

November 12, 2024

Dear Step Up to WAGE\$ Participant:

Over the past two and one-half years, AECA has been excited and honored to support our ECE workforce through the Step Up to WAGE\$ program. We are proud of the fact that over \$9 million in wage supplements have been paid to eligible child care professionals who work directly with children birth to age five. Since the beginning of the program, the WAGE\$ staff has been consistent in its message that the wage supplements are funded with one-time COVID relief money, and this funding was not permanent. Back in July, the program eligibility guidelines were changed to allow us to serve the ECE providers most in need through the entire 2024-2025 program year. As we look towards 2025, **we are sending this to inform you that all funding for Step Up to WAGE\$ will end on July 31, 2025.**

We understand this is disappointing news. But we want to assure all our ECE colleagues **this is not the end of AECA's mission and commitment to improve compensation in the early childhood profession.** The Board and staff at AECA must and will continue to partner with our state and federal policymakers to find solutions that will ensure early childhood education is a career that can financially support its people and their families. For right now, we want to give our WAGE\$ participants as much notice as possible. Please read through the information below which should answer most of your questions.

What does this mean for those who are currently participating in Step Up to WAGE\$?

- ☐ The last commitment group that will receive a stipend will be those *eligibility-confirmed participants* whose commitment period ends June 14, 2025. Any payments for this group will be mailed by July 31, 2024.
- ☐ The program will not begin any new commitment periods that end later than June 14, 2025. For a normal (six-month) commitment period, this would mean December 15, 2024 will be the last active new commitment group.
- ☐ *For participants who would otherwise have a commitment period beginning January 15, 2025 or later, those commitment periods will not be active and no WAGE\$ supplements will be paid for those periods of employment or any later period.*
- ☐ For those of you who are completing or will complete an active commitment period by June 15, confirmation requests will continue to be sent out to employers as normal, and stipends will be paid to those participants who are eligible.
- ☐ **WORK LESS THAN 12 MONTHS:** If you are a 9- or 10- or 11-month employee which will extend an active commitment period beyond June 14, we will address such cases individually. This will also apply if you have taken or will take a leave of absence that will extend your active commitment period beyond June. If eligible for payment, these participants will receive an email that will explain how their last stipend will be prorated. (Final payment amounts are subject to information received from employers at confirmation time.)
- ☐ **LEVELING UP:** Current participants eligible for another stipend can still submit an official transcript if they wish to request an increase in their stipend level. The official transcript must be received by us no later than the 1st of the month when their commitment period ends. Official transcripts can be emailed from the directly from the school to

wages@arkansasearlychildhood.org or mailed to Step Up to WAGE\$, PO Box 2520, Bentonville, AR 72712. Official transcripts which are mailed must be received in sealed intact envelopes with the school stamp. The last day we can accept transcripts to level up will be June 1, 2025.

What about new applications?

- ☐ The last day we can process applications from newly hired employees (employed less than 30 days) will be December 2, 2024.
The last day for applications from employees employed 30 days or more will be January 2, 2025.

Please Note: These are NOT postmark deadlines. Applications must be 100% complete, including the required paystubs and official transcripts.

- ☐ The Step Up to WAGE\$ staff will not approve any new application where a commitment period would extend beyond June 15.

Unless you need to report changes, current participants do not need to do anything right now.

*If you also participate in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship program, **your scholarship will not be affected in any way.** The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship is a separate program with a separate budget.*

Email wages@arkansasearlychildhood.org if you have individual questions. This is the quickest way to get them answered. Thank you for your participation in Step Up to WAGE\$ these past three years. The support of our workforce means so much as we continue the mission of growing and strengthening the ECE workforce in Arkansas!

Sincerely,



Paul Lazenby
Executive Director



Laura House
Step Up to WAGE\$ Program Manager



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