

Question 2: What inconsistencies or changes have directly affected you in a negative way since the separation from the County?

Common Themes and Issues Identified

1. Loss or Reduction of Benefits

- **CTO (Compensatory Time Off):** Repeatedly cited as eliminated or severely restricted, including its replacement with vacation hours, which is less flexible.
- **Health Plans:** Many note the **removal of High Deductible Health Plans (HDHP)** and accompanying **Health Savings Accounts (HSAs)**, replaced with less favorable options and higher out-of-pocket costs.
- **Wellness Incentives:** The **loss of wellness days and incentives** is a demotivating factor for several employees.
- **Boot Reimbursement:** Changed from an annual benefit to every other year.
- **401a Accounts:** Ceased funding, leading to long-term financial concerns.
- **Differentials and Stipends:** Loss of shift differentials, CWEA differential, and professional development reimbursement.

2. Payroll and Systemic Errors

- **Tyler Payroll System Issues:** Numerous complaints about paycheck inaccuracies, incorrect vacation balances, and difficulty verifying deductions.
- **Lack of Trust in Payroll:** Employees frequently mention needing to manually verify calculations, indicating a significant **trust gap**.
- **Inconsistent Paychecks:** Reports of fluctuating take-home pay and poor transparency around overtime, holiday, and differential pay.

3. Medical Insurance and Cost Increases

- Rising **insurance premiums** and **loss of preferred plans (e.g., Sutter HDHP)** are frequent grievances.
- **Lack of transparency** and **poor HR communication** have made it difficult for employees to understand or anticipate medical costs.

4. Human Resources and Administrative Shortcomings

- **Slow or no responses from HR**, especially regarding critical issues like benefits, hiring, and retirement accounts.
- **Lack of clarity on roles/responsibilities** within HR.
- **Errors in onboarding and benefits access**, particularly for new hires.
- Difficulty accessing resources such as **SCERS**, HR, purchasing, and contracts.

5. Workload and Structural Concerns

- A **heavier workload** due to SacSewer's independence, with no corresponding increase in staffing or compensation.
- **Inability to backfill lost positions**, even months later.
- **Perceived inequity in classifications**, such as assistant engineers being designated "admin" despite career-track responsibilities.

6. Holiday, Shift, and Overtime Pay Reductions

- Holiday pay now less favorable (straight time instead of time-and-a-half plus comp time).
- Shift differential reductions and restricted eligibility for night/grave shifts.
- Overtime pay calculations affected by the inclusion of standby pay and other inconsistencies.

7. Equity, Classification, and Representation Issues

- **Discrepancies in time-off accrual** between existing and newly hired employees with similar backgrounds.
- **Ineligibility to join appropriate employee groups**, such as engineering unions.
- Concerns about **pay scale alignment** and whether promises around **salary studies and COLA** adjustments will be honored.

8. Communication and Trust Erosion

- Before the separation, communication was perceived as **clear and direct**; now it is **uncertain and lacking follow-through**.
 - Promises made in communication (e.g., compensation study adjustments and annual COLAs) are not being upheld or clarified.
 - A general **decline in trust and confidence** in management is evident.
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Positive Mentions

A small minority mentioned that things are going "fairly smoothly" or did not have concerns at this time. This suggests that while dissatisfaction is widespread, it is not universal.

Conclusion and Observations

The overarching narrative is one of **declining morale**, driven by:

- **Benefit reductions**
- **Administrative breakdowns**
- **Unfulfilled promises**
- **Perceived lack of support and transparency**

Employees are increasingly **bearing the burden of system inefficiencies**, particularly around pay and benefits, and **feel alienated from decision-making and communication loops**.

There is a clear call—implicit and explicit—for **restoring trust, clarifying policy, and correcting misalignments between work demands and compensation/support.**

Question 3: What are your top concern(s) that SASDEA should know about and prioritize?

Common Themes Identified

1. Salary Study and Compensation Alignment

- **Salary study implementation delays** and incomplete analysis (e.g., unclear comparisons for some roles).
- Concerns that **pay is not on par with comparable agencies or private sector benchmarks**, including:
 - Assistant and Associate Engineers
 - Business Analysts
 - FTOS and Electricians
- Requests for **consistent and transparent COLA (Cost of Living Adjustments)**.
- Concern over **salary compaction**, especially when supervisors earn only marginally more than their staff.
- Interest in **incorporating education incentives** and **certifications** into base pay for broader retirement impact.

2. Benefits and Incentive Concerns

- **Loss or lack of CTO (Compensatory Time Off)** is a recurring grievance.
- **Higher out-of-pocket health, dental, and vision costs**, with requests for:
 - Better employer contribution to medical premiums.
 - Dental/vision benefit improvements.
 - Medical retirement stipends comparable to state standards.

- **Wellness incentives**, sick time cash-out, and vacation accrual expansion were frequently suggested.
- Desire for **cash-back options for waiving medical benefits**.
- **Restoration of education reimbursement** or converting it into permanent salary benefits.

3. Telework and Remote Work Policy

- Concerns over a **loss of hybrid work flexibility**, with fears of mandatory increased in-office days.
- Employees express that **remote work increases productivity** and helps with work-life balance.
- Desire for **telework protection** and policy clarity.

4. Equity and Fairness in Policies

- **Unequal vacation accrual** rules between pre- and post-separation hires based on prior public service.
- Lack of clarity in **differential pay** and benefit access between classes and roles.
- Desire for **equal treatment and transparency** in how policies apply to new vs. existing staff.

5. Staffing and Workload

- **Short-staffing** across departments has led to increased workloads and burnout.
- Specific concern from supervisors who have taken on HR and training duties in addition to their regular roles, without matching compensation.
- Need to **fill vacancies quickly** and fairly.

6. Pension and Retirement Benefits

- Requests for:
 - **Increased pension contributions**
 - **Clearer communication** about retirement benefits and stipends.
 - **Recognition of prior service for retirement and vacation accrual purposes.**

7. Administrative Transparency and Trust

- Concerns about:
 - Lack of transparency in the **salary study process and timelines.**
 - Delays in **COLA negotiations** and the **impact on morale.**
 - Need for better **communication and follow-through** from management.
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Isolated Mentions and Miscellaneous Topics

- Paid lunch for EH&S employees due to frequent interruptions.
 - Hiring delays.
 - Specific losses like the **CWEA 4% differential.**
 - Call for **equal representation and communication in union/contract negotiations.**
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Conclusion

The text reveals a workforce that is:

- **Eager for clear, consistent compensation policies**
- Seeking the **restoration of lost or reduced benefits**

- **Frustrated by inequities** and misalignments in internal policies
- **Committed to their roles**, but in need of structural support and recognition

There's a deep desire for **equity, recognition, and fairness**, alongside specific policy improvements—especially around compensation, workload, and remote work.

Question 4: What has SacSewer done right as part of the split from the County?

Common Themes Identified

1. Communication and Transparency

- **Generally Positive Reception:** Many respondents commend SacSewer leadership for **proactive communication**, especially during the initial split from the County.
 - Phrases like “kept us informed,” “excellent communication,” and “honest attempt at communication” were noted.
- **Mixed Trust:** Some employees express **skepticism or frustration**, particularly about perceived **lack of follow-through** (e.g., on salary study promises or benefits parity).

2. Salary Study

- The **salary study** is a recurring theme, with many referencing it as either a **promising improvement** or a **source of frustration** due to:
 - Delays in sharing results
 - A sense that it’s being withheld for negotiation leverage
 - Anticipation that it could reveal necessary wage adjustments

3. Operational Continuity

- Many comments highlight that **day-to-day operations were not disrupted** by the transition.
 - This perceived **stability** is seen as a key success, especially for those concerned about continuity.

4. Overtime and Pay

- Several respondents mentioned **overtime (OT) calculations**:

- Some appreciated more favorable OT pay (e.g., inclusion of differentials/incentives).
 - Others criticized the **OT formula as incorrect or opaque**.
- A few noted **better base pay**, but often tempered by concerns over benefit reductions.

5. Benefits and Retirement

- **Health insurance dissatisfaction** is evident, particularly:
 - Increased premiums
 - Worse coverage compared to County offerings
- **Medical retirement additions** were seen positively, though some feel the contributions are insufficient.
- **Loss of comp time (CTO)** continues to be a disappointment for several staff.

6. Mixed Reactions to Change

- Some employees feel the organization is **trying to improve**, with attempts at:
 - Streamlining hiring
 - Reducing bureaucracy
 - Enhancing employee engagement
- Others feel **disillusioned**, citing broken promises, especially related to the “equal or better” benefits pledge.

7. General Sentiment

- **Cautious Optimism:** A number of employees are **withholding judgment**, suggesting outcomes will depend on how contract negotiations and benefit implementations proceed.
- **Lack of Major Disruption:** Many indicate that “nothing is on fire” and “everything is still functioning,” signaling a baseline of operational success despite dissatisfaction in other

areas.

Notable Positive Mentions

- Easier decision-making
 - Less bureaucracy
 - Seamless transition
 - Transparency in offer terms (for some)
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Conclusion

The overall tone is **pragmatic**: employees recognize the effort made in communication and operational stability, but there is **deep concern around compensation, benefits, and trust in leadership follow-through**. The **salary study, overtime practices, and future contract negotiations** appear to be the pivotal factors that will determine long-term sentiment.