

# Head Start State Collaboration Office Needs Assessment

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*State of Washington  
2011-2012 Survey Results*



December 2012

## Introduction

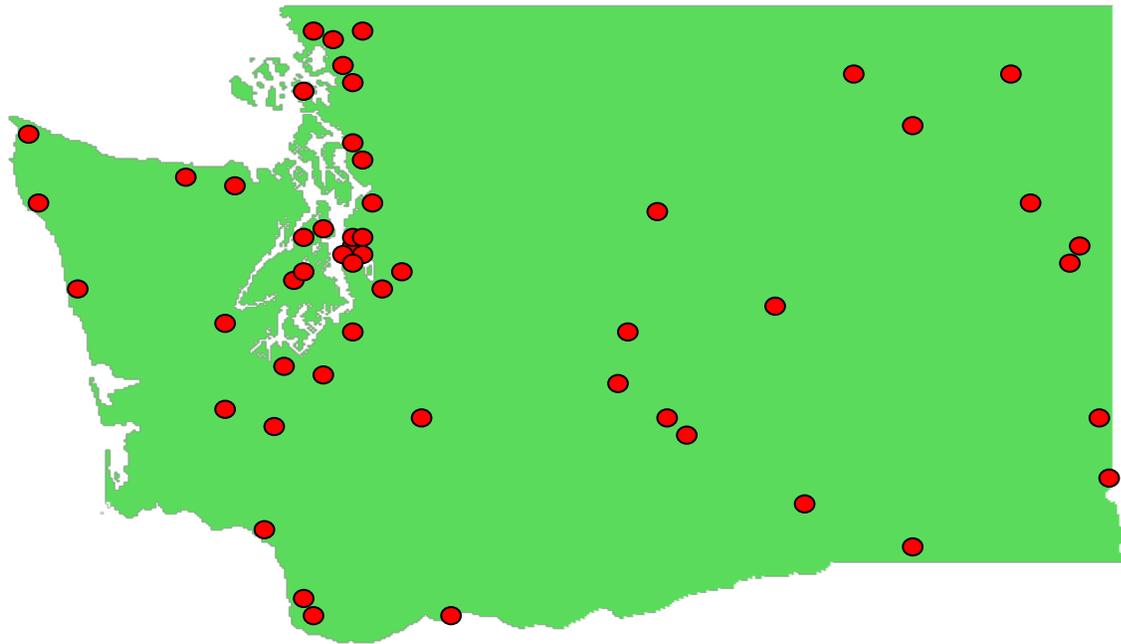
Head Start is a national program that directs comprehensive child development services to help children from low-income families become ready for school. Eligible children ages birth to 5 and pregnant women and their families receive assistance and information in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, and mental health; disabilities; nutrition; and parent involvement.

The federal Office of Head Start in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provides funding for grants to local public agencies, private organizations, Indian tribes, and school systems. These organizations, in turn, operate Head Start programs.

## Head Start in Washington State

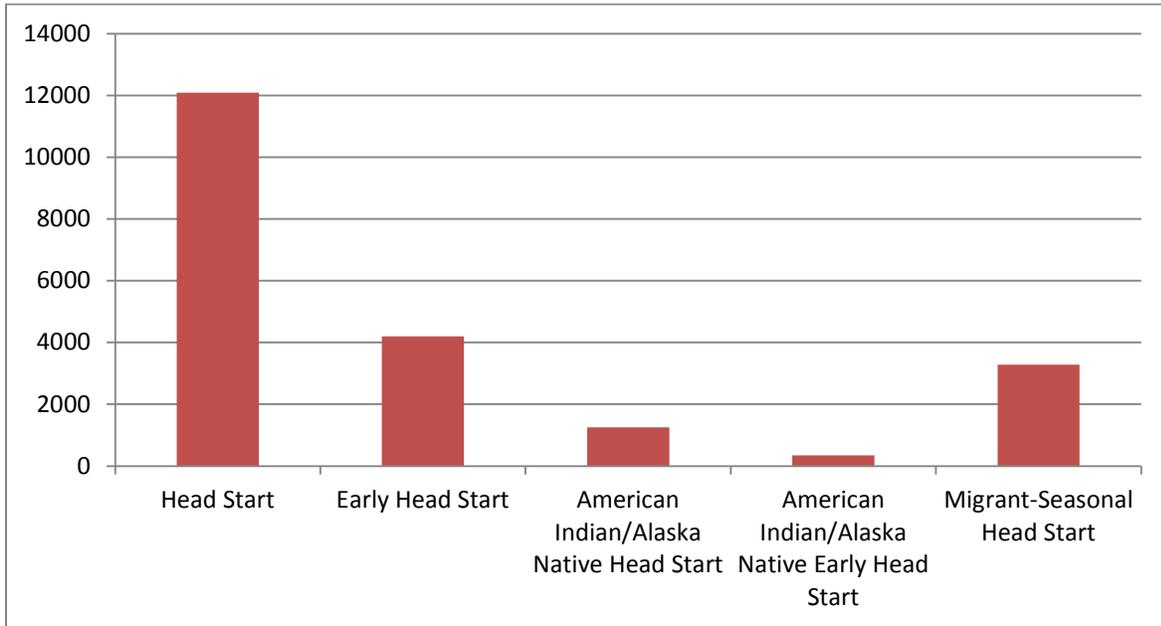
In Washington, there are four different Head Start program options that meet the diverse needs of children and families in our state: Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start/Early Head Start. The programs are geographically located throughout the state, in both rural and urban settings.

**Figure 1.** Locations of Washington Head Start Programs



In the 2011-12 program year a total of 21,162 children and families were served through a total of 52 Head Start programs, many of which providing more than one type of Head Start service. Of these 52 there were; 30 programs providing Head Start, 27 programs providing Early Head Start, 17 programs providing American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start, 8 programs providing American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start, and 2 programs providing Migrant/Seasonal Head Start in Washington.

**Figure 2.** Children/Families Served by Program Type



### Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO)

The HSSCO in Washington is the main point of contact for Head Start at the State level. It is housed within the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL). The HSSCO was established to serve as a state-level support mechanism for the various efforts of Head Start programs to provide quality, comprehensive services to children, families, and their communities. Specifically, the HSSCO is charged with the following federally-mandated goal areas in its efforts to provide state-level support to programs and all low-income children and families:

- **School Transitions:** To foster seamless transitions and long-term success of Head Start children by promoting continuity of services between the Head Start Child Development and Learning Framework and State early learning standards including pre-k entry assessment and interoperable data systems.
- **Professional Development:** To collaborate with institutions of higher education to promote professional development through education and credentialing programs for early childhood providers in states.
- **Child Care and Early Childhood Systems:** To coordinate activities with the State agency responsible for the State CCDBG program and resource and referral, to make full-working-day and full calendar year services available to children. Include Head Start Program Performance Standards in State efforts to rate the quality of programs (Quality Rating and Improvement System, or QRIS) and support Head Start programs in participating in QRIS and partnering with child care and early childhood systems at the local level.

- **Regional Office Priorities:** To support other regional office priorities such as family and community partnerships; health, mental health, and oral health; disabilities; and support to military families.

Encompassed within these goals are the 10 HSSCO priority areas; health care, services for children experiencing homelessness, welfare/child welfare, child care, family literacy services, services for children with disabilities, community services, education (school readiness, HS-PreK partnership development), school transitions and alignment, and professional development.

## Needs Assessment Survey

The Head Start Act of 2007 requires that each HSSCO conduct, and update annually, a statewide needs assessment of Head Start programs. The results of the assessment in each state are intended to inform the development and updating of a 5-year strategic plan for the HSSCO.

### Survey Objectives

The Washington HSSCO in DEL released a needs assessment survey in October of 2012. The purpose of the survey was to identify the challenges and strengths of Head Start programs in Washington with regard to collaboration, coordination, and alignment of services. Last year the HSSCO released an in depth comprehensive survey which encompassed the 10 HSSCO priority areas, the survey was a modified version of a template developed by the national HSSCO network. This year's needs assessment was a shorter update survey based upon the existing Washington HSSCO Five Year Strategic Plan. The objective of this approach was to assess changes since the previous year.

### Survey Design

As indicated above, this year's survey was based upon the existing HSSCO Five Year Strategic Plan. The survey was released in Survey Monkey format and participation was voluntary. The survey included five sections, one for each of the Strategic Plan goal areas which are:

- **Goal Area #1:** Increase the availability of appropriate and coordinated health services for children and families.
- **Goal Area #2:** Improve ability of families to obtain quality early learning programs and services that meet their needs.
- **Goal Area #3:** Improve/increase opportunities for Head Start/Early Head Start grantees to be involved in state-level activities, initiatives and programs that enhance services to children and families.
- **Goal Area #4:** Contribute to the development of a coordinated, statewide comprehensive professional development system for all early learning professionals in Washington State.
- **Goal #5:** Improve the governance, functional operations, and perceptions of the HSSCO to be a transparent and inclusive leader in supporting policies and initiatives that further advance services to children and families.

Each goal area included three types of questions:

- **PART 1** asked programs to rate the level of difficulty their program has had engaging in each of a variety of activities and partnerships.
  - Purpose of this question is to identify challenges programs may be experiencing in building successful partnerships at the local and state levels
  - Programs rated their experiences as:

- More Difficult than the previous year
  - Less difficult than the previous year
  - About the same difficulty as the previous year
  - Not applicable
- **PART 2** asked programs to indicate the extent to which items should be a priority for the HSSCO in the coming year
  - 4-point priority scale was provided, ranging from “low priority” to “high priority”

<b>1</b> <b>(low priority)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> <b>(high priority)</b>
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- **PART 3** was comprised of two open-ended questions at the end of each of the sections
  - If applicable, please describe what changed
  - If you rated this as a recommended high priority for the HSSCO, please describe what types of changes or actions at the state level you believe would positively impact your program’s ability to meet the needs of enrolled families in this area.

### Response rate

The survey was released to all Washington programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start. In total, we received 28 completed surveys out of the total 52 eligible programs. The charts below show responses by program type and geographical location.

**Figure 3. Responses by Program Type\***

Program Respondents	Percentage
Head Start	75%
Early Head Start	57.1%
Migrant/Seasonal Head Start	7.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	25%
ECEAP- Dually Funded	46.4%

\*A single organization may operate more than one program type therefore the percentages do not add up to 100.

**Figure 4. Respondent Locations**

Location	Percentage
Western Washington	64%
Central Washington	21%
Eastern Washington	14%

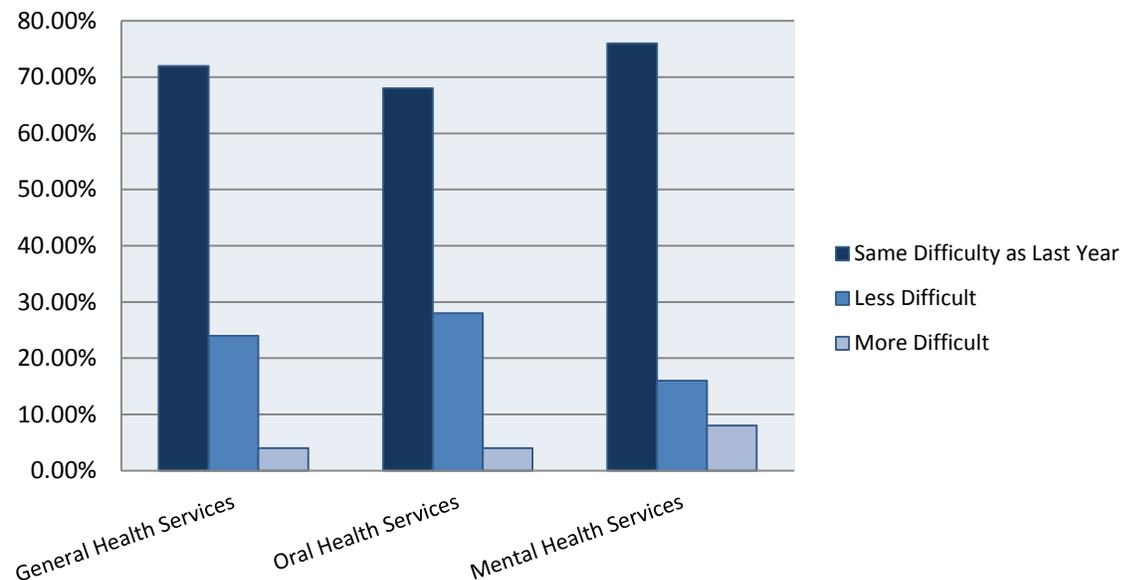
## Survey Results

After receiving the completed surveys, we analyzed results and compiled summaries to inform the strategic plan. Below are summary highlights from the survey, including strengths and challenges in each of the goal areas. Full survey results are available in Appendix A.

### Goal Area #1: Increase the availability of appropriate and coordinated health services for children and families

Survey questions in this section asked questions related to obtaining health, oral health, and mental health services for enrolled children this year as opposed to last year.

**Figure 5.** Program perception of difficulty of obtaining health services this year as compared to previous year



While the vast majority of responses indicated that difficulty obtaining services had not changed since last year, a sizable portion indicated improvement and only a very small portion indicated that difficulty had increased. Given the continuing economic challenges in our state, this is encouraging. Narrative responses cited relationships with providers and increasing awareness of early learning programs as strengths. Respondents also cited a variety of continuing barriers including a lack of providers willing to see Medicaid children, a need for more medical providers trained in working with young children, and a need for more information about available resources. When asked to rate the extent they believe that these areas should be a priority for the HSSCO in the coming year, respondents were fairly consistent across general, oral, and mental health. Averages for each of these three areas ranged between 2.64 and 2.8 on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being a low priority and 4 being high.

### Goal Area #2: Improve the ability of families to obtain quality early learning programs and services that meet their needs

In this section respondents were asked to assess their experience this year as opposed to last in working with partners to meet the needs of enrolled families in various areas including full day/full year services, transition and alignment with K-12, children with special needs, children and families experiencing homelessness, involvement in child welfare, and undocumented families.

**Figure 6.** Respondent perception of level of difficulty working with partners to meet needs of enrolled families in a variety of areas this year compared to previous year

Program Experience:	Same Difficulty as Previous Year	Less Difficult than Previous Year	More Difficult than Previous Year	NA*	Average Recommended HSSCO Priority Rating (1-4**)
Directly providing full day/full year services to enrolled families	25%	8.3%	20.8%	45.8%	2.5
Partnering with child care providers to provide full day/full year services to enrolled families	29.2%	8.3%	8.3%	54.2%	2.3
Partnering with K-12 re: alignment of curriculum and assessment	56.5%	39.1%	4.3%		3.25
Partnering with K-12 re: kindergarten transition	56.5%	39.1%	4.3%		2.83
Working with partners to meet needs of children/families experiencing homelessness	82.6%	4.3%	13%		2.61
Working with partners to meet needs of children with special needs	63.6%	22.7%	13.6%		2.67
Working with partners to meet needs of children involved in child welfare system	87%	8.7%	4.3%		2.63
Working with undocumented families to access services	95%	5%	0%		2.18

\*NA answer option applies only to full day/full year questions

\*\*1= low priority, 4= high

For each area in this section, the majority of responses indicated that the perceived difficulty working with partners to meet the needs of enrolled children and families has not changed noticeably since last year. Provision of full day/full year services either directly or via working with partners stands out as the area showing the most dramatic increase in perceived difficulty. For these questions approximately half of respondents selected NA, when this portion is removed the number of respondents indicating increased difficulty is especially significant. Barriers cited include challenges associated with the Working Connections Child Care Subsidy System, compatibility issues between Head Start practices and DEL licensing requirements, economic challenges for child care partners, and the capacity of child care partners to adopt practices such as comprehensive assessment. Partnerships with K-12 stands out as the area showing the most marked improvement in terms of perceived difficulty. Reasons cited for this included improving relationships with school districts and various P-3 efforts underway. Narrative comments however also indicated a high need for additional supports such as training for K-12 staff regarding engaging Pre-K and training for Pre-K regarding engaging K-12, development of common expectations, and further development/refinement of the early learning collaboration component of WaKIDS. Another area of strength cited was work with partners to meet the needs of enrolled children with special needs. A significant number of respondents indicated improvement in perceived difficulty. It should also be noted that this was an area showing particularly strong relationships in last year’s survey so in this case “same” is a positive result. Strengths cited in narrative comments centered around relationships with specialists and partners. Concerns cited included lack of consistency between schools and the threat of budget cuts. In response to questions relating to work with partners to meet the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness or involved in the child welfare system, the vast majority of grantees indicated the same level of difficulty as the previous year. Narrative comments indicated that while some respondents enjoy strong relationships with partners, significant barriers continue including funding cuts, insufficient resources in rural areas, and the need for improved cross program communication and awareness. Responses to questions related to working with undocumented families to access services indicated very little change from the previous year.

**Goal Area #3: Improve/increase opportunities for Head Start/Early Head Start grantees to be involved in state-level activities, initiatives and programs that enhance services to children and families**

In this section respondents were asked questions relating to the involvement of Head Start in state systems efforts over the past year.

**Figure 7.** Extent to which respondents believe that Head Start overall has been sufficiently engaged in the development/implementation of the following state systems efforts over the past year

Statewide System Effort	Average Rating (1-4)*: Level of Sufficiency of Head Start Involvement	# of Respondents who selected “don’t know”
Regional Early Learning Coalitions	3.47	6

Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)	3.47	6
Early Learning Guidelines	3.42	4
Early Achievers (QRIS)	3.39	5
Home Visiting	3.27	12
WaKIDS	3.25	3
MERIT	3	6
Infant/Toddler Hubs	2.8	18
Strengthening Families Washington	2.57	15

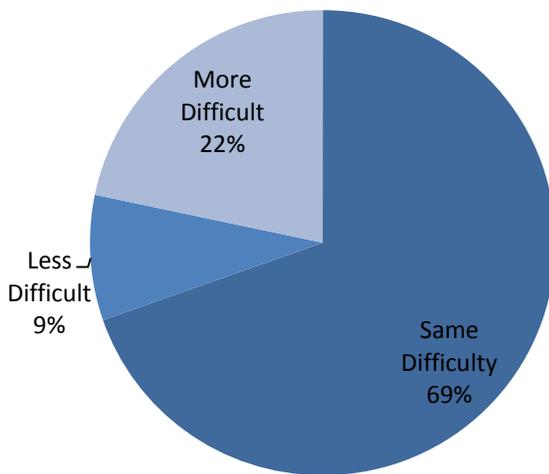
\*1= not sufficient, 4= very sufficient

Responses in this area indicate a relatively high degree of satisfaction among Head Start grantees with regard to opportunities to be engaged in state systems efforts. On a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being not sufficient and 4 being very sufficient, averaged responses to questions asking about the sufficiency of Head Start involvement in a variety of efforts ranged from 2.6 to 3.5. In response to a question asking about respondent perception of the sufficiency of their individual program’s opportunities for engagement in state systems efforts, the average rating was 3.1 and only one respondent selected “don’t know”. It should be noted that the high number of respondents who selected “don’t know” rather than providing a rating in response to questions regarding overall Head Start engagement in specific efforts could indicate a somewhat lower rate of engagement than the ratings suggest. Factors which help to facilitate engagement cited in narrative responses included participation in local/regional coalitions, active recruitment of Head Start participation, WSA, and support from DEL for travel expenses. Barriers cited included lack of awareness of state systems efforts, travel for rural programs, isolation of certain agency types from state level activities (i.e. non-profits and community action programs versus educational service districts), and challenges for tribal programs to engage in state activities.

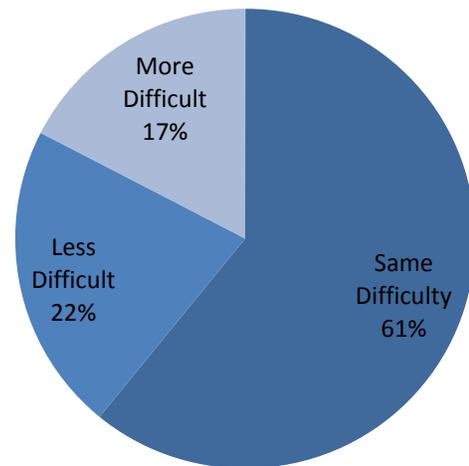
#### Goal Area #4: Contribute to the development of a coordinated, statewide comprehensive professional development system for all early learning professionals in Washington State

This section asked respondents to indicate the perceived level of difficulty this year compared to last with regard to accessing professional development opportunities for staff and progressing toward the new staff qualification requirements outlined in the Head Start Act of 2007 which are due to go into effect in 2013.

**Figure 8.** Experience Accessing Appropriate PD for Staff This Year Compared to Last



**Figure 9.** Experience Progressing Toward Compliance with Staff Qualification Requirements of Head Start Act of 2007 This Year Compared to Last



While the majority of responses in this area indicated the same level of perceived difficulty as the previous year, a significant portion indicated an increase in the perceived level of difficulty. Barriers cited in narrative responses include the transition into the MERIT system, the current focus on accountability versus continuous quality improvement, difficulty recruited qualified staff in rural areas, challenges for staff in paying for and finding time to pursue degrees, and staff turnover. Respondents cited online classes as a strength and called for more creative pathways for staff to pursue degrees. Other strengths cited included partnerships with higher ed. in communities and this year's tribal early learning conference sponsored by DEL.

This section also asked respondents to prioritize needed training and technical assistance for the coming year. This question was asked on behalf of the Region X Head Start T/TA network.

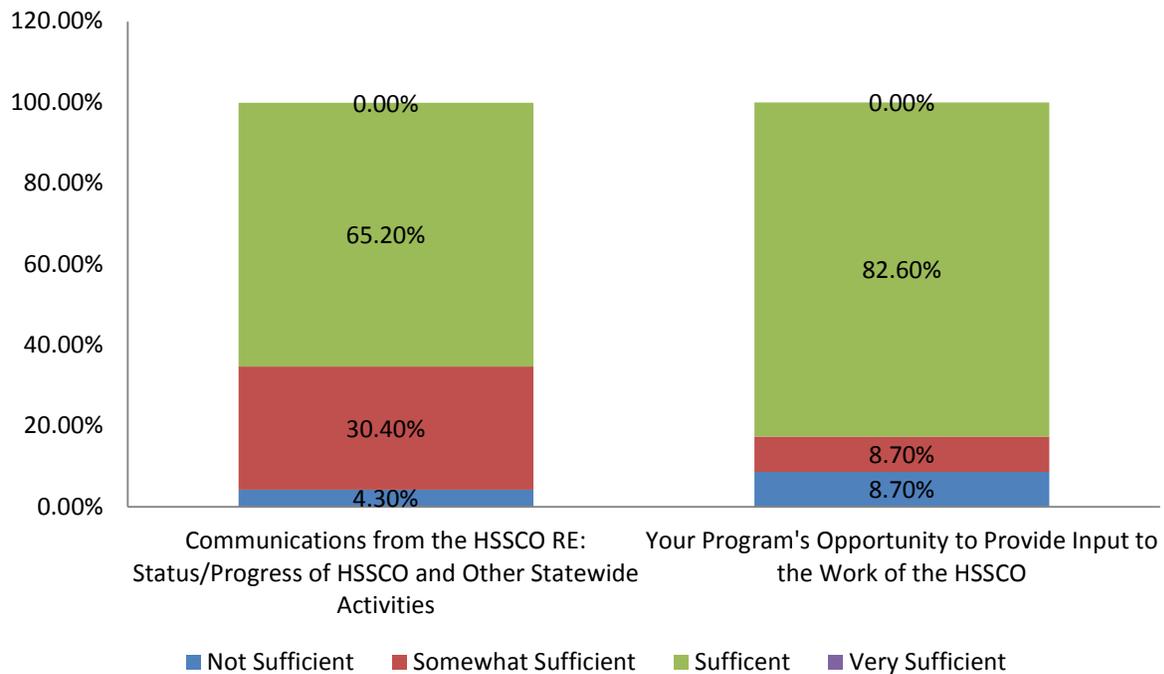
**Figure 10.** Training and technical assistance needs

Training and Technical Assistance Effort	Average Priority Rating (1-4*)
Family Engagement	3.3
Teacher/Child Interactions	3.26
Use of Data for Program Planning	3.17
Dual Language Learners	2.91
Child Assessment	2.83

\*1= low priority, 4= high priority

**Goal Area #5: Improve the governance, functional operations, and perceptions of the HSSCO to be a transparent and inclusive leader in supporting policies and initiatives that further advance services to children and families.**

This section asked respondents to share their perceptions of the sufficiency of communications from the HSSCO regarding the status and progress of the work of the HSSCO and various statewide activities as well as their opportunities to provide input to the work of the HSSCO over the past year.



Responses indicate the perception that both communications and input opportunities are generally sufficient although there is room for improvement.

### **Next Steps**

The HSSCO shared the results the needs assessment survey with the HSSCO advisory team which includes representatives from Head Start programs as well as a wide variety of agency partners. The team assisted in interpreting the survey results and generating ideas for action. This work will be reflected in the updated HSSCO Five Year Strategic Plan.