

Expand the Child Care WAGE\$ program statewide to support early educators, working parents, and young children.

Parents in every industry depend on child care teachers to be able to work, and young children thrive when they have stable relationships with their teachers. Yet North Carolina is facing an unprecedented workforce crisis right now, with high turnover and a dwindling pipeline due to low compensation.

While nearly every industry is facing workforce challenges, staffing shortages in child care impact working parents and businesses across all trades. Without enough teachers, child care programs can't meet the demand in their communities, and unlike other industries, costs cannot be increased without placing the burden on parents, who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Since October of 2021, Child Care Stabilization Grants funded by the federal American Rescue Plan Act have provided funding for child care programs to increase teacher pay and provide other incentives to address staffing shortages. That funding will end this December.

North Carolina needs a multi-faceted approach to maintain higher pay and prevent a mass exodus of child care teachers when federal funding runs out, as well as to continue to recruit and retain a pipeline of qualified early educators. Expanding the Child Care WAGE\$ program statewide is an important step to improve child care teacher compensation, build back the early childhood workforce, and stabilize the child care industry.

Low compensation is the top reason for turnover and the early childhood workforce shortage.

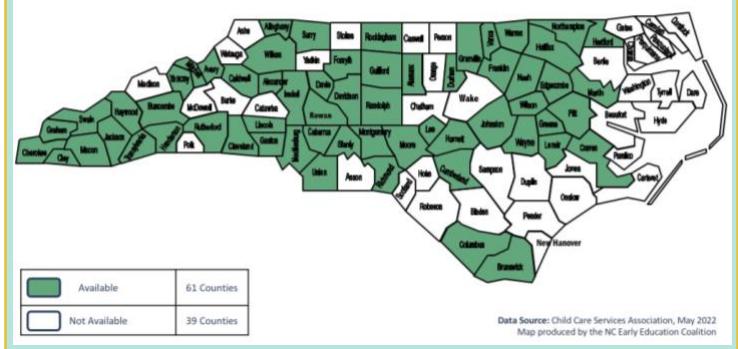
Prior to federal stabilization grants, the average wage for early educators in North Carolina was \$12.00 per hour, and 70 counties paid at or below this rate. One in five teachers has no health insurance, 38% received public assistance in the prior three years, and the poverty rate for early educators is more than 7 times as high as for public school kindergarten teachers. This is despite the fact that 66% of teachers have an associate's degree or higher and 10 or more years of experience.

Retention and recruitment strategies are needed to provide young children with high-quality care.

The Child Care WAGE\$ program is an evidence-based, long-standing program in North Carolina that supports early educator compensation, education, recruitment, and retention. Among WAGE\$ participants, the turnover rate is just 9%, compared to an estimated rate of up to 40% turnover rate overall amongst early educators in the state.

Currently, only about 14% of the total early education teaching workforce is able to participate in WAGE\$. Fully funding the Child Care WAGE\$ program and making it available in all 100 counties will allow child care programs in all communities to attract and retain a qualified early childhood workforce.

Child Care WAGE\$ Program Availability 2022



Parents can't afford to pay more, child care programs can't afford to pay their teachers more, and teachers can't afford to stay for such low wages.

Child care teachers are the workforce behind the workforce. Expanding the Child Care WAGE\$ program statewide will improve compensation, retention, and recruitment in order to support young children's development and keep North Carolina's families and businesses working.

Resources: information provided by Child Care Services Association, NC Division of Child Development and Early Education, and University of California Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.