

The poverty rate for early educators in North Carolina is 17.6%, much higher than for North Carolina workers in general (10.6%) and 7.4 times as high as for K-8 teachers (2.4%).

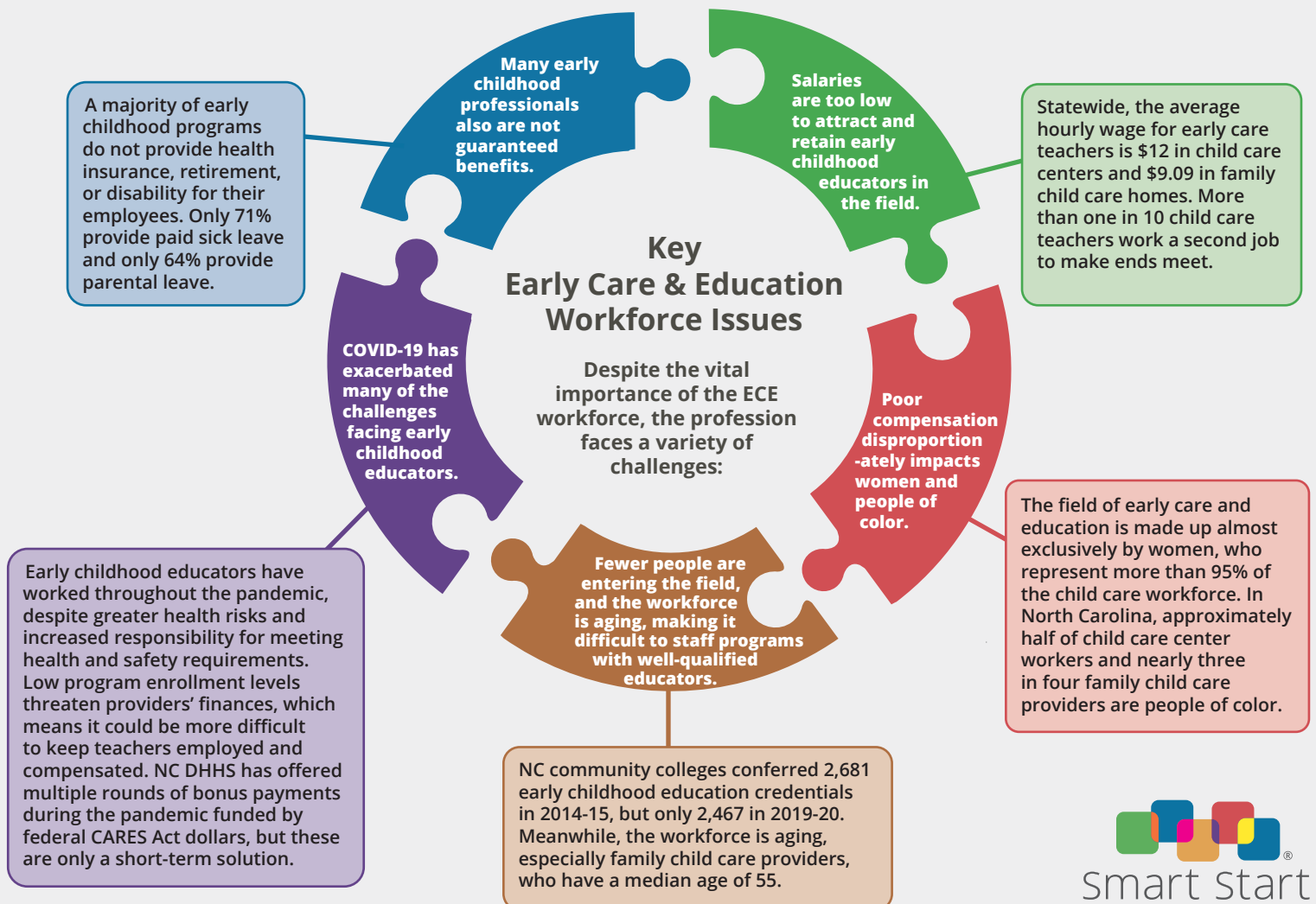
- Center for the Study of Child Care Employment

The Early Care & Education Workforce Matters to North Carolina

North Carolina's ability to attract, retain, and develop a high-quality early care and education (ECE) workforce is a critical multi-generational support for children and their parents.

For parents, access to safe, quality care for their children allows them to fully participate in the workforce and provide for their families. COVID-19 has exposed the critical importance of child care professionals to support employees, businesses and the economy. A sustainable early care and education workforce is necessary to keep businesses open and communities growing.

Early care and education professionals are also developing the state's next generation of workers and leaders. Stable, nurturing relationships and high-quality learning opportunities shape the architecture of young children's brains, with 80% of brain development occurring before a child turns 3. Well-qualified early child care professionals help children develop social and emotional skills and lay the groundwork for future success in school and in life.



How Smart Start Supports NC's Early Education Workforce

70% of Smart Start's state appropriations flow into county-level investments supporting center- school- and home-based child care programs. Smart Start local partnerships leverage state dollars to provide workforce supports including:



WAGE\$ and other salary supplement programs that help increase teachers' pay.



Cost sharing with child care providers to offer health insurance and other benefits.



Scholarships and tuition assistance for professional development and continuing education.



Technical assistance, coaching, consultation, and other resources to support professional learning and development.

RESULTS:

In FY 2020, 4,616 teachers serving more than 53,000 children statewide received education-based salary supplements through Smart Start.

In FY 2020, 680 child care professionals participated in Smart Start-funded programs that helped them study early education at the college level.

Policy Recommendations for 2021

Continue bonus payments to child care professionals during COVID-19 using federal relief funds.

Support investment in the Smart Start network to fund locally-administered workforce programs.

Invest in the expansion of compensation supplement programs like WAGE\$ and AWARD\$.

Increase funding for child care subsidies to better reflect the true cost of high-quality care.

Promote ongoing professional development to support teachers in critical areas of practice like child development, trauma-informed care, social-emotional development, and literacy.