

2024-25

Annual Report

Answering the Call with Advocacy,
Action, and Advancement



Photo Credit: Lorena Dimas

Head Start California

www.headstartca.org

P.O. Box 268 Citrus Heights, CA 95611



A Message from our Leadership

While 2024–2025 did not unfold the way we anticipated, it powerfully reaffirmed the strength and resilience of the Head Start community and the vital role our association plays in uniting the field. This past year tested us in ways we couldn't have predicted—but it also demonstrated just how much we can accomplish when we come together with purpose and determination. In the face of unclear mandates, insecure funding, and constant change, Head Start California focused on rallying our community to overcome and persevere.

We're especially proud of how HSC rose to meet the moment this year. Whether it was sharing vital updates after the closure of the Region Office, launching a rapid media and advocacy response to existential funding threats, or helping programs work with their member of Congress to address delayed Notices of Award, we stepped up to support our members when and where they needed it most.

Even as advocacy demanded more of our attention, we remained committed to supporting professional growth across the field. Our conferences and partner webinars provided high-quality learning opportunities, fostering connection and strengthening Head Start programs across the state – and beyond! And we launched several internal initiatives that will modernize our operations and expand our ability to serve members.

Looking ahead, we know that challenges may continue—but we also know that, together, we have the strength and resolve to face them. We're focused on amplifying our collective voice and building new partnerships that will move our work forward. We look forward to working with the new Region Office and helping them understand the unique landscape of California's Head Start programs. And with the launch of an unprecedented federal advocacy initiative—bringing on a team of lobbyists to work directly with Congress—we're making our voice heard by those whose support is essential to our future.

Together, we've stayed the course and been there for the children and families who need us most. Now, we look to the year ahead with renewed purpose and deeper belief in the power of our association. We're thankful you've chosen to be a part of this journey with us.



Jodie Keller
Board President
Head Start California



Melanee Cottrill
Executive Director
Head Start California



We're focused on amplifying our collective voice and building new partnerships that will move our work forward.



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Our Mission

We empower Head Start programs to reach their full potential through advocacy, professional development, networking, and collaboration.

Our Vision

We envision a future where Head Start is recognized as the gold standard in child development and the provider of choice for California's most vulnerable children and families.



Photo Credit: Sacramento Employment and Training Agency Head Start

Our Value Statements

Everyone is welcome

Do the right thing

Creativity reigns

We're better together

Board of Directors

Executive Committee



President
Jodie Keller, E Center Head Start



Vice President
Laurel Parker, Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District



Secretary
Heather Aulabaugh, Glenn County Office of Education



Treasurer
Tony Jordan, Stanislaus County Office of Education



Past President
Stacey Scarborough, Venice Family Clinic



Vice President
Luis Bautista, Los Angeles County Office of Education (As of May 2025)



Cluster Representatives

Cluster I



Ray Rojas, Easter Seals of Southern California

Cluster II



Luis Bautista, Los Angeles County Office of Education



Latonda Williams, Plaza de la Raza Child Development Services

Cluster III



Betty Zamorano-Pedregon, Child Care Resource Center



Ricardo Rivera, Baldwin Park USD

Cluster IV



Suzanne Godinez, Child Development Resources – Ventura



Adriana Ramirez-Barron, Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo



Yolanda Gonzales, Community Action Partnership of Kern



Marissa Duran, Stanislaus County Office of Education

Cluster VII



Miriam McNamara, North Coast Opportunities



Juan Cisneros, Child Start, Inc



Heather Aulabaugh, Glenn County Office of Education



Brenda Poteete, Sierra Cascade Family Opportunities

Cluster IX



Jenny Pettit, El Dorado County Office of Education

Tribal



AnnLouise Bonnitto, California Rural Indian Health Board

Migrant



Jodie Keller, E Center Head Start



Michelle Dove, Kings Community Action



Special thanks
to retiring board members
Laurel Parker and **Brenda Poteete** for your years of dedicated service to HSC!

Regional Clusters



To better serve our programs, the HSC team attends regional cluster meetings—both in person and online—to hear directly from Head Start staff and stay closely connected to their needs.

38

CLUSTER MEETINGS ATTENDED THIS YEAR BY HSC STAFF

Who We Are



119

HEAD START CALIFORNIA
MEMBER AGENCIES

5

EARLY HEAD START CHILD CARE
PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

23

BOARD MEMBERS

11

REGIONAL CLUSTERS

6

FULL-TIME STAFF

32

VOLUNTEERS

Our Membership

HSC's most valuable asset is its members, and we are proud to be 119 agencies strong!

Our strength and success are also deeply rooted in the unwavering guidance and support from our dedicated board of directors and the many volunteers who give their time and expertise. Together, we are building a better and stronger association.

Who We Serve

137

HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START
PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA

23,349

HEAD START STAFF

1,885

HEAD START CENTERS

85,236

HEAD START CHILDREN

Nonprofits (57)

School Districts (36)

Community Action Agencies (12)

County Offices of Education (14) Tribal (13) Governmental (5)

Head Start in California

With 137 programs spanning the state, California's Head Start programs embody the rich diversity that defines our communities. From community action programs to school districts and services in both rural areas and inner-city neighborhoods, Head Start reaches families from a wide array of cultural, economic, and social backgrounds.

These programs are committed to providing comprehensive early childhood education, health services, and family support, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to build a strong foundation for future success regardless of their circumstances.

Data Source: Office of Head Start,
Program Information Report

Committees

Committees are the driving force behind our success. Whether planning events, reviewing financials, or tackling everything in between, our committees collaborate closely with our staff to advance our mission. We rely on our committee members to bring their unique perspectives, Head Start expertise, and diverse backgrounds to ensure the work we do serves our members well.

Executive Committee

The executive committee is our core leadership group and meets in between board meetings to handle timely association business. This year the committee focused on ensuring HSC is organized and positioned to meet members' needs as a new administration has rapidly changed the Head Start landscape.

Members: Jodie Keller (chair), Laurel Parker (July – April), Luis Bautista (May – June), Stacey Scarborough, Tony Jordan, Heather Aulabaugh, Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Governance Committee

The governance committee had a successful year in reviewing and updating HSC's bylaws with our attorney, presenting them to the Board for review, and submitting them to the members for approval. The committee also worked to fill vacancies on the board, successfully recruiting two new directors in Cluster I.

Members: AnnLouise Bonnitto (chair), Heather Aulabaugh, Betty Zamorano-Pedregon, Cheryl Horney, Brenda Poteete, Jenny Pettit, Michelle Dove, Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Public Policy Committee

The policy committee celebrated many successes this year. We were the primary sponsor of AB 1930, which has officially ended the state's ten-year limit on associate teacher permits. We led the coalition fighting against the fire marshal's limit of 5 infants and toddlers per building, successfully rolling back the regulation and securing creation of a workgroup to craft a new regulation. The policy committee held many thoughtful discussions regarding our response to actions by the new Federal Administration, guiding the efforts of our staff and newly hired team of Federal lobbyists.

Members: Laurel Parker (Chair, July – April), Luis Bautista (Chair, May-June), AnnLouise Bonnitto, Betty Zamorano-Pedregon, Charlotte Ochiqui-Hans, Colin Legerton, Irene Cano Flores, Juan Cisneros, Melanie Mueller, Ray Rojas, Ricardo Rivera, Silvia de la Riva, Stacey Scarborough, Suzanne Godinez, Veronica Pena, Yolanda Gonzales, Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Membership Committee

The Membership Committee advanced several strategic initiatives this year. Following its biennial review, the committee voted to increase dues in response to external economic factors and internal needs. It also provided valuable input on fundraising campaigns and special initiatives to support member engagement and growth.

Members: Yolanda Gonzales (chair), Michelle Dove, Marissa Duran, Suzanne Godinez, Cheryl Horney, Melanie Mueller, Adriana Ramirez-Barron, Ricardo Rivera, Ray Rojas, Karen Burke (staff), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

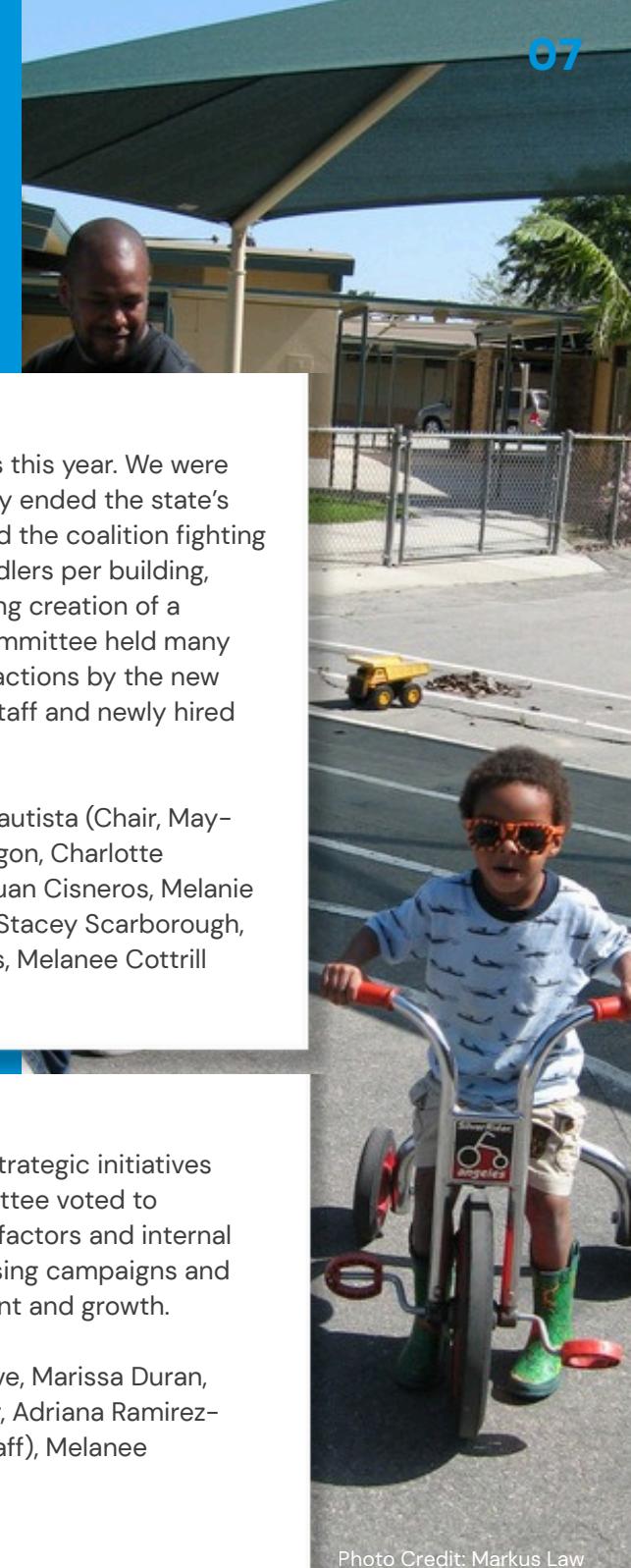


Photo Credit: Markus Law

Committees

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee was pleased to once again receive a clean (unqualified) audit report. We appreciate the staff and Treasurer's diligent efforts to ensure our records accurately reflect our financial position.

Members: Juan Cisneros, (chair), Sarah Orth, Karen Peters, Brenda Poteete, Rochelle Waldbridge, Latonda Williams, Edwin Abarca (staff), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee is charged with monitoring our financial situation and overseeing the implementation of financial policies. This year the committee focused on managing our investments, investing in strategic activities, and membership dues increases while keeping HSC fiscally sound.

Members: Tony Jordan (chair), Luis Bautista, Michael Hawkins, Miriam McNamara, Betty Zamorano-Pedregon, Edwin Abarca (staff), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

46

COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Nov. 13, 2024. Maureen "Mo" Kemp and Lucy Barcelo at the Health Institute. Mo has served as a volunteer with HSC for nearly 20 years.

Conference Committees



Annual Conference Committee

Billiejo LaBriola, Karen Fukushima, Debra Hall, Sandra Gonzales- Pabón, Angel Barrios, Angel Chang, Natalie Lucero, Kristine Binderup, Thresa Offord, Amy Fulgium Kindell Graham (chair), Gricelda Ocegueda (staff)



Health Institute Committee

Cristine Cochran, Nina Paddock, Maureen Kemp, Debra Hall, Lisa Pardue, Rubie Martinez, Renee Kapsner, Kindell Graham (chair), Gricelda Ocegueda (staff)



Managers & Directors Institute Committee

Jenny Pettit, Suzanne Godinez, Heather Aulabaugh, Miriam McNamara, Ricardo Rivera, Kindell Graham (chair), Gricelda Ocegueda (staff)



Our Team

Head Start California is powered by a dedicated team of six full-time professionals committed to serving and supporting our members. Read about our favorite early childhood education memories!



Melanee Cottrill
Executive Director

"One Christmas, my dad played the classroom Santa Claus, dressing up in the jolly red suit and giving out presents. Never one to hide the truth, I promptly told my classmates 'That's not Santa, that's my dad!"



Karen Burke
Director, Membership & Communications

"I attended preschool in Tokyo, Japan. I remember many times, going to the principal's office during nap time where I'd hang out on her couch and she'd give me rice crackers to munch on."



Kindell Graham
Events Director

"I've been to the principal's office once in my life. I didn't know at that age that sharing a throat lozenge was not allowed. I just figured sharing was caring!"



Tiffany Rosso
Development Manager

"My favorite early childhood school memories are jumping on the giant truck tires on the playground, make believe play in the wooden playhouse, and finger painting art with chocolate pudding!"



Edwin Abarca
Administrative & Finance Coordinator

"Education was so important to my parents that even though we moved from Crenshaw to Norwalk halfway through my preschool year, I still took the bus with my 18-year-old cousin to make sure I finished."



Gricelda Ocegueda
Engagement Coordinator

"I remember being the very first child picked up for school by Mrs. McNurlin, our bus driver, blasting 80's music as we sang our hearts out together!"

In the Community

This year, Team HSC embraced the spirit of service by volunteering at the Harvest Festival at Twin Rivers Head Start—helping set up a festive pumpkin patch and running carnival games for families.

We also joined the Salvation Army's Angel Tree program, packing toys to bring holiday cheer to children in need.

In addition, our team collectively attended nine site visits, witnessing firsthand the incredible work happening across Head Start programs. We're proud to support and celebrate the impact of Head Start!



Celebrating 60 years of Head Start & 30 years of Head Start California

In May 2025, we celebrated two incredible milestones—60 years of Head Start changing lives and 30 years of Head Start California championing early childhood education in our state. These anniversaries are more than numbers; they reflect decades of helping children learn, grow, and thrive while strengthening families and uplifting communities across California and the nation.



Happy 60th Birthday Head Start!



Watch our Happy Birthday
Head Start video now! 



Our History

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary, we look back on three decades of growth, advocacy, and impact. Explore some of the milestones that have shaped our journey.



Strategic Plan

Now in the third year of Head Start California's 2022 Strategic Plan, we are proud to report significant progress, with nearly all goals addressed. In 2024-25, we advanced several major initiatives designed to expand the association's impact and strengthen internal efficiencies, ensuring we are well-positioned to meet the evolving needs of our members and the communities we serve.

The Strategic Goals

- 1** Head Start is funded to support a justly compensated workforce
- 2** Head Start has wider recognition in California among families with young children and the emerging workforce
- 3** All Head Start staff have access to training they need to succeed
- 4** Head Start California generates income from a balance of revenue sources
- 5** Head Start California attracts and retains a professional staff and board leadership that will advance our mission and secure our future

Accomplishments

-  Development and launch of our first-ever fundraising plan, creating new opportunities to support HSC's work and enhancing our organizational sustainability
-  Initiation of a project to select a new member database, which will streamline our operations and improve the member experience
-  Held our first call for committee volunteers, creating opportunities for members to engage with HSC and securing fresh voices and new perspectives on nearly every HSC committee
-  Revamped and improved employee benefits, positioning HSC as competitive in the attraction and retention of staff



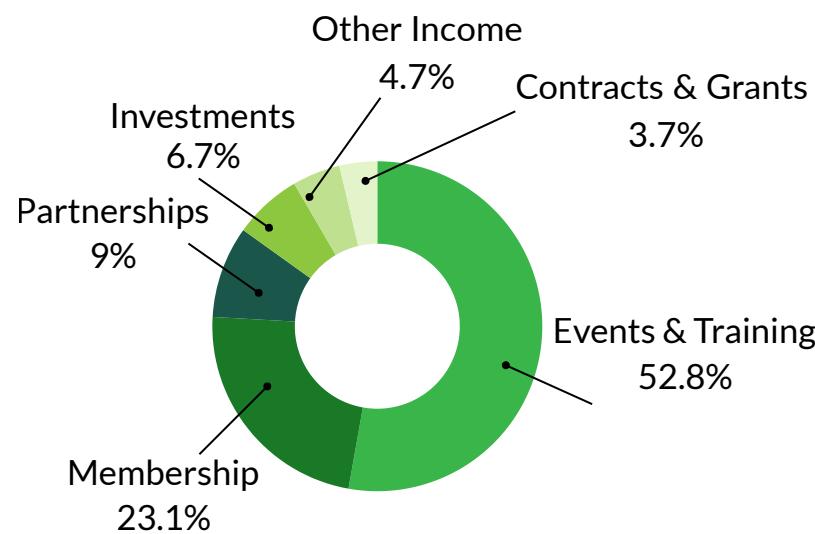
Photo Credit: Twin Rivers Unified School District, Morey Avenue Head Start

Financials

HSC this year thoughtfully invested in advocacy, long-term leadership development, and strategic organizational priorities to increase capacity and strengthen impact. As anticipated during budget planning, we closed the fiscal year with a negative net income; however, the shortfall was just \$21,000—nearly \$100,000 less than initially projected. This result comes despite a mid-year decision to invest significant additional resources in federal advocacy efforts and is thanks to the work of our development manager, careful conference planning, and successful partnerships. The previous fiscal year received a clean audit, and the current financial statements will undergo the same rigorous review. With a strong cash reserve and stable assets, HSC remains financially healthy and well-positioned for sustainable growth in the years ahead.

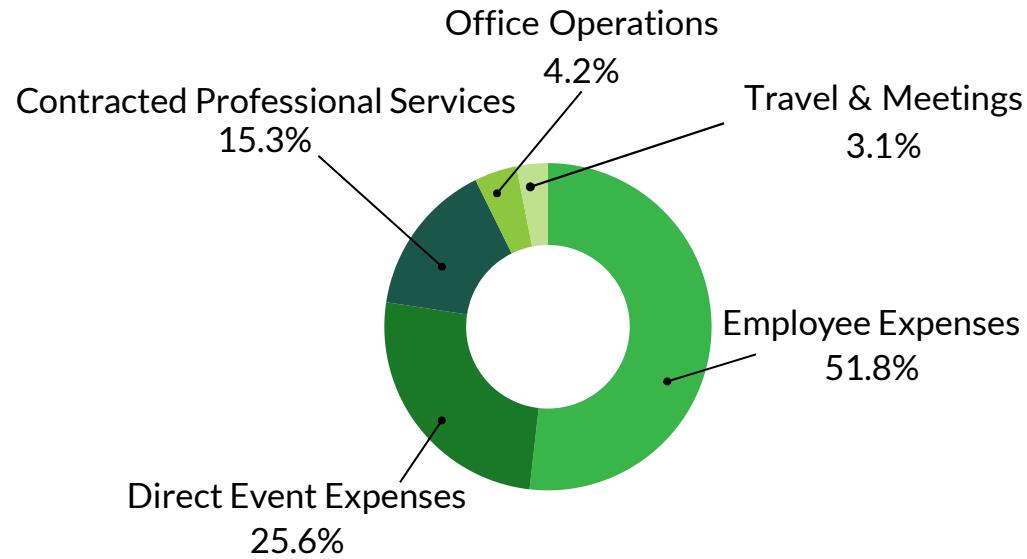
TOTAL REVENUE

\$1,360,687



TOTAL EXPENSES

\$1,381,816



Total assets increased \$91,691, total liabilities increased \$113,196, and total equity decreased \$21,505 from fiscal year 2023 to 2024.

Total Equity: \$1,616,238

I am an authorized officer of Head Start California and hereby certify that the financial statements herein were prepared without audit from the books and records of the corporation.

TONY JORDAN, HEAD START CALIFORNIA TREASURER

Advocacy

Our Guiding Principles

Funding: Increase Head Start wages to be commensurate with the education and training required.

Alignment: Align poverty eligibility guidelines, staffing requirements, wages, and funding to strengthen the ability of Head Start programs to serve families and children.

Simplicity: Reduce and simplify regulations to remove unnecessary administrative burdens and free agencies to focus on serving children.

Flexibility: Give service providers the flexibility to adapt services and leverage funding to fit local needs and to innovate in designing new services.

Equity: Create an environment of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging for all members, staff, volunteers, families, and stakeholders.

Security: Advance policies that promote the economic security of vulnerable families and children.

Our Priorities

Federal

- Dramatically increase funding for Head Start to support mandated wage parity by 2031.
- Obtain additional federal funding to support staff wellness.
- Adjust income-eligibility guidelines to account for state, regional, or local costs of living.
- Expand categorical eligibility.
- Increase the number of children Head Start serves.

State

- Ensure the state maintains its commitment to increase the state reimbursement rate, to close the wage gap between Head Start and TK-12 teachers.
- Ease or offer flexibility in workforce requirements to improve workforce recruitment and retention.
- Simplify CCTR regulations to align with Early Head Start.
- Improve integration of Head Start throughout relevant state systems and agencies.
- Encourage building code revisions related to occupancy limits to align with Head Start standards.
- Ensure the state's child development permit matrix aligns with Head Start standards and supports a developing workforce.



Photo: March 18, 2025, Head Start to the Capitol Advocacy Day

Advocacy

Accomplishments

Federal

- ✓ Successfully coordinated a statewide advocacy and media campaign to oppose a proposal to eliminate Head Start
- ✓ Launched an unprecedented Federal advocacy effort, hiring two firms to work directly with Congressmembers and ensure Head Start retains Federal funding

State

- ✓ Sponsored and secured adoption of AB 1930, ending the ten-year limit on Associate Teacher Permits
- ✓ Held a record-breaking advocacy day at the state capitol, with 200 Head Start staff and parents
- ✓ Secured adoption of AB 176, rolling back the fire marshal's new limit of 5 infants and toddlers per building



March 18, 2025. Advocates from E Center Head Start attend Head (Start) to the Capitol Advocacy Day in Sacramento.

LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS ATTENDED

79
STATE



96
FEDERAL



January 29, 2025. Head Start advocates from California meet with staff from the office of Senator Alex Padilla in Washington, D.C.



March 18, 2025. Advocates at Head (Start) to the Capitol Advocacy Day in Sacramento.



June 18, 2024. Melanee Cottrill, pictured fourth from right, stands with Assemblymember Murasutchi and ECE advocates after AB 1123 passed the Senate Education Committee.



Professional Development

Leading with Purpose: Advancing the 2024 HSPPS Priorities

In response to the most significant update to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) since 2016, our association launched a bold series of professional development sessions at our conferences starting in November 2024. These sessions equipped staff across all program levels to implement updated federal standards with confidence and clarity.

142

SESSIONS DELIVERED
AFTER THE HSPPS UPDATE

753

PROFESSIONALS TRAINED
ACROSS 133 AGENCIES

5,699

SESSION ENGAGEMENTS
LOGGED

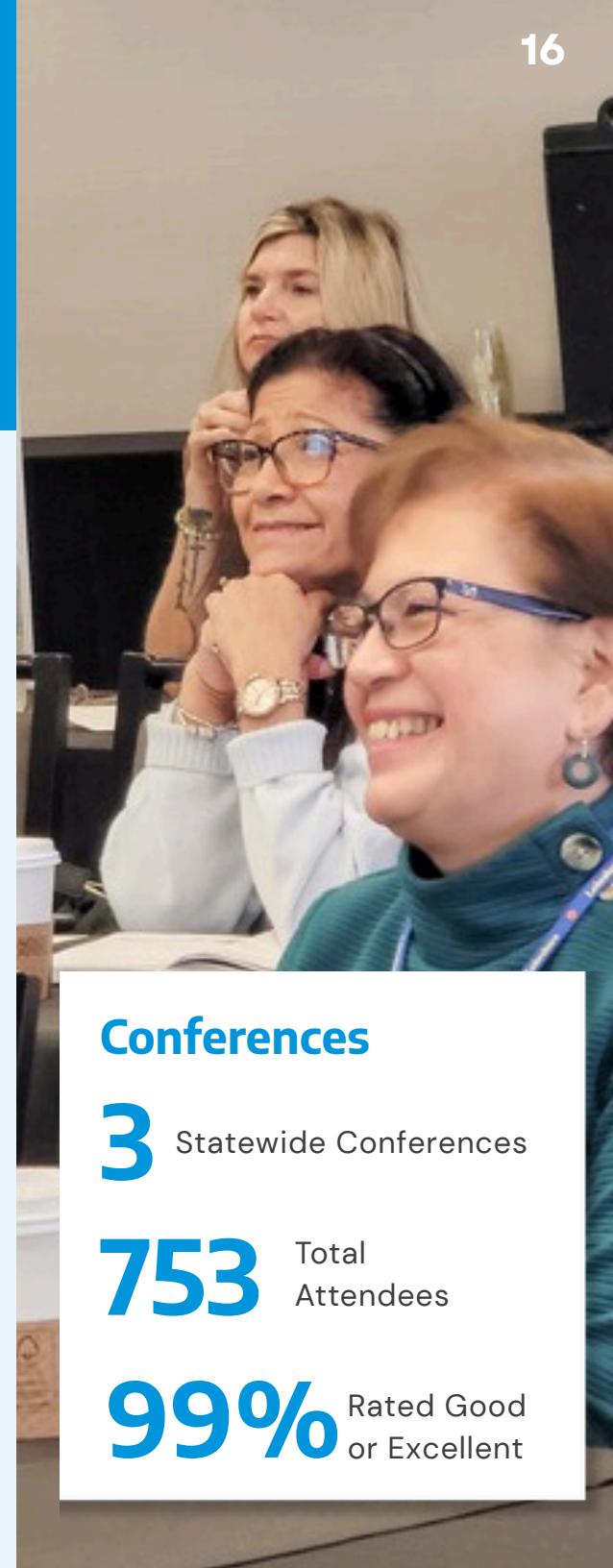
Strategic Focus Areas

Our programming concentrated on the most urgent priorities elevated in the updated HSPPS. Verified content and attendance data show how deeply each topic was addressed:

Topic	# of Sessions	Hours of Training
Mental health systems and trauma-responsive care	23	1,894 hours
Staff well-being, compensation, and retention	27	1,616 hours
Governance, oversight, and developmental quality	25	1,122 hours
Child safety, supervision, and incident reporting	22	940 hours

These figures underscore our commitment to not just checking the compliance box — but moving the field forward in emotional wellness, workforce support, and organizational readiness.

Two of HSC's five signature conferences were not conducted during this fiscal year. The Parent and Family Engagement Conference was not held as NHSA hosted a similar event in California, with which we collaborated. Additionally, the Wellness Symposium was strategically shifted from its usual June timeframe to September to better accommodate participant availability, placing it outside the reporting period for this fiscal year.



Conferences

3 Statewide Conferences

753 Total
Attendees

99% Rated Good
or Excellent

Professional Development

Leading with Purpose: Advancing the 2024 HSPPS Priorities

Who We Served

Our three statewide conferences brought together a powerful cross-section of the early childhood workforce, uniting educators, leaders, specialists, and families around a shared mission: achieving excellence through HSPPS implementation.



Our statewide events served as a dynamic hub for HSPPS-aligned leadership and learning — ensuring new standards were not only understood but put into action.



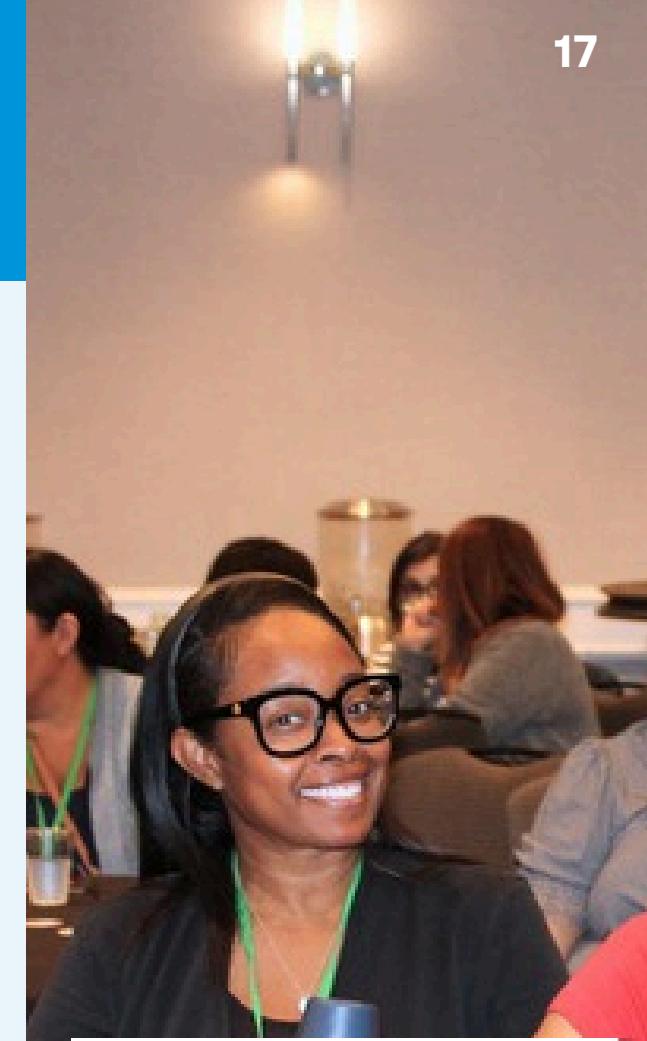
HEALTH INSTITUTE



ANNUAL (EDUCATION) CONFERENCE



MANAGERS & DIRECTORS INSTITUTE



“

The event was inspiring, providing more resources, and strengthening my joy and purpose for my work.

-2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE ATTENDEE

Professional Development

Improving Access to Learning

We recognize that attending in-person conferences is not always possible due to staffing needs, budget considerations, or other factors. That's why Head Start California is committed to providing asynchronous and virtual learning opportunities—ensuring staff can access valuable professional development on their own schedule, from any location.

Webinars

This year, Head Start California offered 15 free webinars designed to give our members practical tools and fresh insights. Sessions covered early literacy, de-escalation techniques, advocacy, AI, and compliance with HSPPS. Many were presented by our Proud Partners or in collaboration with state agencies—ensuring members had access to expert guidance on the topics that matter most.

15
FREE
WEBINARS

2,498
PARTICIPANTS

Trauma-Equipped Training *Hanna Center*



HSC partnered with the Hanna Center to create a comprehensive 9-hour certificate course designed to equip staff with essential trauma-responsive and de-escalation techniques. Tailored specifically for Head Start programs, the Trauma-Equipped Training was launched in April 2024.

334
COURSES
COMPLETED

Learning Journey: Communicate with Impact



In April 2025, Head Start California launched the Learning Journey: Communicate with Impact, a self-paced, virtual training designed for managers, teachers, and support staff. This innovative program equips participants with communication skills, effective feedback techniques, and strategies to strengthen team engagement and workplace wellness.

35
COURSES
PURCHASED



Partnerships & Sponsorships

Head Start California is proud to connect our members with our trusted Proud Partners—organizations that offer a wide range of valuable resources tailored to the unique needs of program leaders. Whether it's data systems, insurance, school supplies, staffing solutions, or other essential services, our partners are here to support and strengthen Head Start programs across the state.

22 HSC PROUD PARTNERS

Executive Proud Partners



Associate Proud Partners



12 EVENT SPONSORS



“

The partnership gives us the opportunity to connect with and support many programs...and work together.

-LALA ZHANG, LEARNING GENIE

Fundraising

This year, Head Start California expanded its fundraising efforts with two new individual giving campaigns—Giving Tuesday and the Big Day of Giving—while continuing our signature Power of 2 campaign. Power of 2 directly supports our advocacy work, with \$1 of every \$2 raised going to the National Head Start Association (NHS). Together, these initiatives inspired generosity from 63 donors, raising a total of \$11,279 to strengthen our mission and amplify our voice at both the state and national levels.

\$11,279 RAISED
63 DONORS

GIVING
TUESDAY

The Power of **2**

Big Day of Giving
MAY 1

Thank you to our generous donors

Individuals:

Cherrie Adajar
Robert Arnold
Heather Aulabaugh
Rich and Terese Belme
Christina Castle-Barber
Adriana Castillo
Juan Cisneros
Cristine Cochran
Edward Condon
Lilibeth Cosico-Berge
Christopher Cottrill
Melanee Cottrill
Darien DeLu
Matthew Denerstein
Deborah Dillon
Michelle Dove
M DuPree
Genevieve Garavito
Holly Garrett
Kathryn Gianolini
Daniel Gribble
Mary Carol Gustafson

John Herbert

Jessica Hess (in honor of
John Murray)

Cheryl Horney

Janis Jones

Anthony Jordan

Elizabeth Kamrar

Maureen Kemp

David Koppel

Anthony Kushnir

Monika Landenhamer

Christopher Maricle

Diane Marshall

Miriam McNamara

Jeremy S Meyer

Susanne Miller

Mason Moore

Melanie Mueller

Heather Mummau

Jodi Neuenschwander

Anita Osborn

Laurel Parker

Brenda Poteete

Robyn Pottorff

Diana Rischling
David Robinson

Kitty Ryan

Stacey Scarborough

Jerry Tello

Maria Luz Torres

Barbara Walden

Willie Warren

Jacqueline Williams

Olusegun Williams

Sherline Wilson

Organizations:

CCR Analytics

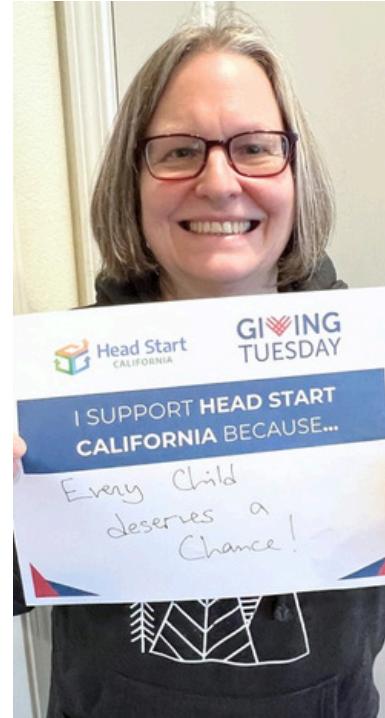
Easter Seals Southern CA

Shasta County Head Start

Sierra Cascade Family

Opportunities

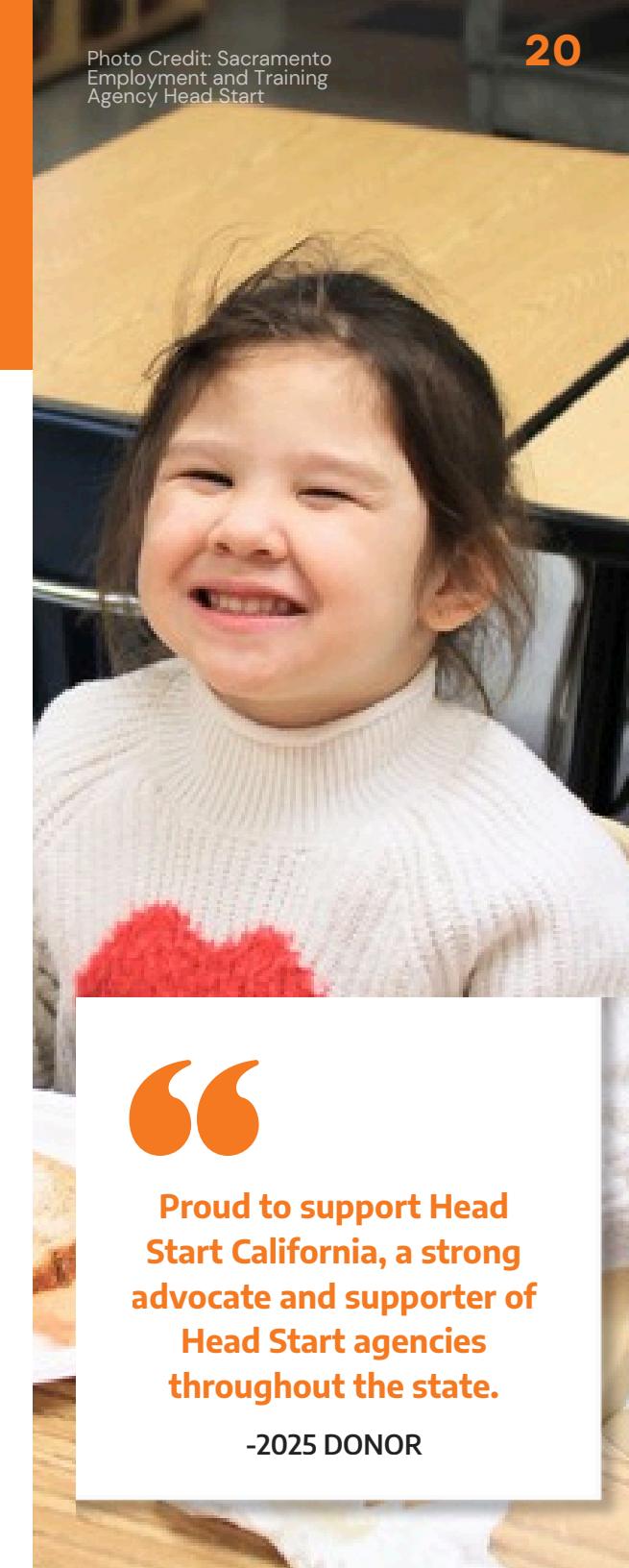
Plus three anonymous
donors



Giving Tuesday Donor, Susanne Miller

Photo Credit: Sacramento Employment and Training Agency Head Start

20



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Proud to support Head Start California, a strong advocate and supporter of Head Start agencies throughout the state.

-2025 DONOR

Standing Strong for Head Start

In times of uncertainty, strength comes from standing together. As your association, Head Start California is steadfast in our commitment to face challenges side-by-side with you.

This year brought funding delays, unclear executive orders, and even an existential threat to Head Start. But with your partnership—through membership, conference participation, and even your personal donations—we have met each challenge head on.

In January, when the federal government tried to freeze our grants, we were in Washington, D.C., and had funding restored in less than a day. When a gag order silenced the Region Office, we stepped in—sharing expanded program updates in the Director’s Update and Cluster Meetings. With new restrictions on T&TA funds, our updated conferences gave information and inspiration.

In February, as PMS delays threatened closures, we worked with Congress to keep funds flowing. In April, when our Region Office was shuttered and a proposal to eliminate Head Start surfaced, we made an unprecedented investment in advocacy and communications—and turned the tide.

Today, our voice is louder and stronger than ever. We are fighting alongside you, for the families and children who need us. Whatever comes next, we will face it together—and we will not back down.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the former Region 9 Staff:

Cynthia Yao	Josh Jagerman
Jeff Arciero	Sarah Kennedy
Maureen Burns Vermette	Bernard Lagud
Laura Candeloro	Guanyat (Julian) Lee
Joanna Chan	Matt Louie
Neil D’Silva	Raymond Low
Brenda Diaz	Dow-Jane Pei
Rachel Gannon	Chris Pflaumer
Erendira Guerrero	Birdie Winrow



Thank you to the programs that shared heartfelt notes and children’s artwork. These touching tokens of appreciation were presented to Region 9 staff and featured in a special tribute video.  [View it now!](#)

“

Your voices matter.
Your leadership matters.
The love and care that you continue to pour into your staff, your communities, and the youngest among us — that is the heart of Head Start.

-CYNTHIA YAO,
FORMER REGION 9 OHS
PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Head Start Voices

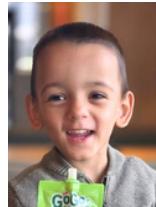
Head Start stories are the heart of our mission. They capture the profound impact Head Start has on children, parents, and families—transforming lives and serving as a true launchpad of opportunity. Each story reflects the hope, growth, and success made possible through Head Start.

This year, we were honored to hear from families across rural, urban, and suburban communities. Because Head Start is a federal program with local control, it looks different in every community—but the commitment to children’s success remains the same.

27

STORIES COLLECTED
& SHARED

Thanks to all who
shared their stories!



“When my son entered Head Start, he was shy, overwhelmed, and delayed. Today, he’s running into his classroom with a grin, speaking with confidence, and dreaming bigger dreams than I ever dared hope. Head Start didn’t just prepare my son for school — it prepared him for life. And it gave me the village I prayed for during the hardest nights.” **—Arishankery, Head Start Parent**



“I was a Head Start kid, raised in rural California by a single mom who worked two jobs just to keep the lights on and put food on the table. I know firsthand what Head Start means to families like mine—it was a lifeline. While my mom worked tirelessly to build us a better life, Head Start gave me a safe place to learn, and to grow, and to be seen.” **—CA Assemblymember Heather Hadwick (R)**



“Over the years working in Head Start, I’ve served as a Family Educator, Teacher’s Assistant, and Lead Teacher. Now, I’m a Site Supervisor and Family Service Worker. In the past 17 years, I’ve earned an AA in Child Development and a BA in Early Childhood Education Administration, which has been both challenging and rewarding.” **—Nicolette, Head Start Staff**



MY HEAD START STORY

By: Randi, Head Start alumni, parent, and staff

“I started in Head Start as a young child back in 1980! As I got older, I did not have any interest in school, as I was a child of a depressed, drug-addicted mom. I struggled in school and only went because it was the only place I could receive a free hot meal.

When I became a mom at the young age of 19, I had no idea how to be a parent as I did not have positive role models. My oldest daughter was a breeze, and I enrolled her at Head Start, where she flourished and made many friends. She was shy but did well there and seemed to like it. Then comes my son, and oh boy was I in for it! He was lacking in language, so I again enrolled him in Head Start. This time, things did not go so well. My son cried every single day at drop off, hid under the table, and would not come out. It got to the point that the teachers decided to move him to the PM class because they said that teacher was really great with kids like my son, I was willing to try anything at that point! My first encounter with his new teacher was so welcoming, and she reassured me that he would be just fine, and I should think about volunteering in his class. Which I did, every day! I loved the environment so much, I decided to go back to school to learn more about child development.

I became who I am all because of Head Start. I am now a supervisor/coach for all early childhood programs in our district. I continued to watch to learn as much as I could, so I went back to get my master’s degree in education, and now I also teach early childhood development classes as an adjunct professor for the local university. My children are all grown now, and doing very well, but they still remember their Head Start teachers. Head Start changes lives, and it can change the trajectory to a direction not even thought possible. I love to spread the word about Head Start and its benefits to not only children, but families and even communities.”

Social Media

Head Start California is active on Facebook, X, LinkedIn, and Instagram—expanding our reach and engagement with members across platforms. Over the past year, we've invested in a more robust video strategy, with a focus on delivering high-quality content, timely updates, and valuable resources. We're committed to keeping our members informed, inspired, and connected through dynamic, relevant, and accessible digital communications.

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