

# California Head Start State Collaboration Office 2023 Needs Assessment Summary

May 2023

As required by The Head Start Act, the California Head Start State Collaboration Office (CHSSCO) creates and submits a final report to the Office of Head Start Region 9, including a state needs assessment. The Collaboration Office partners with Head Start California (HSC) to conduct the needs assessment including designing the needs assessment, collecting information from Head Start programs, analyzing results and drafting the report.

For the year 2023-24, the Needs Assessment was conducted from March 15-April 1, 2023. Fifty-one (51) agencies completed the assessment representing 36.4% of all Head Start programs in California, with a 98% completion rate and an average response time of just over 5 minutes. The survey questions asked are largely unchanged from the 2022-23 survey, so where applicable, 2022-23 responses are called out for year-to-year comparison. Herein we will refer to the 2023-24 data as “2023” and the 2022-23 data as “2022”.

The survey is reasonably representative of the field. By agency type, respondents included:

Agency Type	# of Responses	% of Responses	% of Head Start Recipients*
Non-Profits	31	61%	41%
Community Action Agencies	8	15%	9%
School Districts	6	12%	26%
County Offices of Education	5	10%	11%
Tribal Government	1	2%	9%
Government Agencies	0	0%	4%

\*As of April 2023, there are 140 Head Start recipients.

## Timing and Design of Needs Assessment

The 2023-24 needs assessment was conducted in February 2023, after Head Start programs had been operating under COVID-19 conditions for three years. The response rates more than doubled from twenty-two (22) respondents last year to fifty-one (51) this year. Many directors continued to report anecdotally to being overwhelmed by demanding operational challenges and an intense increase in requests for information at the local, state, and federal level. It continues to be exacerbated by staff shortages. To accommodate their challenges, this needs assessment was designed to be *brief*, and *focused on only the most important issues* facing Head Start recipients and is similar to last year’s needs assessment to compare year over year data. The questions that were asked encompasses four main themes: 1) staffing challenges 2) eligibility and awareness 3) low enrollment, and 4) the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten to serve younger children beginning in State Fiscal Year 2022-23.

## Executive Summary

Four clear issues emerge from this survey.

1. **Staff Compensation:** Head Start programs compete with school districts who pay staff more, and national retail chains who pay the same with far fewer requirements, responsibilities, and paperwork. More funding is needed to address the wage disparity.

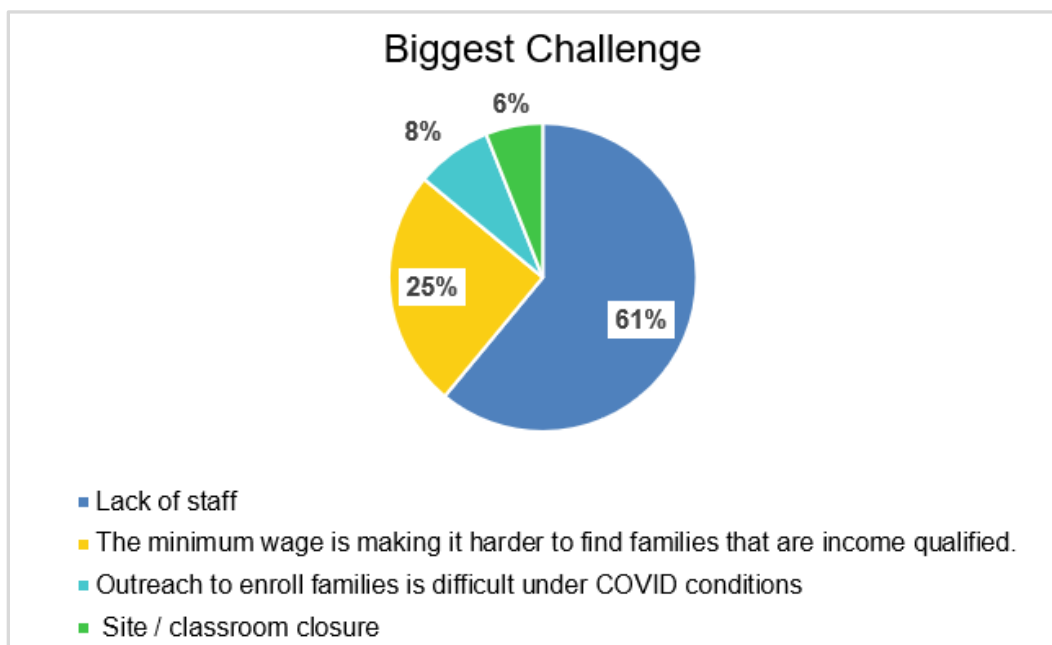
2. **Income Eligibility** – Across the state, Head Start programs struggle to identify income-eligible families. Head Start programs utilize federal poverty guidelines to determine income eligibility. Use of federal poverty guidelines are not aligned to the California state median income guidelines. The increase in California minimum wage rates is one of the contributing factors for the misalignment.
3. **Program Flexibility**: As the California mixed delivery system undergoes historic changes and expands state preschool and Transitional Kindergarten programs to younger children, programs need flexibility to align standards and ratios to match state systems so Head Start can continue to be a part of the mixed delivery system.
4. **Other**: Various other needs and challenges were included in survey responses. These included, but are limited to, addressing supports and services to assist with the needs of families, behavior challenges, class ratios, facilities, and COVID restrictions.

## Findings and Data

Below are the results of the needs assessment.

### Part 1: Enrollment

1. *During this program year, what has been the biggest challenge for enrolling new families?*



#### Comments

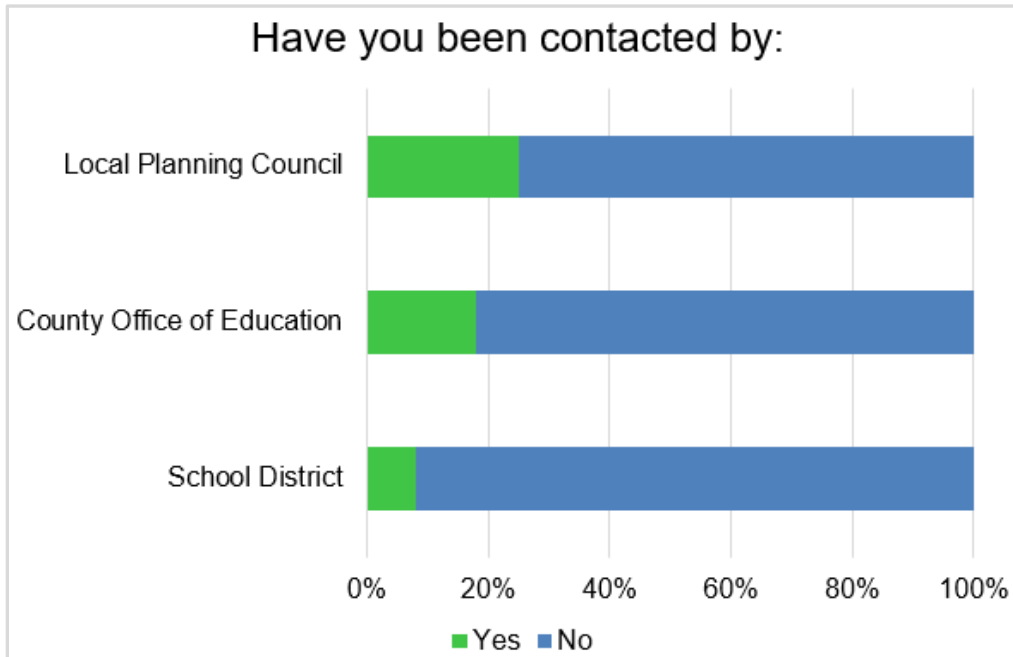
- Minimum wage making it harder to find eligible families
- Half and half: lack of staff and lack of eligible families
- Competition from new programs, school district
- The Tribal Programs are having to compete with local school districts that have universal Pre-K programs.

#### Compared to last year:

In 2022, the biggest challenge for enrolling new families was the minimum wage making it harder to find qualified families (42%). In 2023, the biggest challenge is the lack of staff (61%).

## Part 2: Transitional Kindergarten Expansion

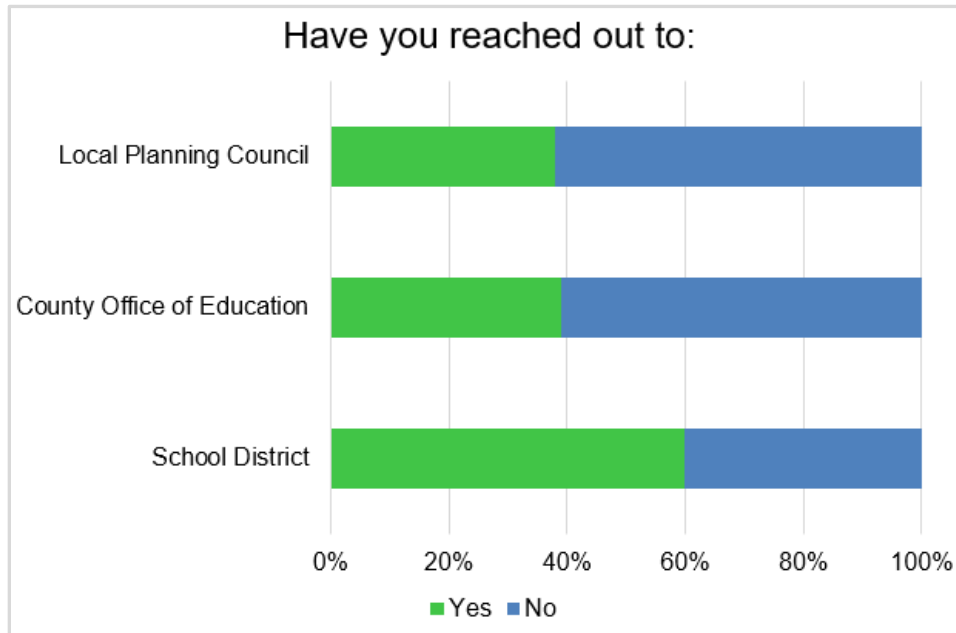
2. Has your Head Start program been contacted regarding planning for expansion of Transitional Kindergarten LEA or local planning council?



NON-LEAs (N=40)		
	Yes	No
Local Planning Council	25%	75%
County Office of Education	18%	82%
School District	8%	92%

Note: Participating LEA respondents (school districts and county offices of education) were removed from the analysis of this question. A total of forty (40) respondents remained. Twenty-five (25) out of forty (40), equaling 63%, *have yet to be contacted*.

3. Has your Head Start program reached out to these agencies regarding planning for expansion of Transitional Kindergarten?



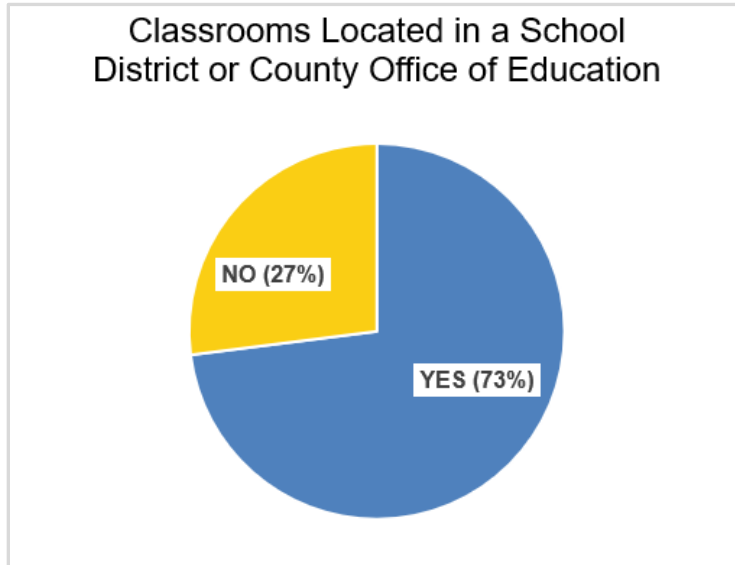
<b>NON-LEAs (N=40)</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Local Planning Council</b>	38%	62%
<b>County Office of Education</b>	39%	61%
<b>School District</b>	60%	40%

Note: Participating LEA respondents (school districts and county offices of education) were removed from the analysis of this question. A total of twenty-five (25) respondents remained. Eight (8) of the twenty-five (25) respondents, equaling 32%, have not contacted their local school districts, county office of education or local planning council.

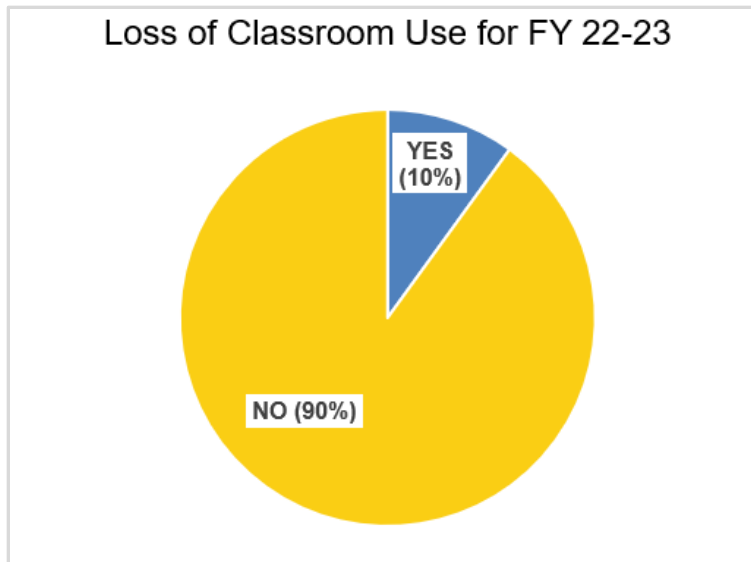
**Compared to last year:**

Year-over-year data indicates an insignificant difference of 1%.

4. Does your program currently have one or more classrooms located in a school district or County Office of Education site? [N=40 non-LEA respondents]



5. If yes, have you been informed that your program will not be able to use the classroom in FY 22-23? [N=29 of the 40 non-LEA respondents]



**Comments**

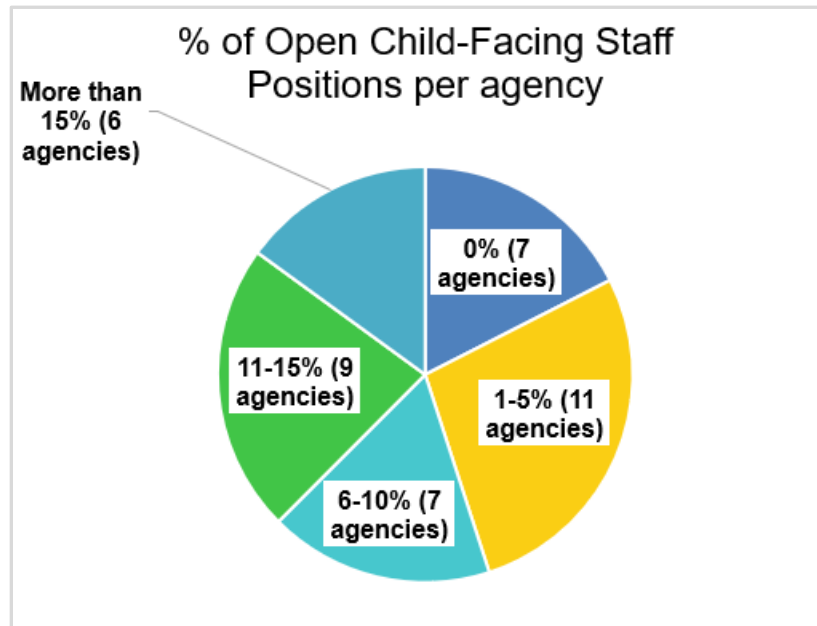
- Not yet, but leases are going to expire soon and meetings are being scheduled.
- We have been asked to leave because district wants to put in their own TK program.
- We own the modular buildings where services are provided.

**Compared to last year:**

Year-over-year data indicates an insignificant difference of 1%.

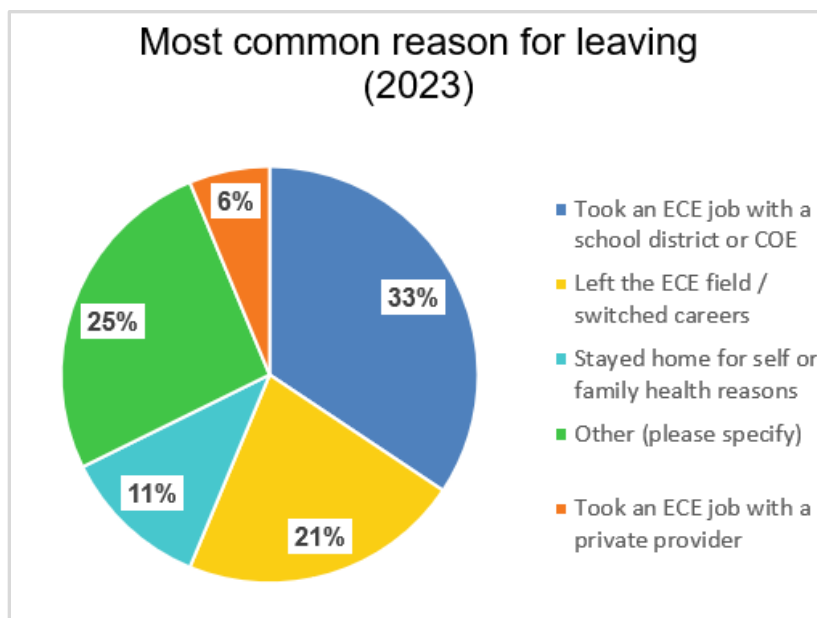
### Part 3: Staffing Challenges

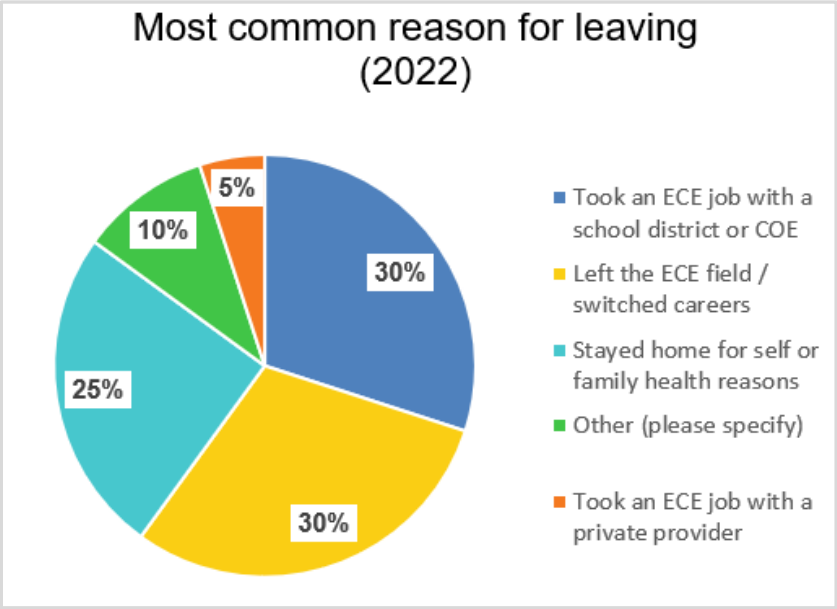
6. How many staff positions that serve children directly do you have open right now?



Head Start directors of forty (40) agencies reported 1,217 unfilled positions, an average of thirty-four (34) openings per agency. These forty (40) agencies constitute 29% of all Head Start recipients in California, suggesting that statewide, there *could* be as many as 4,260 child-facing positions open.

7. During this program year, what has been the primary (most common) reason teaching staff (e.g., teacher, aides, etc.) left the position?



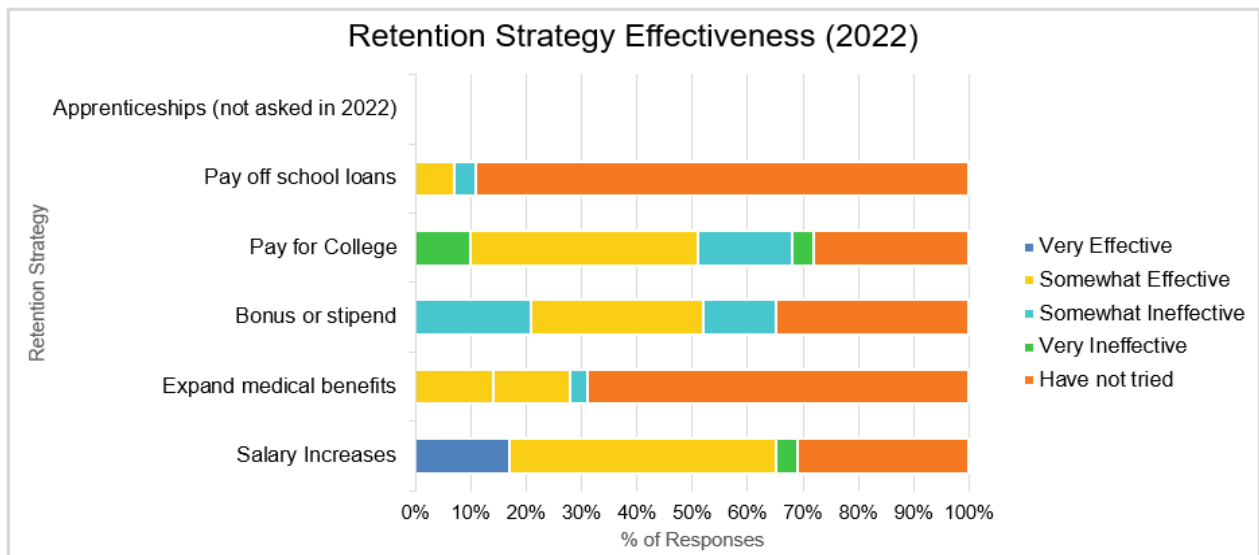
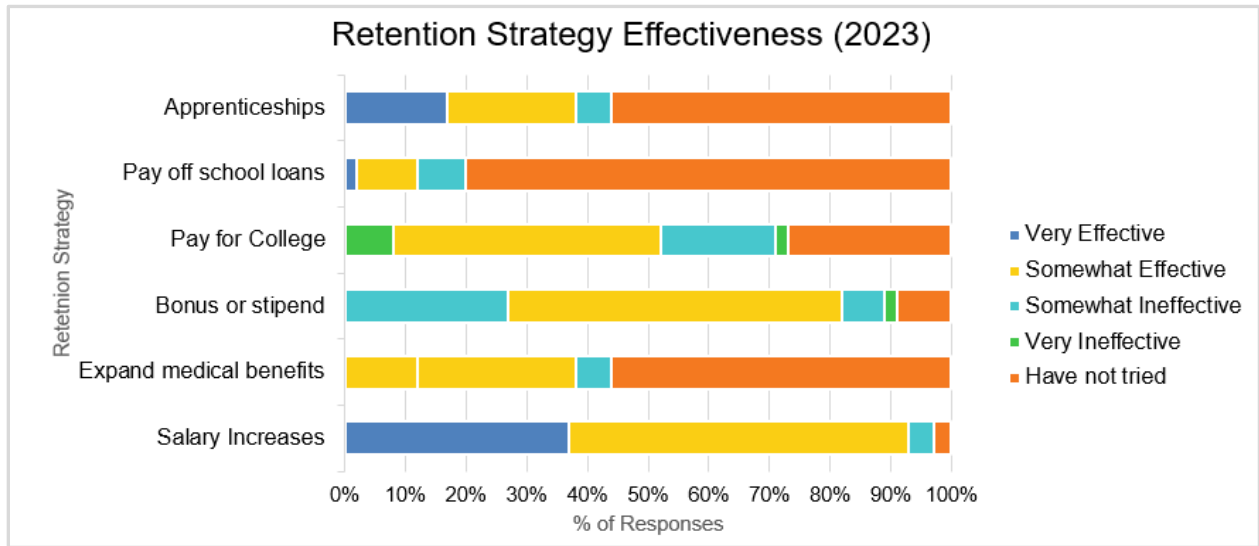


In 2022, 30% of respondents that the most common reason for teaching staff leaving was “left the ECE field / switched careers.” This decreased to just 21% in 2023. Additionally, the percentage of teaching staff leaving to stay home for self of family health reasons decreased from 25% to 11%. Comments made for the “other” selection (25% in 2023) are below:

Comments:

- I haven't had any teachers leave their positions during the year.
- Moved out of the area/state
- We have not lost staff so far this year, however our TA staff and sub staff have moved to or expressed desire to move to permanent positions with other agencies/programs
- For personal reasons
- Left for pay increases at other organizations
- Fortunately, turnover is low for our program

8. Please rate the effectiveness of any retention strategies you have tried during this program year.



**In 2023:**

98% rated Salary Increases as very or somewhat effective  
 50% rated Paying for College as very or somewhat effective  
 82% rated Bonus or Stipends as very or somewhat effective  
 57% had *not* tried expanding medical benefits  
 86% had *not* tried Paying off School loans

**Compared to last year:**

**In 2022:**

82% rated Salary Increases as very or somewhat effective  
 52% rated Paying for College as very or somewhat effective  
 52% rated Bonus or Stipends as very or somewhat effective  
 71% had *not* tried expanding medical benefits  
 85 % had *not* tried Paying off School loans



## Part 4: The Immediate Future

9. *What program needs and challenges should the CHSSCO and HSC elevate with state and federal stakeholders?*

Forty-seven (47) of fifty-one (51) respondents made fifty-five (55) comments in three main themes, and a few outlying comments.

### 1. Staff Retention and Recruitment: 27 comments

Two Quotes:

- “Provider rates that match state programs; Family income guidelines; Accept CDA credentials for state programs; Encourage ECE classes in Spanish.”
- “Teachers’ salaries continue to be low, making it difficult to attract and retain quality staff. The amount of paperwork, screenings, assessments, etc. required in Head Start makes it more appealing to work elsewhere for the same or more money (getting paid the same but with less responsibilities). Still need to change the eligibility requirements for those families that live in highly populated areas (i.e., Los Angeles) as they don’t always qualify for services and have no other options. We have a large waiting list, but they are all over income so we can’t place them in a site.”

### 2. Income eligibility guidelines: 18 comments

Two Quotes:

- “Continue the discussion to raise the income qualification level for families so that it is better aligned to California state median income. Consider qualifying students that have an IEP or IFSP regardless of income in the HS and & EHS program.”
- “Poverty guidelines don’t work!”

### 3. Program Flexibility: 6 comments

Two Quotes:

- “The need for LEAs to partner with Head Start, CSPP, and other community-based organizations. While it has been recommended for them to partner, very little effort has been made by LEAs. Also, better communication about the availability of preschool programs and not just TK.”
- “Provide samples of MOU or partnership agreements between districts and Head Start programs.”

### 4. Other: (Behavior challenges and class ratios facilities, and COVID restrictions): 6 comments

Two Quotes:

- “More expertise/tools for addressing social needs of families- ex: counseling. Specific funding to support students with behaviors/disabilities that are undiagnosed.”
- “Inclusion of Head Start in State funding for services and facilities.”