TEACH EARLY CHILDHOOD®
National Center
A Division of Early Years

teachecnationalcenter.org
earlyyearsnc.org



TEACH EARLY CHILDHOOD®
NATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT
FY 2025-2026

A LETTER FROM **OUR PRESIDENT**

The early childhood education field continues to navigate a period of significant uncertainty. Across the nation, programs and educators are being asked to do more with limited resources, while workforce shortages, financial pressures and barriers to professional advancement continue to challenge the stability and sustainability of the field. At the heart of these challenges is a fundamental truth: **we cannot build a strong foundation for children without investing in the educators who nurture, teach and support them every day**. Meeting this moment requires more than short-term solutions. It calls for bold thinking, sustained investment, meaningful partnerships and workforce strategies designed not only to respond to today's challenges, but to withstand the uncertainties of tomorrow.



KRISTI SNUGGS
EARLY YEARS PRESIDENT

For more than 30 years, the **TEACH Early Childhood® National Center** has worked alongside partners across the country to turn this vision into action. We believe a stronger early childhood workforce is possible when educators have access to affordable higher education, comprehensive supports, meaningful opportunities for career advancement, and compensation that recognizes their knowledge, skills and contributions. Through innovative programs and collaborative partnerships, TEACH is helping transform these essential elements into pathways that enable educators to enter, advance and remain in the profession.

TEACH Early Childhood® scholarships address one of the field's most persistent barriers to professional growth: the cost of higher education. By helping early educators pursue credentials and degrees while continuing to work, TEACH makes educational advancement more attainable without requiring educators to step away from the children and families who depend on them. These scholarships do more than open doors to education; they create opportunities for educators to strengthen their practice, expand their career possibilities and invest in their own futures while continuing to invest in the futures of young children.

The TEACH Early Childhood® Educator Apprenticeship Network builds on this foundation by connecting education with employment, hands-on learning, mentorship and career advancement. Apprentices gain practical skills in the workplace, participate in related technical instruction, receive guidance from experienced mentors, and work toward credentials and degrees. This approach recognizes that learning is most powerful when educators can connect new knowledge to their daily practice and see a clear path from their current roles to future opportunities. By strengthening the connection between education and employment, apprenticeship can help employers develop talent, support educators as they grow, and create more intentional pathways into and through the profession.

Professional growth must also be accompanied by recognition. **Child Care WAGE$®** helps strengthen the connection between education, experience and compensation by providing wage supplements to eligible early educators. In a field where compensation often fails to reflect the complexity and importance of the work, WAGE$ recognizes educators' professional development and commitment while reinforcing the value of continued learning. Compensation alone cannot resolve the workforce crisis, but strategies that reward professional growth are an important part of creating a more stable and sustainable profession.

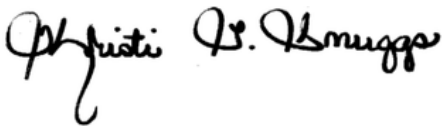
Together, these approaches reflect a comprehensive vision for workforce development — one that connects **opportunity, support and value**. Scholarships make education more financially attainable. Apprenticeships integrate education with employment, practical experience and mentorship. Wage supplements recognize professional growth and reinforce the importance of investing in educators. Each strategy addresses a different barrier, but their collective impact is greatest when they operate as part of a coordinated workforce system.

The challenges facing early care and education are complex, and no single program or organization can solve them alone. Sustainable progress requires collaboration among policymakers, employers, institutions of higher education, funders, community partners and early educators themselves. It also requires a shared commitment to addressing the structural barriers that continue to undermine workforce stability, including inadequate compensation, the cost of education, limited advancement opportunities and the need for accessible, supportive professional learning pathways.

As we look to the future, our goal must be to create a profession in which early educators can envision a future for themselves and their families — a profession where learning opens doors, experience creates opportunities, advancement is achievable and dedication is met with meaningful recognition. This vision demands that we move beyond isolated interventions toward connected systems that support educators throughout their careers.

The work of the TEACH Early Childhood® National Center reminds us that progress is possible when we pair a clear vision with practical solutions and sustained partnerships. Every scholarship awarded, every apprenticeship supported, and every investment in professional growth represents a step toward a stronger workforce and a more resilient early childhood system.

When we invest in early educators, we invest in the future of children, families, communities and our nation. Together, we can move beyond managing workforce challenges to building a profession where educators are equipped to thrive, programs are better positioned to succeed, and every child has the opportunity to benefit from a skilled, supported and valued early childhood educator.





WHAT WE DO

Provide leadership in the creation of programs and policies that promote and support equity toward an educated, well-paid and stable early childhood workforce. Thus ensuring the long-term success of our nation's children in school and in life.

HOW WE DO IT

The TEACH Early Childhood® National Center, a division of Early Years, works across states, providing accountable workforce development strategies that lead to measurable education and compensation gains and real career mobility and stability for the early childhood education workforce. In the past year, Center staff have worked diligently, bringing to life a new program, new resources, events, publications, and direct support to TEACH Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGE$® state program staff.

FUNDING STATEMENT

Our work is funded in part by the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, the Stranahan Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. We thank them for their support, but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of these organizations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

The TEACH Early Childhood® Initiative is an evidence-based model providing debt-free college education with comprehensive support for the early childhood education workforce. It provides the structure for a comprehensive, sequenced program of early childhood higher education opportunities that recognizes the varied educational backgrounds of early childhood educators. TEACH targets increased education leading to credentials and degrees, increased compensation, and job and career retention. Employer and employee dollars are partnered with public or private funds in each state to support their early childhood workforce. Within states, as a large buyer of education, TEACH can leverage a more accessible, responsive higher education system to support education and career pathways.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FEATURE

ANA DE HOYOS O'CONNOR
PROFESSOR ECE, SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE



"Investing in early childhood educators strengthens teachers, programs, families and ultimately the children we serve. Strong educational pathways give early childhood educators opportunities to continue their education while remaining in the classroom and applying what they learn directly to their work with children."

BETH ANN LANG M.ED.
DEPUTY CEO, CHILD CARE AWARE® OF MISSOURI



"Over TEACH Missouri's 26-year history, we have witnessed the life-changing impact of investing in early childhood educators. TEACH Early Childhood® Missouri scholarships have helped educators achieve higher education, increase their compensation and remain in the profession, creating lasting change in the classrooms and communities where they teach and stay. We have seen educators grow in confidence, children benefit from stronger learning experiences, families gain stability and communities become stronger. When we invest in an early childhood educator's future, the positive impact reaches far beyond one person."

IMPACT

ROBIN MARX-MACKERLEY M.S.
NEVAEYC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND TEACH EARLY CHILDHOOD® NEVADA PROGRAM DIRECTOR

“I am incredibly grateful for the guidance, encouragement and unwavering support provided by the TEACH Early Childhood® National Center over the past six months.

In February 2026, TEACH Early Childhood® Nevada received notice that our funding would end on June 30, 2026. After processing the news, I immediately reached out to Edith, Jill and Megan. Like me, they were shocked, but Edith quickly reassured me that I would not have to navigate this challenge alone.



Together, we established bi-weekly meetings and developed a plan to address the uncertainty ahead. Throughout this process, the National Center provided not only technical assistance and practical resources, but also compassion, encouragement and a true sense of partnership. During our conversations, we worked through difficult decisions, shared frustrations, explored possibilities and identified strategies for sustaining the program.

Just as we were preparing for the possibility of closing our doors, the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) stepped forward with two years of funding support. While the funding does not allow us to operate a fully comprehensive program, it enables us to continue serving approximately 90 recipients through coursework and educational bonuses. We are deeply grateful for this opportunity, even as we continue our search for long-term sustainability.

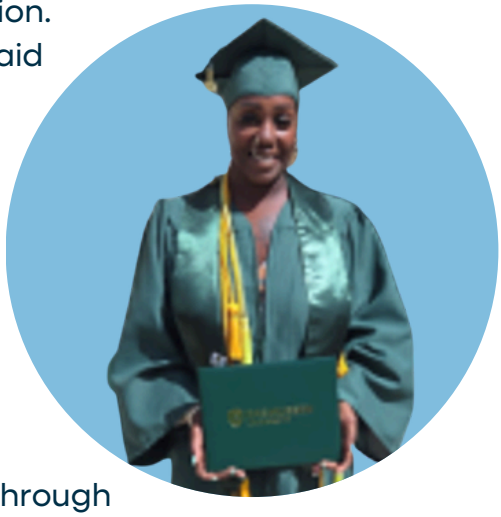
I can say without hesitation that navigating this situation without the support of the National Center would have been an overwhelming burden. Their encouragement and steadfast commitment helped me move from fear and uncertainty to hope and action. Knowing we were not alone made all the difference, and their support has been instrumental in helping TEACH Early Childhood® Nevada continue serving early childhood educators across our state.”

RECIPIENT TESTIMONIALS

ANNETTE EBERHART
TEACH FLORIDA SCHOLAR

“I learned about the TEACH Early Childhood® Scholarship Program through my state's Family Child Care Home Association (FFCCHA). At the time, I held a CDA and director's credential. I was in my mid-40s and had operated my family child care business since 2007. I knew I needed to match my work experience with the education and credentials to support it, so I applied to TEACH in 2016.

Becoming a TEACH scholar meant so much to me. It felt good to know that someone was willing to invest in me and my education. TEACH supported me far beyond tuition. With the paid release time, I was able to afford a substitute so I could attend school while continuing to operate my FCCH. When personal challenges required me to take a break from school, TEACH was patient and supportive. It took me four years to earn my Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, but I did it!

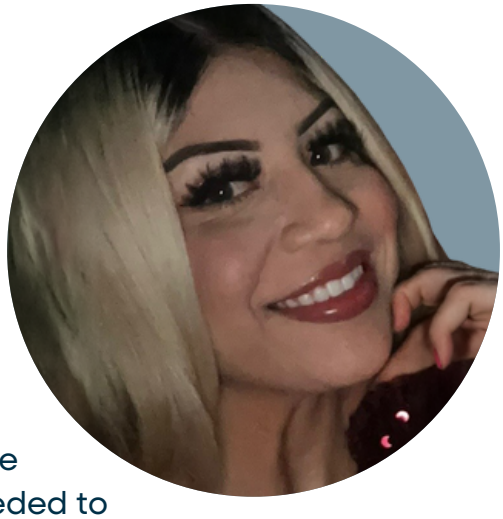


Since 2016, I have renewed my national CDA and earned both my associate and bachelor’s degrees through TEACH. But my ECE journey is not finished yet! I am currently pursuing a Master’s Certificate in Early Childhood Policy from the University of Florida, once again with the support of a TEACH scholarship.

Increasing my education has helped me expand my FCCH business and has opened doors for me to grow as a leader and advocate. I was honored to be selected for the Florida Early Childhood Advocacy Fellowship with the Children’s Forum, from which I graduated in April 2026.

TEACH has been an important part of my educational and professional journey. I am grateful for the investment TEACH has made in me and hope this opportunity continues for generations of early childhood educators.”

EVEDITH CASTRO ALFARO
TEACHER, EARLY HEAD START CLASSROOM
UTAH COMMUNITY ACTION HEAD START



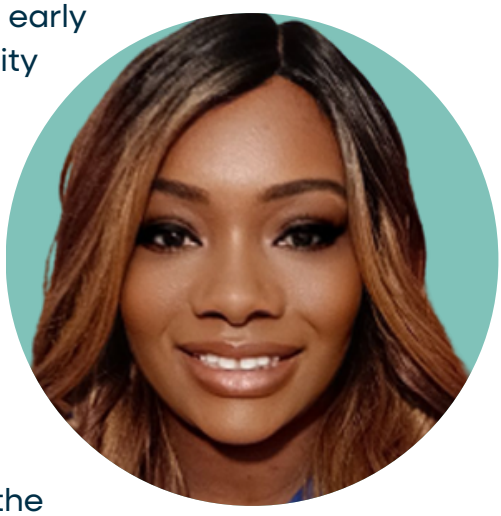
Eve shared that before receiving the TEACH scholarship, her biggest barriers to pursuing education were financial constraints and a lack of guidance. Since receiving the scholarship, she has felt supported through assistance with books, flexibility in completing responsibilities with release time support and regular check-ins with her scholarship counselor. She has found that taking one class at a time, although it may extend the time needed to complete her education, has been the right approach for her. Eve shared that "everything from the scholarship definitely has been life-changing, and I am so appreciative of the opportunity that I was given. I feel very blessed because it has made me confident in getting more knowledge in the career that I have chosen."

SARAH STEVENS
TEACH MICHIGAN AA STIPEND 2019-2023 AND BA STIPEND 2023-2026



"I applied for TEACH because I reached a point in my career where I knew I wanted to grow, not just for myself, but for the children and families I serve every day. I've always cared deeply about giving kids the best version of me, and continuing my education felt like the next step in becoming the kind of educator they deserve. Financially, going back to school can feel overwhelming, and TEACH made it possible in a way that felt supportive instead of stressful. It opened a door I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to walk through. More than anything, I applied because I'm committed to this field. I want to keep learning, keep improving, and keep showing up with intention. TEACH gave me the chance to do that. Since participating in TEACH, my career has grown in ways I didn't expect. Having the support to continue my education gave me the confidence to step more fully into my role. I'm not just doing the work — I understand it on a deeper level now. I see child development, behavior and family dynamics through a more informed lens, and that's changed the way I show up every day. TEACH also opened doors for me professionally. As I've gained more knowledge, I've taken on more responsibility, advocated more effectively, and become someone my team can rely on. I feel more capable, more prepared and more aligned with the educator I'm becoming. It didn't just help me move forward — it helped me grow into my purpose."

KATHLEEN BROWN-TATE
TEACH NORTH CAROLINA SCHOLAR AND ECE APPRENTICE



Kathleen Brown-Tate has built a remarkable path in early childhood education, one shaped by passion, curiosity and a lifelong love of supporting young children.

Since beginning her journey with the TEACH program, she has already earned a promotion, something she attributes to her expanding knowledge, coursework and ability to apply what she learns directly to her classroom practice. The opportunity to further her education has also increased her compensation, something she says is "beneficial and critical in such an uncertain time in the world." Returning to school came with challenges, especially as she balanced work, home and academic responsibilities. Yet she found unexpected encouragement through the TEACH program's supportive structure. Working as an apprentice transformed her relationship with teaching, strengthening her sense of purpose and determination. Through mentorship, education and hands-on experience, she is grateful for the guidance that pushed her to grow. Most of all, she is thankful for her own perseverance and the unwavering support system that motivates her to continue pursuing her educational goals.

"My mindset has changed through the mentorship and education I have been receiving, and I am so thankful to the TEACH program and my wonderful mentor for challenging me to apply my learning."



TEACH NATIONAL **DATA**

$64.6 million
Funding and support

22
State partners

18,561
Scholarship recipients

532
Partnering higher education programs

119,913
Annual credit hours completed

3.44
Average annual associate recipient GPA

3.62
Average annual bachelor's recipient GPA

8,864
Participating programs

659,582
Children who benefited from having a better-educated teacher

95.1%
Associate degree scholarship employee retention rate

96.4%
Bachelor's degree scholarship employee retention rate

9.9%
Average wage increase for TEACH associate scholarship recipients

11%
Average wage increase for TEACH bachelor's scholarship recipients

512
Associate degree

380
Bachelor's degree

148
Master's degree

Total degree completion

NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR APPRENTICESHIP NETWORK

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

TRACY GORDON

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

"As the Nebraska AEYC Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program reaches the end of its second year, I have been reflecting on the successes and challenges we've experienced with this program. What we've learned is that nearly all apprentices report increased confidence, intentionality, a deeper understanding of child development and increased pride in themselves and seeing themselves as professionals. These types of outcomes speak to the success of the program in ways that we might not have imagined.



As we explore survey responses from the apprentices and the mentors, common themes include being more reflective, slowing down to observe before acting and better understanding the 'why' behind best practices. The apprentices are showing skill development by applying what they learn in their coursework directly to their classrooms. One apprentice has learned to distinguish between product and process art experiences, one is redesigning her classroom to create learning/interest centers, one has created a daily schedule that reinforces routines, and another is using observation intentionally to notice children's strengths and make adjustments to individualize for each child. Apprentices have also shared that they are doing well in their coursework, making the Dean's List, being invited to participate in leadership opportunities, some are preparing to graduate, and many are fostering more in-depth relationships with children, peers and families.

Seeing how the apprentices are embracing their new learning, new skills and increased professionalism has been inspiring, but this doesn't happen on its own. One of the key components of the program is the apprentice-mentor relationship. The survey summary showed that mentorship was the single most impactful element of the program, providing academic, professional, and personal guidance tailored to each apprentice's context and needs. The mentors light up as they share the apprentices' successes and the positive steps taken for the children, families, peers and the professionalism of the apprentices themselves.

This program has shown many successful outcomes, but it would not have been possible without the support of the team at the TEACH National Center. From the first day, their support has been invaluable. They have walked side by side with us at each step, providing guidance, resources, and lessons learned that helped to inform the creation and implementation of our apprenticeship program."

MENTOR HIGHLIGHT

ELIZABETH SCUDDER M.ED.
TEACH/AECA ARKANSAS



"I love my work with apprentices because I get to see firsthand what happens when early childhood educators are truly supported as they grow. For years, I built teams by 'growing my own' — investing in educators, helping them discover their strengths and encouraging them to continue their education. I often think that if an apprenticeship program like this had been available then, more of those talented educators might have stayed in early childhood instead of moving to public schools or leaving the field altogether.

What makes apprenticeship so powerful is that educators aren't asked to figure it all out on their own. They have education, mentoring, coaching, encouragement and someone walking alongside them as they put what they are learning into practice. That kind of support builds more than knowledge — it builds confidence, competence and a sense of belonging in this profession.

As a mentor, it is incredibly meaningful to watch an apprentice begin to recognize herself as a professional, find her voice and realize, 'I can do this, and this is where I belong.' We talk so much about retaining the early childhood workforce. Apprenticeship gives us an opportunity to do more than talk about it — we can intentionally invest in the educators we hope will stay, grow and become the next generation of leaders in our field."

NATIONAL STATE DATA

90
Apprentices

40
Pre-apprentices*
*completed 167 credit hours

33.4
Average age of participants

1,192.5
College credit hours taken

3.67
Average GPA

98,945
On-the-job training hours

2,033
Individualized apprentice-mentor meetings

APPRENTICE HIGHLIGHTS

TRACY RACKLEFF
TEACH/AECA ARKANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD® APPRENTICE



“Being part of the apprenticeship was one of the best experiences I have had. Elizabeth brought a wealth of knowledge and years of experience, but what made the experience so meaningful was that the learning went far beyond a textbook. It was hands-on, personal and connected to what was actually happening in my classroom.

My favorite part was knowing I had someone in my corner. Whether we were talking about my classroom, schoolwork, new ideas or simply life, Elizabeth was always a phone call away. When I felt overwhelmed or questioned whether I was doing something right, she helped me slow down, think it through and trust what I already knew. I always left our conversations feeling encouraged, confident and knowing what to do next.

The apprenticeship may be complete, but the relationship we built is not. I gained a mentor, a tremendous amount of knowledge and a friendship that I know will last a lifetime. Elizabeth is still there when I need her, and that continued support means more than I can say.”

TINA PLUMLEE
TEACH/AECA ARKANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD® APPRENTICE



“The Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship means more to me than simply growing as a teacher — it means becoming the kind of teacher who leaves a little piece of love, confidence and encouragement in every child I teach. My children may not remember every lesson or activity, but I hope they remember how they felt in my classroom: safe, loved, valued and believed in. Every new thing I learn through this apprenticeship gives me another opportunity to make a difference in their lives. I’m not just preparing children for their next step; I’m helping build the foundation of who they will become. That is what makes this journey so meaningful to me.”



CHILD CARE WAGE$® An Early Years Initiative

WHAT WE DO

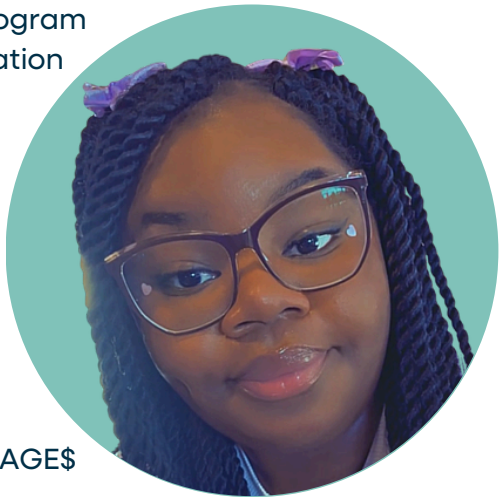
The Child Care WAGE$® Program provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors and family child care providers working with children between the ages of birth to 5.

HOW WE DO IT

The Child Care WAGE$® Initiative was created in response to research-based evidence showing that the quality of care children receive is lowered by high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education. To help stem the tide of turnover and increase teacher continuity, Child Care WAGE$® awards education-based salary supplements to early childhood professionals to address the key issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover in the early childhood workforce. Supplement awards are based on education and the continuity of care provided.

RECIPIENT TESTIMONIALS

MONAE JACKSON
EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER, TENNESSEE



“I am incredibly grateful for the WAGE$ of Tennessee program and the meaningful role it has played in my higher education journey. As a single mother raising a son with autism, pursuing advanced education has required resilience, sacrifice and faith. I have always had a deep passion for education, but balancing family responsibilities, financial demands and long-term career goals has not been easy. The WAGE$ program has helped bridge a critical financial gap, allowing me to continue investing in my professional growth while providing stability for my family. While I remain hopeful for higher wages in the near future, I am genuinely thankful that WAGE$ exists to support educators like myself in the present.

This support has been both encouraging and affirming, reminding me that my commitment to the field is valued. WAGE$ also served as a powerful incentive for me to pursue education beyond an associate degree. Because of this encouragement and support, I am now pursuing my master’s degree as of December 2025. The program has been a significant contributor to my ability to advance my career and remain committed to education. I am deeply appreciative of WAGE$ of Tennessee for recognizing the importance of investing in educators. This program has helped sustain my momentum, strengthen my resolve, and support my calling to continue growing professionally while advocating for students and families like my own.”

TORIE PHILLIPS
TORIE’S TINY TOTS PRESCHOOL, TENNESSEE



“My name is Torie Phillips, and I own Mrs. Torie's Tiny Tots Preschool in Monterey, Tennessee. I have been receiving WAGE$ for several years, and I am beyond grateful for the financial relief it has given my family. Monterey is a small town, and families cannot afford large daycare bills, so I have to keep my cost low, but in turn, it can make things tight. WAGE$ has helped me build my savings account, pay bills and it even helped me take my family on vacation one year. I love my job, and the families I serve daily. I will forever be thankful that WAGE$ allows me to keep costs low for families but still earn money for my family.”

LAVERNE BEAZER
EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER, NORTH CAROLINA



"When you are going through things and you don't know which way to turn, programs like WAGE$ give you a sense of relief. You don't know where your next meal is going to come from or if you are going to be able to make a payment. With WAGE$, you don't have to worry as much. You don't have to worry about something as simple as a bill. When you don't have it, it's a big thing. I had children to take care of, and I was a single mom. These programs are very, very important. I pray that they are always around for people like me that need that extra money to make ends meet. To know that your family will be able to eat; to know you can walk in the house and turn your lights on.

I thank WAGE$ and TEACH, and Central Piedmont Community College for all the support they gave me. All these things help you focus on your education. I could sit down and focus on my homework, not how I'm going to provide for my children."

NATIONAL WAGE$ **RESULTS**

More than
$25 million
invested in WAGE$ salary supplements

$1,644
Average six-month salary supplement

14%
Turnover rate

3,762
Early education programs with supplement recipients

9,362
Supplement recipients

69%
Of active participants have the AAS ECE or higher, or have submitted education during the year to document additional coursework

LICENSED ORGANIZATIONS

Currently, TEACH and WAGE$ programs are housed in a group of statewide organizations serving the early childhood community. In FY 2025-2026, 23 states were licensed.

ALABAMA
Alabama Partnership for Children

ARKANSAS
Arkansas Early Childhood Association

COLORADO
Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance

FLORIDA*
The Children's Forum

INDIANA
Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children

IOWA*
Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children

MAINE
Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

MICHIGAN
Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children

MINNESOTA
Child Care Aware® of Minnesota

MISSOURI
Child Care Aware® of Missouri

NEBRASKA*
Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children

NEVADA
Nevada Association for the Education of Young Children

NEW HAMPSHIRE
Community Action Partnership Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties

NORTH CAROLINA*
Early Years

OHIO
Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association

PENNSYLVANIA
Pennsylvania Child Care Association

RHODE ISLAND
Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children

SOUTH CAROLINA
SC Endeavors

TENNESSEE+
Signal Centers

TEXAS
Texas Association for the Education of Young Children

UTAH
Utah Association for the Education of Young Children

VERMONT
Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

WISCONSIN
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

*Denotes both TEACH and WAGE$ programs operating in the state.
+Denotes only a WAGE$ program operating in the state.

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TEACH Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGE$® National Advisory Committee members for FY 2025-2026.

Toshiba Adams
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Marica Cox Mitchell
Bainum Family Foundation

Ana De Hoyos O'Connor
San Antonio College

Erin Speer Smith
National Association for the Education of Young Children

Kelsey Laird
Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children

Beth Ann Lang
Child Care Aware® of Missouri

Paul Lazenby
Arkansas Early Childhood Association

Calvin Moore
Council for Professional Recognition

Debra Murphy
Cape Cod Community College

Hanan Osman
Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children

Jeanette Paulson
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS – EARLY YEARS STAFF

Kristi Snuggs
President

Edith Locke
SVP, Professional Development Initiatives

Allison Miller
SVP, Compensation Initiatives

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