible. If the applicant's current initiative provides higher payments, they may want to consider continuing with that program. If unsure which supplement program is most beneficial, contact a STEP\$ specialist at 919-967-3272.