WAGE$: Helene Expansion for Disaster Relief
Salary Supplement Fact Sheet

What is Child Care WAGE$®: Helene Expansion for Disaster Relief and how is it different from the Child Care WAGE$® Program? Child Care WAGE$®: Helene Expansion for Disaster Relief (WAGE$: Helene Expansion) is fully funded through the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) as a way to expand WAGE$-based opportunities in the counties impacted by Hurricane Helene. The Child Care WAGE$® salary supplements are funded through local Smart Start partnerships that have elected to participate. Both programs are administered by Early Years.

**What opportunities are available through WAGE$: Helene Expansion?** Funds will support two different strategies. It will expand WAGE$ salary supplements into three counties (Ashe, Madison and Watauga) and will provide annual incentive payments to WAGE$ participants in other impacted counties based on their county's participation in the WAGE$ salary supplement program. A separate fact sheet is available to further explain the annual incentive payments.

What are WAGE$: Helene Expansion salary supplements? The salary supplements are education-based payments issued every qualifying six-month period to low-paid teachers, directors and family child care educators working with children ages birth to 5 years old. The supplements are designed to increase retention, education and compensation.

Who is eligible to receive a WAGE$: Helene Expansion salary supplement? To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be a teacher, assistant teacher, director, assistant director or family child care provider working in **Ashe, Madison or Watauga County.**
- Earn at or below $25 per hour.
- Work with children ages birth to 5 at least 10 hours per week in a licensed or GS110 child care program.
- Have a level of education appearing on the WAGE$: Helene Expansion supplement scale

How much are the supplements? The awards vary based on the education level of the applicant and the schedule worked. Awards are issued in six-month installments, each after the participant completes an assigned six-month commitment period in the same child care program. Supplements for part-time employees (those working below 30 hours per week with children birth to age 5) are prorated. The scale ranges from $600 to $4,000 per year for full-time eligibility.

What is necessary to apply? Interested early educators must complete an application, including the employer's verification of employment, and submit evidence of their current wages and education earned, as verified by an official transcript or with an active CDA Credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. Details of required documentation can be found on the program application. An application can be sent via email or mail, or downloaded from the Early Years website. Stay tuned for an application that can be completed online.

What is the employing child care program's responsibility? A child care center must agree to verify an applicant's employment status and wages and agree not to use participation in the program to offset normal wage increases. The center is not responsible for providing the salary supplement should funding no longer be available.

How are supplements received? Payments are issued following the completion of assigned six-month cycles called "commitment periods." Commitment periods run from mid-month to mid-month and are established by WAGE$: Helene Expansion for each individual participant using application date, start date and education documentation. After a commitment period is completed, WAGE$: Helene Expansion will confirm the ongoing eligibility of participants in that cycle with their employers. If still employed and still eligible, the amount received will reflect the education level and the schedule worked during the six-month commitment period. All payments are contingent upon funding availability.

Payments are issued after Early Years has received the necessary funding from DCDEE. Once approved for an award, participants who remain in the same child care program and obtain the necessary education (if applicable) do not need to reapply in order to receive future supplements.

Can the supplement amounts be increased? Participants in WAGE$: Helene Expansion may increase their supplement amounts by gaining more education. The TEACH Early Childhood® Program offers scholarships to child care professionals who want to earn course credits toward specific early childhood credentials or degrees.

Contact the TEACH Early Childhood® Program at Early Years (919-967-3272) for more information. Participants are encouraged to send WAGE$: Helene Expansion an updated official transcript after the completion of any formal coursework so staff can determine the highest possible award. All educational levels noted with an asterisk on the scale are temporary. Participants must advance to a higher level as noted on the scale in order to remain eligible. Deadlines are shared with individual participants as applicable.

Do participants continue to qualify if they move to a different child care program? Payments are issued to participants after each six-month period in the same child care program. If a participant moves to another eligible child care program in Ashe, Madison or Watauga within the six months, 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.

Are the salary supplements taxable income? Yes. 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.

**How long are WAGE$: Helene Expansion supplements available?** Individual payments will be dependent upon the eligibility of the participant. However, funding for WAGE$: Helene Expansion is expected to be available until September 2029.

Child Care WAGE$®: Helene Expansion for Disaster Relief
PO Box 901, Chapel Hill, NC 27514
wagespages@earlyyearsnc.org | 919-967-3272
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