



Head Start
CALIFORNIA

CONNECTING | ENGAGING | ADVOCATING
for our highest needs children

2025-26

Annual Report

**Standing Together.
Growing Stronger.**

A Message from our Leadership

In many ways, 2025–2026 was a transformative year for Head Start California. Throughout nearly every aspect of our work—including advocacy, governance, membership, and learning—we made new investments, launched upgraded technologies, and strengthened our collective voice. Our goal is simple: to ensure members have the resources they need to thrive, and that children and families remain at the center of every decision.

This year's advocacy efforts focused on building relationships with Congressmembers and state legislators on both sides of the aisle, with support from two Washington, D.C.-based firms. We are proud to have helped overcome major threats and secure an increase in funding for Head Start. Although relatively small, this increase was a triumph as other programs faced reductions or elimination.

Our conferences remained the core of our learning opportunities this year. At the same time, we heard from members that traveling to conferences is becoming more difficult, so we also launched new virtual learning opportunities. Our goal is to ensure that every staff member—regardless of whether they can take time away from their center—has the learning opportunities they need to succeed.

We continued to move our Strategic Plan forward, launching a new Association Management Software System that now underpins and streamlines the ways in which we interact with members. In the coming years, this system will allow us to unify our online offerings and provide even more benefits for our members. While this Strategic Plan has reached its planned end date, efforts to create our next plan using organizational evaluations and best practices are well underway.

Last year, our members approved a major update to our Bylaws. This year, we implemented those changes through our Board election process. The new Bylaws also enabled us to begin updating our corporate policies. While this work wasn't always glamorous, it laid a strong foundation for HSC's future.

Looking ahead, we know that challenges remain. Yet we are confident that, together, we can keep Head Start strong. We deeply appreciate our members, partners, supporters, families, and everyone who continues to stand up for Head Start. It is a privilege to do this work alongside you, and we look forward to many more years together!



Jodie Keller
Board President
Head Start California



Melanee Cottrill
Executive Director
Head Start California



Our goal is simple: to ensure members have the resources they need to thrive, and that children and families remain at the center of every decision.



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Photo Credit: Sabrina Meza, Head Start Parent



The Mission

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



The 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.

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
Luis Bautista, Los Angeles
County Office of Education



Treasurer
Tony Jordan,
Stanislaus County
Office of Education



Secretary
Heather Aulabaugh,
Glenn County Office
of Education



Past President
Stacey Scarborough,
Venice Family Clinic

Cluster Representatives

Cluster I



Ray Rojas, Easter Seals
of Southern California



Rosa Cabrera Jaime,
Episcopal Community
Services

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



Photo: Board of Directors Meeting April 12, 2026

Cluster V



Cheryl Horney, Wu Yee
Children's Services



Melanie Mueller, YMCA of
the East Bay

Cluster VI



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.

Cluster VIII



Heather Aulabaugh, Glenn
County Office of Education



Vicki Markss, Colusa County
Office of Education

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

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.

48

CLUSTER MEETINGS
ATTENDED THIS YEAR BY
HSC STAFF

Who We Are

22

BOARD MEMBERS

6

FULL-TIME STAFF

42

VOLUNTEERS

11

REGIONAL
CLUSTERS

115

HEAD START CALIFORNIA
MEMBER AGENCIES

4

EARLY HEAD START CHILD CARE
PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

Our Membership

HSC's most valuable asset is its members, and we are proud to be 115 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

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

83,728

HEAD START CHILDREN

1,488

PREGNANT WOMEN

28,210

HEAD START STAFF

1,784

HEAD START CENTERS

137

HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START
PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA



Photo Credit: E Center Head Start

Community Action Agencies (12)

Nonprofits (58)

School Districts
(35)

County Offices of Education (14)

Tribal (13)

Governmental (5)

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.



Photo: Volunteer, Rosie Estrella-Dow, runs carnival games at HSC's Annual Conference.

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 responding quickly to changing circumstances, guiding the strategic planning process, and meeting members' evolving needs.

Members: Jodie Keller (President / Chair), Luis Bautista (Vice President), Heather Aulabaugh (Secretary), Tony Jordan (Treasurer), Stacey Scarborough (Immediate Past President), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Membership Committee

The Membership Committee advanced several strategic initiatives throughout the year. The committee provided guidance on implementing a new association management system, developing a new vendor directory scheduled to launch next year, and expanding training opportunities to better meet the evolving needs of HSC members.

Members: Marissa Duran (chair), Jenny Pettit (Vice Chair), Michelle Dove, Norma Johnson, Jodie Keller, Vicki Markss, Melanie Mueller, Alberto Ramirez, Adriana Ramirez-Barron, Ray Rojas, Cynthia Skyers-Gordon, Latonda Williams, Karen Burke (staff), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Public Policy Committee

The public policy committee is charged with advising the Board and staff on proposed laws, regulations, and other public policies. This year, the committee focused on building strong relationships with key members of Congress, working with the state on regulatory issues including teacher permits and building codes, and protecting Head Start's funding and future. We were proud to sponsor and secure adoption of AB 1123, which adds ECE representation to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Members: Luis Bautista (Chair), Ricardo Rivera (Vice Chair), AnnLouise Bonnitto, Betty Zamorano-Pedregon, Juan Cisneros, Melanie Mueller, Ray Rojas, Stacey Scarborough, Suzanne Godinez, Yolanda Gonzales, Nikki Brock, Jessica Roenfeldt, Maureen Coker, Charlotte Ochiqui, Colin Legerton, Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Governance Committee

The governance committee is responsible for ensuring HSC's governance systems and structures are compliant and meeting members' needs. This year, the committee focused on updating existing policies, adopting new policies, and implementing our new bylaws.

Members: AnnLouise Bonnitto (Chair), Heather Aulabaugh (Vice Chair), Betty Zamorano-Pedregon, Cheryl Horney, Brenda Poteete, Michelle Dove, Miriam McNamara, Lisa Morrow, Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Committees

53 COMMITTEE
MEMBERS

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee is charged with recommending the selection of auditors, receiving any audit reports and reporting findings to the Board.

Members: Juan Cisneros (chair), Stacey Scarborough (vice chair), Sarah Orth, Karen Peters, Rochelle Walbridge, Latonda Williams, Edwin Abarca (staff), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee is charged with providing oversight, advice, and analysis of the financial details of the association. Responsibilities include: quarterly review of association financial statements and investment results; oversight of the association's budget; and oversight of the association's financial procedures. This year the committee focused on a streamlined reporting of the financials, investing in strategic activities, and improvements in financial procedures while continuing to keep HSC fiscally sound.

Members: Tony Jordan (chair), Cheryl Horney (vice chair), Rosa Cabrera-Jaime, Max Chavez, Michael Hawkins, Vicki Markss, Miriam McNamara, Jenny Pettit, Edwin Abarca (staff), Melanee Cottrill (staff)

Conference Committees

Conference Committees provide guidance and expertise to help shape Head Start California's professional development events. Members advise on event themes, session topics, speakers, and program content, assist with proposal reviews, support promotional and volunteer efforts, and provide feedback to strengthen future events. Their contributions help ensure HSC events are relevant, engaging, and responsive to the needs of California's Head Start community.



Annual Conference Committee

Adriana Ramirez-Barron, Barbara Walden, Billiejo LaBriola, Debra Hall, Karen Fukushima, Kristine Binderup, Natalie Lucero, Noelle Cook, Sandra Gonzales-Pabón, Arlene Molina, Patricia Gordon, Renate Martin, Lynda de la Mora, Kindell Graham (staff), Gricelda Ocegueda (staff)



Health Institute Committee

Angel Chang, Cris Cochran, Chriselda Gonzalez, Debra Hall, Renee Kapsner, Rubie Martinez, Nina Paddock, Kristine Ramilo, Lisa Taylor, Thao Tran, Samantha Stacey, Kindell Graham (staff), Gricelda Ocegueda (staff)



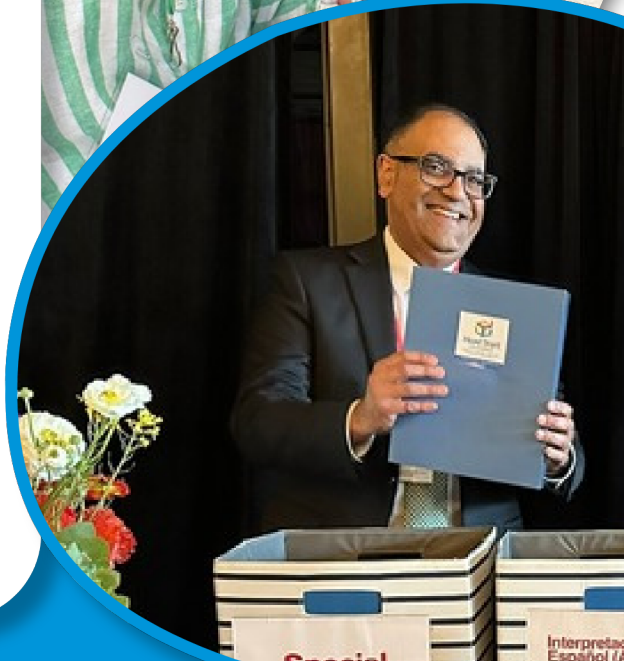
Managers & Directors Institute Committee

Heather Aulabaugh, Angel Chang, Marissa Duran, Suzanne Godinez, Cheryl Horney, Miriam McNamara, Ricardo Rivera, Rosa Cabrera, Jocelyn Tucker, Kindell Graham (staff), Gricelda Ocegueda (staff).



Pictured above: (left to right) Health Institute committee members Angel Chang and Chris Cochran.

Pictured below: HSC Board Member Ricardo Rivera hands out folders at HSC Capitol Day.



Our Team

Head Start California is powered by a dedicated team of six full-time professionals who are passionate about supporting our members and advancing the Head Start community. Get to know our team and read about our favorite things to do as a young child.



Melanee Cottrill
Executive Director

"I grew up in a small, rural town, so my best friend, siblings, and imagination were my entertainment. Luckily, we had a giant country backyard perfect for shenanigans. Whether we were digging a garbage-bag-lined 'swimming pool' or putting on swing-set acrobat shows for our laughing siblings, there was never a shortage of fun!"



Karen Burke
Director, Membership & Communications

"I loved following my dad around because, to me, he was the coolest person on the planet. Whether he was mixing cement, sawing wood, heading to the hardware store, or fixing a broken appliance, there I was—right beside him, 'helping'."



Kindell Graham
Events Director

"My favorite childhood activities were climbing trees, building forts, and searching for animals. Whether I was high up in the branches, creating a secret hideaway, or looking for lizards, frogs, and other critters, I was happiest spending my days outside exploring nature and creating my own adventures."



Tiffany Rosso
Development Manager

"I enjoyed making and painting salt dough holiday ornaments with my mom and all the other arts and crafts!"



Edwin Abarca
Administrative & Finance Coordinator

"As a child, I loved building things for my three little sisters. Using cardboard, I made dollhouses, towers, moats, and, as we got older, even pulley elevators. Bringing their ideas to life and playing together brought all of us so much joy."



Gricelda Ocegueda
Engagement Coordinator

"As a kid, nothing lit me up more than creating skits for school talent shows, especially lip singing contests and family gatherings. I'd write, produce, direct and film it."

On the Ground

This year, Team HSC visited a handful of Head Start programs, seeing firsthand the incredible work happening in communities across California. We're proud to support and celebrate their impact!



Gricelda painting a child's face at the WCIC Harvest Festival



Toy Sorting for Salvation Army Angel Tree



Team holiday celebration

Strategic Plan

LOOKING BACK

As we close out our 2022–2026 Strategic Plan, we are proud of the incredible progress we have made. Despite leadership transitions and significant legal and regulatory changes, HSC completed nearly all of our planned activities – with just three remaining in progress.

The Strategic Goals

The plan's activities were built on five pillars, designed to support five 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



Photo Credit: E center Head Start

Strategic Plan

Pillars and Accomplishments

Major progress was made on each pillar. Our top two accomplishments of each include:

Raise Awareness About Head Start



Staff and board members participated in state workgroups, including those focused on ECE Teacher Permits and Fire Marshal / Building Code regulations, ensuring Head Start had a seat at the table when key decisions were made.



Created a UPK Toolkit, giving members the tools to build awareness about the important role Head Start plays in the mixed-delivery system.

Mobilize the Network



Staff attended Cluster meetings to share information and engage members.



Recruited new, non-director members to participate on HSC committees and ensure member voices are centered in decision-making. We appreciate our new volunteers!

Diversify HSC Training



Launched new virtual training partnerships, including the Trauma-Equipped Training and FA1/FA2 Monitoring Bootcamp.



Conducted two professional learning needs assessments, to ensure learning opportunities directly meet program needs.

Build HSC Internal Capacity



Benchmarked and adjusted staff compensation and benefits to sustainable levels that support retention of our talented team.



Implemented a new Association Management Software system, laying the foundation for efficient access to member benefits.

Increase & Diversify HSC Revenue



Hired a Development Manager and successfully implemented a new fundraising plan.



Evaluated and adjusted Proud Partner program to better align benefits, member needs, and investment.

LOOKING FORWARD

11

The Board embarked upon a new strategic planning journey in April 2026. Our FY2026 – 2029 Strategic Plan is built on a solid foundation of data gathered through the CORE Capacity Assessment Tool and the 7 Measures of Success assessment. The assessments revealed opportunities to focus on our technical capacity, customer service culture, and alliance building – all with an eye towards adaptability. Grounded in best practices for remarkable associations that stand the test of time, our goals for the next three years focus on building an even stronger association that is positioned to support our members, adapt to changing circumstances, and overcome any challenge.

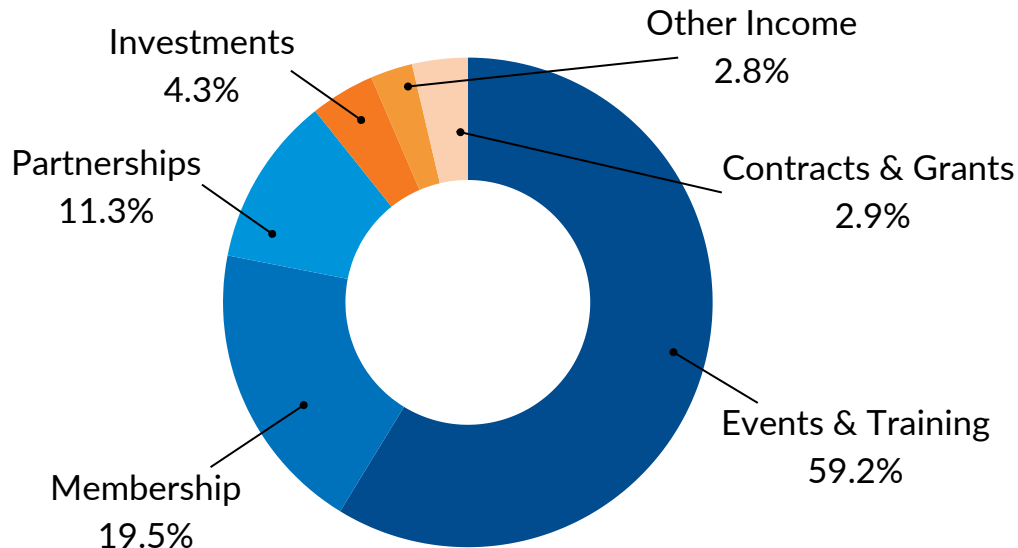
- **HSC will serve as a mission-driven, dynamic hub** that empowers members, donors, and volunteers through integrated digital platforms, leveraging data and engagement strategies to foster a unified and strengthened Head Start community.
- **HSC will foster an adaptable, service-oriented culture** focused on member satisfaction and continuous improvement that elevates their voice, is grounded in data and feedback, and meets the evolving needs of our Head Start community.
- **HSC will expand our influence and reach through the development of mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances**, fostering a collaborative landscape that supports the evolving needs of the Head Start California community.

Financials

HSC this year again 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 \$96,000—\$372,000 less than initially projected. This result comes despite the 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 financial statements are still undergoing the typical rigorous review from previous years. With a strong cash reserve and stable assets, HSC remains financially healthy and well-positioned for sustainable growth in service to our Head Start and Early Childhood Education community for the road ahead.

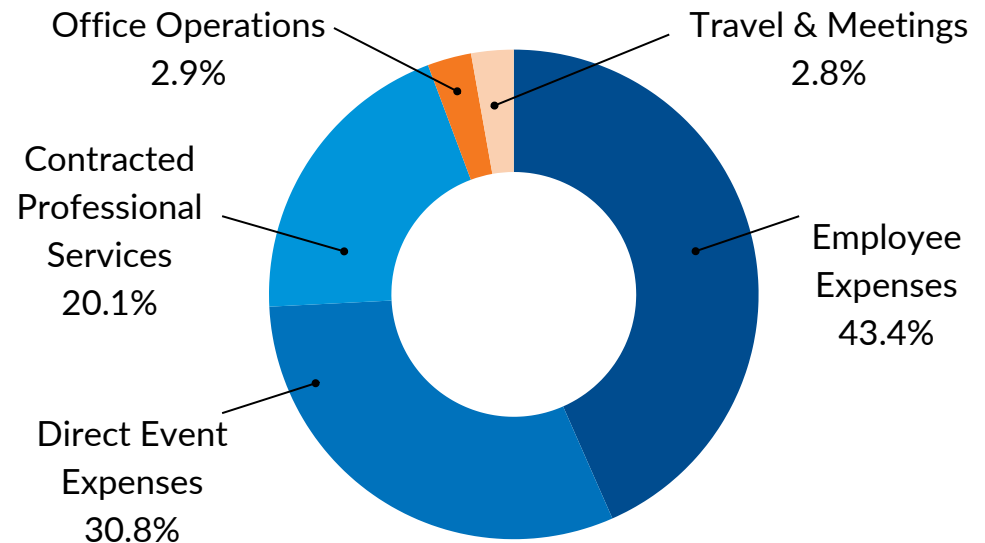
TOTAL REVENUE

\$1,638,202



TOTAL EXPENSES

\$1,734,345



Total assets decreased \$133,434, total liabilities decreased \$111,595, and total equity decreased \$21,839 from fiscal year 2025 to 2026.

Total Equity: \$1,594,399

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

With rapid changes to the Federal landscape, 2025 – 2026 was no ordinary year for advocacy. Recognizing the opportunities and threats ahead, our Board of Directors made an unprecedented investment in consultants to support our advocacy efforts.

With their support, we built and strengthened our relationships with key members of Congress who have not historically been strong supporters of Head Start. Through collective advocacy efforts, we secured a slight increase to Head Start funding – a major accomplishment in an environment where other programs are being reduced or outright eliminated and following on the heels of an attempt to entirely defund Head Start.

Of course, we didn't stop there. Our federal work was complemented by ongoing efforts at the state level. For too long, ECE teacher permits have been regulated by an agency on which early childhood education did not have a voice. To solve this, we sponsored and secured adoption of AB 1123, which will add early childhood education representatives to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

We participated in workgroups hosted by the State Fire Marshal, crafting recommendations for new building occupancy regulations that keep children safe and classrooms open. And we continued to raise our voices as the Commission on Teacher Credentialing advanced updates to the ECE teacher permit matrix, securing key modifications to the proposal.



LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS ATTENDED

67
STATE

79
FEDERAL

REGULATORY AGENCY MEETINGS ATTENDED

9
STATE

1
FEDERAL



March 17, 2026. Advocates at Head (Start) to the Capitol Day in Sacramento.



September 17, 2025. Advocates from California pose with Senators Padilla and Schiff at the Fall Leadership Institute.

Photo: Senator Adam Schiff holds children's artwork gifted to him at Hill Day, Winter Leadership Institute on January 28, 2026.

13



The entire experience was simply a wealth of knowledge and empowering. Loved the energy and preparation before visits. Thank you.

-2026 HSC CAPITOL DAY ATTENDEE

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.

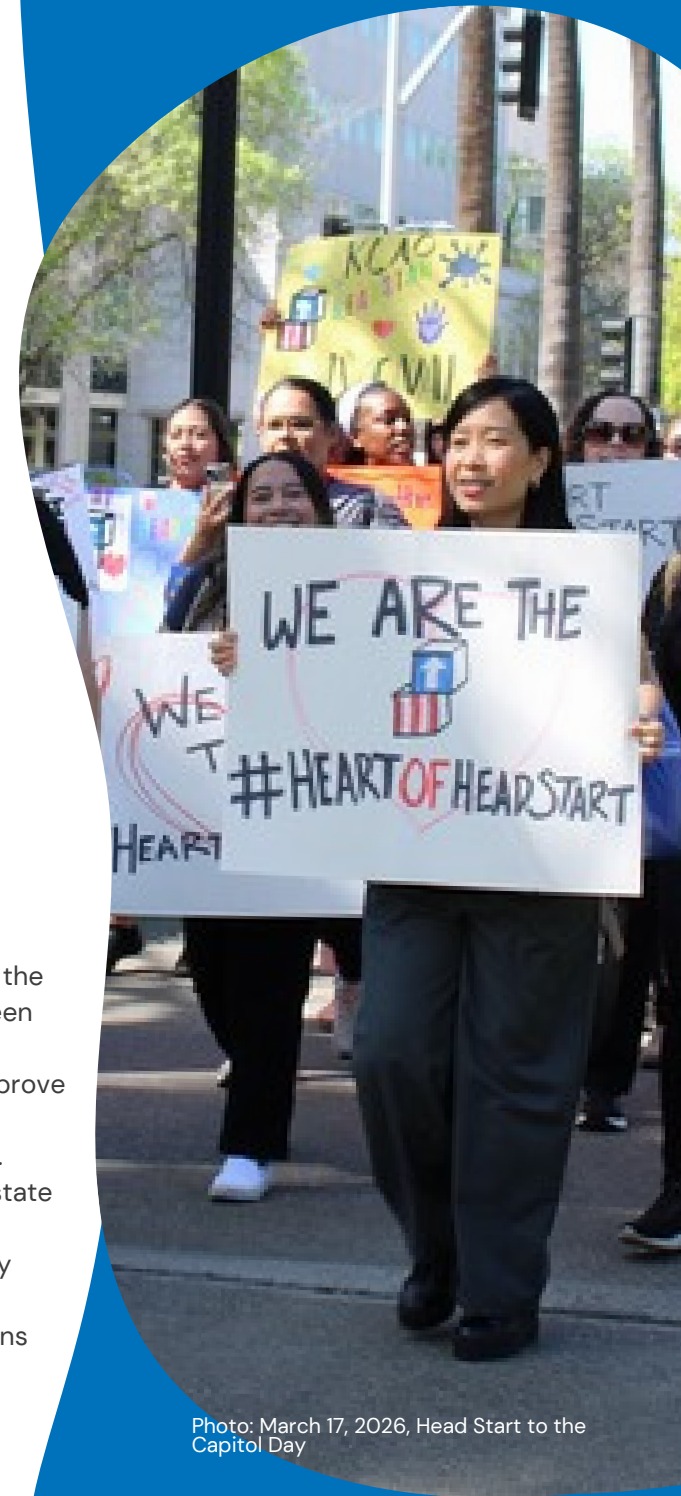


Photo: March 17, 2026, Head Start to the Capitol Day

Advocacy

Head Start Heroes

The Head Start Hero Award was created to honor individuals who go above and beyond to support and protect Head Start— individuals who become heroes to the children and families we serve. This year, we are especially proud to present the inaugural award to two incredibly deserving members of the state assembly: Patrick Ahrens and Heather Hadwick.

It's not every day that legislators cold-call their constituents simply to ask, "How can I help?" But that's exactly what Patrick and Heather did. When news broke that the White House was considering eliminating Head Start, our honorees reached out. At a time when bipartisan agreement can feel increasingly rare, we honored a Republican and a Democrat who came together to protect Head Start. Together, they sponsored a letter to Congress from the State Legislature that garnered a record number of bipartisan signatures. They co-authored a widely read op-ed in The Sacramento Bee, elevating the importance of Head Start. They declared May 2025 as Head Start Month, again calling on Congress to preserve the program. At every turn, they stood shoulder to shoulder with us — advocating, elevating, and protecting this vital program.

In the face of unprecedented threats, Heather and Patrick did not hesitate. They used their voices and their platforms to ensure that Head Start — and the children and families who rely on it — were protected. Assemblymembers Ahrens and Hadwick remind us that when we put children at the center, meaningful partnerships and progress are achievable.



Photo: March 17, 2026, recipients of the 2026 Head Start Hero Award: Heather Hadwick & Patrick Ahrens



Professional Development Conferences

4 Statewide
Conferences

1,271 Total
Attendees

98% Rated Good
or Excellent



Wellness Symposium

South Lake Tahoe, CA

The Wellness Symposium goes beyond individual self-care. This intimate, hands-on experience helps Head Start professionals strengthen their own well-being while learning practical ways to support staff, strengthen workplace culture, and create lasting change within their programs.



Health Institute

San Jose, CA

The Health Institute brings together Head Start professionals across California for specialized learning in health, nutrition, mental health, disabilities, and wellness, creating a unique space to connect across disciplines and strengthen services for children and families.



Annual Conference (Education and Parent & Family Engagement Conferences)

Ontario, CA

Our largest event of the year, the Annual Conference brings together educators, family advocates, and Head Start parents for inspiring keynotes and breakout sessions that spark new ideas and deepen impact.



Managers and Directors Institute (MDI)

San Francisco, CA

MDI is a leadership-focused event for early childhood program leaders. It blends peer networking, policy updates, and workshops to support strategic decision-making, team management, and effective operations.



"My favorite part was the balance of activities and information. The trainers were so warm and engaging and had such great ideas and insights."



"I benefited from attending and my organization will benefit. I will be making changes/improvements based on the information I received."



"Connecting with others during different sessions is definitely one of my favorites. It's wonderful to share experiences and support each other through challenges and victories."



"THE BEST conference I have ever attended. I loved how the trainers connected all content and made it relevant to leadership!"

Professional Development

Your Voice Shaped Our Learning

Our FY 2025–26 professional development strategy was driven by member feedback. Through statewide cluster meetings, member surveys, and ongoing conversations with California Head Start professionals, we identified seven key priority areas for learning. These priorities guided the development of our conferences, institutes, webinars, trainings, and special events, ensuring our professional development responded to the needs our members identified most.

Monitoring Readiness Bootcamp: FA1 & FA2 Edition

HSC helped programs strengthen FA1 and FA2 readiness with practical tools to demonstrate compliance, prepare for reviews, and confidently tell their program's data story.

65 Attendees

Wellness Symposium

HSC responded to continued demand for staff wellness support by moving the Wellness Symposium to a more convenient time of year, helping increase attendance by 91%, from 54 participants in 2024 to 103 in 2025.

103 Attendees

Building Strong Family–Staff Partnerships

HSC partnered with the Head Start TTA Network to help programs strengthen family partnerships through practical PFCE strategies and ready-to-use resources.

19 Attendees

Responding to Member–Identified Professional Development Priorities in FY 2025–26

Priority	Professional Learning Experiences*	Session Attendance	Total Participant Training Hours
Monitoring, Governance & Organizational Excellence	23	772	1,543.5
Leadership, Workforce & Organizational Culture	28	2,459	4,597.5
Child & Family Well–Being	50	1,763	3,186.75
Enrollment, ERSEA & Community Engagement	27	1,333	2,281.0
Safety & Program Quality	26	883	1,141.75
Innovation, Technology & Data	16	465	617.25
Communication, Advocacy & Public Leadership	20	2,010	3,083.25

*Professional development experiences include sessions at conferences, institutes, symposiums, bootcamps, virtual trainings, and other HSC learning events.

Note: Session attendance and participant training hours reflect engagement across all professional learning experiences. Individuals may be represented in multiple sessions based on their participation.

Operationalizing ERSEA Excellence

HSC responded to ERSEA challenges identified by California programs with practical training to help staff turn changing requirements into stronger day-to-day systems.

94 Attendees

Professional Development

Professional Learning Needs Survey

The 2026 Head Start California Professional Learning Needs Survey was launched in April to help identify the professional learning priorities and workforce development needs of Head Start programs across the state. Findings will inform future conferences, webinars, on-demand learning, and other professional development opportunities.

Key Findings

- Children's behavioral, developmental, and mental health needs are a top priority.
- Family engagement continues to evolve.
- Strong leadership and organizational capacity remain essential.
- Advocacy and communication are increasingly important.
- Technology is becoming part of the professional learning landscape.

**29**

Programs
Represented

**55.2%**

Program Directors
Represent more than
half of respondents

Top 5 Professional Learning Priorities

1

Behavior Management

2

Mental Health, Behavioral &
Developmental Delays

3

Fatherhood/Father Involvement

4

Political/Legislative Advocacy

5

ERSEA Monitoring Process

Biggest Professional Development Challenges



Limited Staff Time/Coverage



Lack of Local Training Opportunities



Staff Turnover



Travel Costs



Limited Training Budget



Finding Relevant Topics

Preferred Learning Formats



On-Demand 60–90 Minute Webinars
Most Preferred



Single-Day
In-Person Training



Multi-Day
Conferences



Hybrid Learning
(Online & In-Person)

Webinars

This year, Head Start California offered 14 [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.

14

FREE WEBINARS

2,494

PARTICIPANTS

Partnerships & Sponsorships

Head Start California is pleased 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.

20 HSC PROUD PARTNERS

Executive Proud Partners



Associate Proud Partners



16 EVENT SPONSORS



We value being a Proud Partner because it allows us to stay closely aligned with the needs of all the programs throughout the state, and to listen and learn together about what those needs are.

-STEPHEN DAY, LAKESHORE LEARNING



Fundraising

20

This year, Head Start California built on last year's momentum with three distinct giving campaigns: Giving Tuesday, the Big Day of Giving, and the Power of 2 campaign. The Power of 2 campaign directly supports HSC's advocacy efforts, with \$1 of every \$2 raised benefiting the National Head Start Association (NHSA). Together, these initiatives inspired 60 donors to contribute \$44,573—nearly four times the amount raised through individual giving last year. We are deeply grateful to the donors who continue to invest in our mission and help strengthen Head Start's voice at both the state and national levels.

YEAR-OVER-YEAR
FUNDRAISING INCREASED BY
APPROXIMATELY

295%

\$44,573

RAISED BY

60

DONORS

\$11,279

FY 2024-25 (LAST YEAR)

\$33,294

INCREASE



The work of Head Start California is vital to communities across our great state. HSC supports programs at the local level doing the good work of educating children, supporting parents, and developing professionals. I am glad to support these efforts.

-TONY JORDAN

The **2** of

GIVING
TUESDAY

Big
Day of
Giving



Photo Credit: WCIC Head Start

Thank you to our generous donors

Individuals:

Veronique Alexander
Simone Aloisio
Annette Aslanian
Heather Aulabaugh
Maria Avila
Alisa Bierria – *In Honor of Sung Ja Hong*
Ralph Campbell
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Dahlijani Chung
Juan Cisneros

Edward Condon
Elizabeth Crocker
Darien DeLu
Desiree DelZio
Michelle Dove
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Patricia Flores
Richard Gribin
Paz Guzman

Julie Hersch
Cheryl Horney
Mark Jackson
Anthony Jordan
Elizabeth Kamrar
Jodie Keller
Jodi Kim – *In Honor of Sung Ja Hong*
David Koppel
Brandon Kurtz – *In Honor of Jean Clarkson*
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Organizations:

Stille Family Fund
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Plus six anonymous donors

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.



MY HEAD START STORY

By: Candace Lopez

My journey with Head Start began as a parent looking for support for my child. In 2021, I enrolled my son in the homebased program because I was concerned about his speech. I had already shared my worries with this doctor, but they were brushed aside. It was discouraging to feel like my voice as a parent did not matter.

After I met our home visitor, I began to feel empowered as a parent again. She listened to me, took my concerns seriously, and made the necessary referrals for services. Soon after, my son began receiving speech support that was vital to his growth and development. The moment I felt heard made all the difference, not only for my child's progress, but also for me as a parent. I finally felt supported, reassured, and validated as the expert on the needs of my child. My relationship with Head Start grew even deeper because that same home visitor saw something in me. She encouraged me to join the Parent to Teacher Program, reminding me that I had skills and potential to share.

At the time, I was searching for work that would allow me to be present for my family while also building a future. With her encouragement, I took the leap. A year later, I completed the Parent to Teacher program and was hired as a home visitor. Walking into families' homes to listen, support, and encourage, just as someone had once done for me, was an incredible honor.

Over time, I transitioned into my current role as a Family Service Worker, where I continue to serve families every day. Through this journey, I have had the privilege of experiencing Head Start from many sides: First as a student years ago, then as a parent, later as a participant in the Parent to Teacher program, and now as a staff member. I have seen how Head Start prepares children for success in school, but also how it strengthens families. It helps parents find their voice, children reach milestones they might not otherwise, and families grow in confidence and hope. Head Start did not just change my child's life; it opened doors for me as well. It gave me the chance to grow into a career filled with purpose, compassion, and connection.

Today, I am proud to walk beside families in their own journeys, just as someone once walked beside me. To me, Head Start is more than a program. It is a community, a lifeline, and a source of hope that continues to ripple through the lives of children and families every day.

44 STORIES COLLECTED & SHARED
Thanks to all who shared their stories!



"But the greatest gift Head Start gave me wasn't just opportunities for my children. It gave me a voice. It gave me my GED, the chance to take college courses, and the courage to pursue a degree. It gave me a career path I never imagined." **—Gladys, Head Start Parent & Staff**



"In Head Start, children learn important life skills like sharing, following a schedule, cleaning up after themselves, and practicing good hygiene such as washing hands before and after meals. The program also supports social and emotional growth, teaching kids how to communicate, build friendships, and respect others. The program truly partners with families, making sure parents feel supported as their children grow. For us, the changes we've seen in our child—becoming more independent, self-disciplined, and confident—are proof of how valuable Head Start is." **—Heather, Head Start Parent**



"We watched our daughter, who had been developmentally behind by several years, begin to catch up. It was remarkable to see the progress she made as the nurses, therapists, and EHS/HS staff provided wraparound care—not just for our child, but for us as parents and as a family unit. They worked one-on-one with us both at home and in the center. Our daughter made tremendous progress, and her doctors were amazed as she went from being years behind to only six months delayed developmentally." **—Stephanie, Head Start Parent & Staff**

Social Media

Head Start California is active on Facebook, X, LinkedIn, and Instagram, expanding our reach and strengthening engagement with members across multiple platforms. Over the past year, we placed a greater emphasis on creating video content—from behind-the-scenes glimpses of the HSC team, to "Meet the Keynote Speaker" features, to highlight reels showcasing our members at conferences and trainings. By sharing more videos than ever before, we've connected with a broader audience, increased engagement, and welcomed new followers. We hope you've enjoyed following along with us!

773

NEW FOLLOWERS
ACROSS PLATFORMS

9%

INCREASE IN OVERALL
REACH

245%

INCREASE IN
ENGAGEMENTS

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!
CLICK ON EACH ICON BELOW:



Video Content

37

 VIDEOS POSTED

57.2K

 VIEWS

In addition to expanding our short-form video content, we released our five-minute "The Head Start California Story," a video celebrating HSC's 30-year journey and highlighting how we continue to fulfill our mission of connecting, engaging, and advocating for our highest needs children. We invite you to take a look!

**The Head Start
California Story**



View in:



**2026 Advocacy
Day - In Action**



View in:



**2025 End of the
Year Recap**



View in:



**Avery & Brian Experience
Conference Promo**



View in:





Special thanks to WCIC and E Center Head Start for allowing us to take photos at your centers.

Learn more and connect with us by visiting www.headstartca.org



Head Start
CALIFORNIA

CONNECTING | ENGAGING | ADVOCATING
for our highest needs children

Head Start California | 2025-26 Annual Report
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