The Child Care WAGE$ Program provides education-based salary supplements to teachers, directors, and family child care educators working with children from birth to 5 years old. The program is designed to increase retention, education, and compensation.

WAGE$ is a funding collaboration between Smart Start and the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE). It is administered by Child Care Services Association. Smart Start local partnerships fund more than $7.6 million in WAGE$ salary supplements.¹

Current WAGE$ Impact

- 57 counties covered¹
- 3,880 teachers receiving supplements²
- $993 average supplement (paid every six months)²

The Need

- In 2019, the median wage for child care workers was $10.62.³
- In 2019, the media wage for preschool teachers was $12.83.
- The poverty rate for early educators in North Carolina is 17.6%.
- One in five teachers has no health insurance, and 38% received public assistance in the prior three years.⁴
- Almost 30% of the workforce report that they do not expect to remain in the field for three years because of low wages and lack of benefits.

The Opportunity

Additional funding for WAGE$ and Smart Start would expand the program statewide, increasing the reach and impact for child care professionals.

- Funding proposed in Governor Cooper’s budget to expand WAGE$ to all 100 counties through the Smart Start network: $10M in recurring funding for FY 21-22 and $26M in recurring funds for FY 22-23.
- Projected impact of statewide expansion: 16,640 teachers receiving education-based salary supplements (90% of those eligible)

¹2021 CCSA WAGE$ Report to June 2021
²WAGE$ Annual Report Summary 2020 final v2 (childcareservices.org)
³https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/north-carolina/
⁴The 2019 Early Care and Education Workforce in North Carolina, Child Care Services Association