

North Carolina Early Childhood Compensation Collaborative Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers



Children’s earliest experiences are built into their bodies—shaping the brain’s architecture and creating the foundation for future learning. The interactions they have with their early childhood teachers play an essential role in determining how their brains are wired. To build strong brains and support children’s optimal development, early childhood teachers need specialized knowledge and skills.

Compensation is an integral component of attracting and retaining the high-quality early learning workforce needed to prepare children for success. A salary scale tied to education can serve as critical tool to professionalize the early childhood teaching workforce.

BACKGROUND

The North Carolina Early Childhood Compensation Collaborative (Collaborative) was created out of a national project to improve compensation for the early childhood workforce. The Collaborative believes that a statewide, locally-implemented salary scale for early childhood education teachers is an important tool to guide early childhood programs in determining fair salaries that are commensurate with education or certification, and will ultimately help professionalize the early childhood teaching workforce.

The Collaborative recognizes that early childhood teachers are the key to delivering high-quality programs and ensuring positive outcomes for young children and families. Early education teachers must have professional education, skills, and competencies to successfully fulfill their responsibilities and should be compensated for their work. However, too often teachers are woefully underpaid and not recognized as professionals for the important work they do. Consequently, North Carolina is facing a crisis in attracting and retaining qualified early childhood teachers.

SALARY SCALE DEVELOPMENT

The Collaborative developed the attached Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers to help guide the early childhood field in establishing better compensation for the early childhood workforce that is tied to educational attainment. The goal was to develop a standard salary scale that was based on paying parity with entry level teachers in public schools. The scale is intended to be used as a guide and is completely voluntary. For more information on how this scale was designed, please see Attachment A. For the Model Salary Scale, see Attachment B.

The Model Salary Scale was developed by the Collaborative with input from early childhood experts, child care providers and parents. It was then pilot tested by researchers at UNC Charlotte who conducted surveys with child care programs representing different star-licenses and permit types and geographic areas of the state. In addition, the researchers followed up with interviews and focus groups with child care center directors/owners, early childhood teachers and early childhood education organizations. Many agencies across the state collaborated on the development of the scale, including the following:

- Child Care Resource and Referral Council
- Child Care Services Association
- Division of Child Development and Early Education
- MomsRising
- North Carolina Early Education Coalition
- North Carolina Institute for Child Development Professionals
- North Carolina Partnership for Children

The Collaborative recognizes there are important points to consider when a child care program chooses to implement the Model Salary Scale. For example, although the Model Salary Scale does not include benefits in the hourly wage calculation, we recognize the value and cost of providing benefits and do not want to see benefits dropped if a child care programs uses the salary scale to pay better wages.



HOW TO USE THE MODEL SALARY SCALE

The Model Salary Scale was designed to set minimum standards for education and compensation to help attract and retain qualified early childhood education teachers. It is based on paying teachers a living wage, and wages that are on parity with the salaries of entry level public school teachers. Based on input from directors and teachers, the resulting salary scale serves as a model for child care programs wanting to adapt or change their own salary structure. Use of the Model Salary Scale is completely voluntary. Currently, there are no state-level requirements to use the salary scale, however, we know that providing a wage scale that identifies increases related to education is a factor in attracting and retaining qualified staff.

The Model Salary Scale can be used as a tool to address your own program's needs and goals. The following steps are recommended for considering its use:

1. Compare this Model Salary Scale to the one your child care program is already using.

- Does your salary scale differentiate based on educational attainment?
- Using the Model Salary Scale, determine how your current salaries compare to the recommendations. For example, how much does a teacher with an AA degree earn in your program compared to the \$15.14 per hour on the Model Salary Scale?
- Since the Model Salary Scale is based on wages only, benefits should not be used in the comparison.

2. What changes could you make to your existing salary scale to bring it closer to the Model Salary Scale?

- After calculating the cost of bringing your program's salaries in line with the Model Salary Scale and reviewing the program's budget, you can determine if the program can afford to make wage adjustments in line with the Model Salary Scale.
- If your program cannot make the full adjustments based on the scale, you can set a goal of achieving a percentage of the recommended levels. For example, your program could decide to start by implementing the scale at 80% of the recommended levels. This would mean, for example, that a teacher with an AA degree would earn \$12.11 per hour. This approach also can also be used to accommodate for regional differences in communities.
- Determine when your program can begin implementing changes you have identified. This may mean you will phase in implementation of your plan over a period of time.

3. What additional customizations could you consider for your salary scale development?

- How will you account for additional compensation to reflect experience?
- Will you need to adjust for local or regional differences?

4. What resources will you need to pay your teachers better wages?

- After your program compares its current salary levels to the Model Salary Scale, you can then calculate what it would cost to bring each position in line with the scale.
- How can your program access additional resources to make these wage changes? Here are some options:
 - Accept children who are supported by child care subsidies to receive state reimbursement.
 - Ask your community to make donations to your program to pay qualified teachers better wages.
 - Explore and join local and state level efforts to increase the funding for early childhood programs.
 - Get to know your decision-makers and elected officials and educate them about what it will take to pay teachers on parity with public school teachers.
 - Include the need for attracting and retaining quality teachers in all advocacy efforts for improving quality for young children.

ATTACHMENT A

Assumptions for Salary Scale Construction:

- **Recommended only:** This scale is recommended as a statewide goal for early childhood programs to work toward an increased level of stability and a more consistent standard of compensation for early education teachers across the state. It sets minimum standards for both education levels and compensation.
- **Wage parity for teachers with a BA/BS degree plus B-K License in early childhood programs with entry level public school teachers:** This recommended scale is based on wage parity with public school teachers. This does not reflect compensation parity since it does not include benefits. This scale reflects the 2020-2021 public school teacher salary scale, and would be adjusted upwards when public school teacher salaries are increased.
- **Education or certification based:** Professional standards and compensation for early childhood teachers should be linked. This recommended scale is built on education, licensure and certification required for public school teachers, and considers the current NC standards for early education teachers set through the state's QRIS system and North Carolina's higher education system.
- **Local variation recognized:** This scale is offered only as a guide and sets expectations for minimum standards in education and compensation. Local early childhood programs are advised to incorporate this scale into their own salary and personnel systems, and adjust for regional and local living wage standards. Additional benchmarks or steps can be added based on local use.
- **Professional entry level education/certification:** The scale starts with the Infant/Toddler or Preschool Certificate (issued by the NC Community College System) and a starting salary of \$11.98 per hour. This hourly rate represents the North Carolina statewide average of a living wage as determined by Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/37>.
- **Living wage should be the goal:** All early education teachers should be paid a living wage at a minimum. This is not currently the standard in North Carolina for most early education teachers.
- **Cost-sharing implementation:** The Collaborative does not expect the burden of fair compensation for early childhood teachers to be placed exclusively on the early childhood programs or parents. Rather, the Collaborative recognizes that better compensation can only be achieved when costs are shared between providers, parents, governmental bodies, and other funders as necessary to achieve full implementation of the salary scale.

ATTACHMENT B. MODEL SALARY SCALE FOR EARLY EDUCATION TEACHERS

B-K LICENSE PUBLIC SCHOOL			
Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (10 mo.)	Annual Salary (12 mo.)
\$20.19	\$3,500	\$35,000	\$42,000
	BA/BS	ECE/Child Dev. ¹	
\$19.18 ²	\$3,325		\$39,900
	AAS	ECE/Child Dev.	
\$15.14 ³	\$2,625		\$31,500
	Infant/Toddler or Preschool Certificate ⁴		
\$11.98 ⁵	\$2,044		\$24,523

This scale was developed in consultation and collaboration with the following agencies:



[1] Includes other BA/BS or AAS degrees with similar early childhood coursework
 [2] 95% of Public School B-K LICENSE
 [3] 75% of Public School B-K LICENSE
 [4] Certificates are offered by the NC Community Colleges and include 5 ECE courses
 [5] This hourly rate represents the North Carolina statewide average of a living wage as determined by Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology as of February 2021, and is updated regularly:
<http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/37>