



ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

FOR PARENTS & FAMILIES





Your experience matters - and no one knows that better than the families who live it every day. **Your story is the most powerful way to show why Head Start matters.**

When you share your experience, decision-makers pay attention. This toolkit is made just for parents, grandparents, and caregivers in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is made just for you - parents, grandparents, and caregivers - to share your story and make a difference in How Head Start is supported and funded

Use the tools that feel most helpful to you! This toolkit includes:

-  Fill-in-the-blank templates
-  Tell your Head Start story in letters or videos
-  Quick ways to speak up
-  Options for sharing online or in person

Every tool is designed so you can speak from the heart - no policy background needed.



ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

FOR PARENTS & FAMILIES

How to Use This Toolkit

1. Pick a Tool

- Fill-in-the-blank letter templates
- Quick video or social media prompts
- Postcard-style messages
- Family Action Tracker (bingo style)

2. Customize It

- Add your name, program site, and personal details.
- Tell your own story—no need for “policy talk.”

3. Take One Action

- Mail a note to your representative.
- Post a card on Facebook or Instagram.
- Mark a square on the bingo sheet.

4. Share & Invite

- Ask another parent or caregiver to join you.
- Every voice adds to our impact.

SUPPORT HEAD START

WE NEED YOUR VOICE NOW

Decisions are being made in Washington that could determine whether Head Start continues serving children and families across Illinois.

What is Head Start?

Head Start is a community-based, comprehensive federal early childhood program that promotes the school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development and supporting families in their self-sufficiency goals.

What Does Head Start Do?

Head Start provides **more than 28,000 Illinois children** with early learning, health, and nutrition screenings. Provide **more than 26,000 families** with support services in all **102 Illinois counties**.

Head Start employs almost **9,000 Illinoisans** serving these children and families.



28,000+
Children Served



26,000+
Families Supported



9,000+
Illinois Jobs

Smart Investment, Strong Returns

For every \$1 invested in Head Start, taxpayers see up to a \$9 return; it greatly improves the likelihood of financial self-sufficiency in adulthood (UCLA Research Brief).

Creates Local Jobs, Stimulates Economies

Funds go straight to communities to support local agencies and staff who understand their children, families & communities.

Better Start, Better Outcomes, Long Term Gains

Head Start children are more likely to graduate, less likely to be held back in school, and more likely to avoid crime – good for families and for the United States!

Stronger Families & Communities

Head Start helps families build strong foundations by supporting children's development and empowering parents to pursue work, education, and stability.

Stronger Families = Stronger Communities!

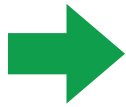
SUPPORT HEAD START

WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER

SPEAK UP

Share why Head Start matters to your community. Your story can help inform decision-makers about the real-life impact of these services.

Scan any one
or better yet, all
of the QR
Codes to send a
message



NATIONAL
HEAD START
ASSOCIATION



FIRST FIVE
YEARS
FUND



CHILD
CARE
AWARE

SIGN YOUR NAME



Are you a Head Start parent or alumni? You can share your story to help show why Head Start matters. Scan the QR Code to participate.

GIVE A DOLLAR

Support the Illinois Head Start Association Dollar per Child campaign so they can continue to lead the charge to Protect Head Start!



GET INVOLVED LOCALLY



Contact your local Head Start program and ask how you can help. Scan the QR Code and find your nearest Head Start location.

Sign up for IHSA Newsletter -
<https://forms.gle/GYBnLEgrP3EJFjt7>



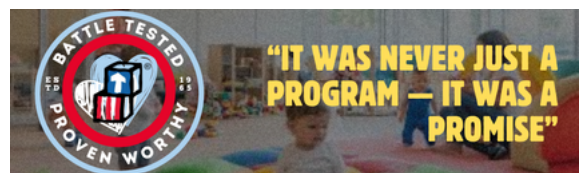
SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Post a Support Head Start yard or window sign to raise awareness about the program.



Like and follow Illinois Head Start Association on Facebook and Instagram.

Post the Head Start profile picture and banner on your social media pages. Use the hashtag #SupportHeadStart.





TEMPLATES

FOR REACHING OUT TO ELECTED
OFFICIALS, PARTNERS, AND MEDIA





TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL – WHY HEAD START MATTERS TO ME

Subject: Head Start Helped My Family

Dear [Representative/Senator/Mayor Last Name],

Hi, my name is [Your First Name], and I'm a parent in [City]. My child goes to Head Start at [Program Name], and I just wanted to say thank you for helping support it.

Before Head Start, things were tough. Since my child started, we've both grown. They're learning so much, and I've had people I can count on for support too. It's not just a preschool—it's been a lifeline for us.

Please keep Head Start going. Families like mine really need it.

Thank you,
[First Name, Last Name if comfortable]
[City, IL ZIP]



TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL – WHY HEAD START MATTERS TO ME (FILL-IN-THE-BLANK)

Subject: Head Start Helped My Family

Dear [Senator/Representative Last Name],

My name is _____ and I live in _____ (city or ZIP).

My child, _____ (child's first name or "my child"), attends Head Start at _____ (program name).

Before Head Start, we were facing:

Since joining Head Start, my child has:

And I have:

Head Start has made a big difference for us. Please continue to support and fund programs like ours so more families can benefit.

Thank you for your time and service.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

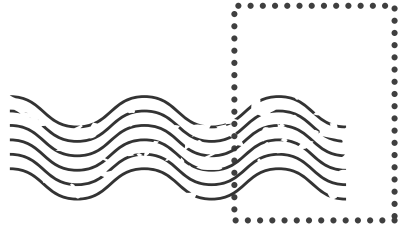
[City, State ZIP]

[Optional: Your email or phone]



TO CONGRESS MEMBERS: QUICK POSTCARD MESSAGE

Great for snail mail or your program's postcard drive

POSTCARD	
<p>Head Start changed our lives. My child is thriving in school, and I've found the support I needed as a parent. Thank you for supporting Head Start—and please keep it going for families like mine.</p> <p>— [First Name], [City or ZIP]</p>	
	<p>Elected Official Name/Office</p> <hr/>
	<p>1234 Street Address</p> <hr/>
	<p>City, State Zipcode</p> <hr/>



TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL: INVITATION TO VISIT PROGRAM

Subject: You're Invited to See Head Start in Action

Dear [Senator/Representative Last Name],

I'm _____, a Head Start parent at _____ (program name) in _____ (city). I'd love to invite you to visit our classroom and see how Head Start supports children and families every day.

My child and I would be honored to show you around and share real stories of the difference this program makes.

Thank you for your service, and I hope to see you soon.

Warmly,

[Your Name]

[City, State ZIP]

[Optional: Phone or Email]



TO ELECTED OFFICIALS: FOLLOW-UP OR THANK YOU AFTER CONGRESSIONAL VISIT OR MEETING

Subject: Thank You for Listening

Dear [Senator/Representative Last Name],

Thank you for taking time to [visit our program / speak with me by phone] about Head Start. As a parent at _____ (program name), I appreciate your interest in how Head Start serves families in our community.

Head Start has helped my child _____ (brief outcome) and given me _____ (brief benefit). Your support means a lot to families like mine.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[City, State ZIP]



TO A LOCAL NEWSPAPER OR MEDIA OUTLET – SHARE THE IMPACT

Subject: Spotlight on Head Start in Our Community

Dear Editor,

My name is _____ and I'm a parent in _____ (city or neighborhood). I wanted to share how much our local Head Start program at _____ (program name) has meant to my family and so many others.

Before Head Start, I worried about finding affordable childcare and support. Since my child joined, they've grown in confidence, learned new skills, and had access to health screenings we couldn't afford otherwise. I've also joined parent workshops and met a community of families who uplift one another.

Head Start is about more than preschool—it's a lifeline for families, a foundation for learning, and a boost for our neighborhood. I hope you'll consider featuring our program and the stories of local families who've been positively impacted.

Thank you for your time and for shining a light on programs that truly make a difference.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[City, State ZIP]

[Optional: Your email or phone]



TO A COMMUNITY PARTNER OR SCHOOL – STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP

Subject: Partnering to Support Head Start Families

Dear [Partner's Name or Title],

My name is _____, and I'm a Head Start parent at [Program Name] in [City]. My child, _____, attends the program, and I've seen how much it helps our family.

I'm reaching out because I believe we can work together to make things even better for our children. Here are some ideas I'd love to explore:

- Kindergarten Visits: Invite Head Start families to tour [School Name] so kids feel comfortable on their first day.
- Family Events: Host a joint storytime or family night at your location—something fun for parents and kids.
- Resource Spotlights: Let me know if you have workshops (like health screenings or literacy tips) that Head Start families could attend.

Would you be open to a brief meeting or call to discuss these ideas? I'm happy to help organize or spread the word among other parents.

Thank you for all you do for our community. I look forward to partnering with you!

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[City, State ZIP]
[Optional: Your email or phone]



MAKE THE CALL: HEAD START ADVOCACY PHONE SCRIPT

Sometimes the fastest way to make your voice heard is simply by picking up the phone. A brief, well-focused call can leave a lasting impression on your elected officials. Use the script in the next page to guide your conversation.

Keep it short, keep it real, and keep it polite. Phone calls may take just a few minutes, but they're a powerful way to show lawmakers that Head Start matters in our communities.

BEFORE YOU CALL

- Find the correct office number for your U.S. Representative or Senator (or local official).
- Have paper and pen ready to note the staffer's name and any follow-up details.
- Write down a brief personal story or fact about how Head Start has helped your family.
- Keep the script in front of you.



QUICK TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CALL

- Keep it under 2 minutes.
- Speak clearly and smile—it comes through on the phone. Use your own words to keep it natural.
- Write down the staffer's name who you spoke with for follow-up.
- Send a thank-you email later if you get their contact info.
- Feel free to tailor this script for events (like Advocacy Day) or one-off calls. Every call helps keep Head Start visible—and valued.



MAKE THE CALL: HEAD START ADVOCACY PHONE SCRIPT

1. GREETING & INTRODUCTION

You: *"Hello—my name is [Your Name], and I'm a Head Start parent in [City, State]. May I please speak with the staff member who handles education or family services?"*

(If you reach voicemail, leave a brief message with your name and number and say you'll follow up by email. If transferred or put on hold, repeat your intro when the staffer answers.)

2. STATE YOUR PURPOSE

You: *"I'm calling because I want to share how important Head Start is to families like mine and to offer myself as a resource on what's happening locally."*

3. SHARE YOUR QUICK STORY OR KEY FACT

You: *"Here's one example of why Head Start matters to us: 'Before Head Start, I worried about childcare and finding health support for my child. Since starting, my child, [Child's Name], has grown in confidence and I've had access to parenting classes and health screenings I couldn't afford otherwise.'"*

4. THE ASK

You: *"Could you please share this story and these details with [Representative/Senator Last Name] so they know the real impact Head Start has in our community? I'm also happy to send a one-page summary by email."*

(Be specific: one clear, single ask.)

5. OFFER TO FOLLOW UP

You: *"If it's helpful, I can email more information or invite [Representative/Senator Last Name] to visit our Head Start program here in [City]. What's the best email address to send materials?"*

6. THANK YOU & CLOSE

You: *"Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your interest in Head Start and families like mine. Have a great day!"*

By sharing your story and offering resources, you help keep Head Start visible—and valued—in your community.



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS TO SHARE

Head Start doesn't need to shout—it just needs to be seen.
These share-ready campaigns let you tell the truth about Head
Start with bold, simple visuals and strong messages.





SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS TO SHARE

Head Start doesn't need to shout—it just needs to be seen. These share-ready campaigns let you tell the truth about Head Start with bold, simple visuals and strong messages.

Celebrate the legacy. Share the impact. Speak the truth. Head Start isn't a trend. It's a promise that's stood the test of time—and it works.

IHSA's Social Card series campaigns includes ready-to-share cards that highlight why Head Start matters and how it changes lives. Staff, parents, and community supporters can all use them to speak up online.

How to Use the Cards

- Download any image that speaks to you.
- Post it with your own story or use one of the suggested sample captions provided.
- Tag your elected officials or program page.
- Use these hashtags: #HeadStartMatters #HeadStartWorks #SupportHeadStart

As a parent/family member:

"I've seen the difference Head Start makes every day. These cards help explain what words can't. #HeadStartWorks"





BATTLE TESTED – PROVEN WORTHY

This campaign reminds the public—and decision-makers—that Head Start has always delivered. It's not new. It's not political. It's proven.

- ✓ Visuals showing Head Start's long-term outcomes
- ✓ Posts that explain what Head Start actually does
- ✓ Use it to celebrate, educate, and push back against misinformation

"WHAT HEAD START REALLY DOES..."

Countering Misinformation: Know the Facts – These are calm, clear, fact-checked posts to help set the record straight—especially in response to misleading claims.

Use these cards to correct myths and highlight facts about:

- ✓ What Head Start is (and isn't)
- ✓ Who Head Start serves
- ✓ How it's funded
- ✓ What the outcomes really are

"MY HEAD START STORY"

This is our most powerful tool: real people sharing real stories. Parents, staff, alumni—anyone whose life has been shaped by Head Start can tell their story. Stories are collected in:

- ✓ Fill-in-the-blank templates
- ✓ Social post prompts

Tips for Sharing

- ✓ Use a campaign hashtag
- ✓ Tag your local officials, program, or IHSA
- ✓ Keep it real and keep it brief—your voice matters
- ✓ Share one card, one quote, or one photo at a time
- ✓ Hashtags: #BattleTestedProvenWorthy #HeadStartStrong #FundHeadStart

Scan to browse and download social media cards.
Use them to speak up, share your story, and show
what Head Start really does.

Head Start Family Action Tracker – BINGO Style!

Speak up. Take action. Make a difference.

🎯 Goal: Complete 5 in a row—or fill the whole board!

📧 Send a thank-you note to your Congress	💬 Tell your Head Start story to a friend or neighbor	💻 Share a Head Start post on Facebook or Instagram	📺 Watch a short Head Start video	😊 Help your child draw a “Why I Love Head Start” picture
📷 Take a photo of your child at Head Start	🗣️ Invite a friend to join a Head Start parent meeting	✍️ Write one sentence about how Head Start helped your family	✉️ Sign up for Head Start advocacy updates	📞 Call your program and say thank you
✍️ Help a child “sign” a postcard to Congress	✅ Attend a parent committee or policy council meeting	★ FREE SPACE – You’re making a difference!	📢 Post a family story using #HeadStartWorks	💛 Tell a teacher or staff member what you appreciate
📅 Join a Head Start family night or event	💡 Share an idea with your Head Start program	✉️ Mail or email your story to IHSA or your program	👤 Invite a legislator to visit your site	🔄 Share another family’s Head Start story online
📄 Write a Head Start testimonial for your program’s website	💖 Hang a “We Love Head Start” sign in your window	🎨 Make a Head Start-themed art project	👥 Tell a relative or neighbor about how Head Start helped	✍️ Sign a petition or letter supporting Head Start

🏆 What Happens When You Complete The Bingo Card?

- Take a picture of your completed tracker and share it with your program
- Bring it to your center and get a small reward or public shout-out
- OR: Turn it in for entry into a family prize drawing (if your program allows)



TOOLKIT DISCLAIMER & PRIVACY

Purpose & Use

These resources are provided by the Illinois Head Start Association for informational and educational purposes only. They are not legal or professional advice. Users should adapt templates, materials, and scripts to their own needs and consult legal or compliance experts if necessary.

Nonpartisan Guidance

The templates and scripts here are designed to inform and share personal stories, not to endorse or oppose any candidate, political party, or specific legislation.

Privacy & Safety

You control what personal details you share. Please use discretion when including names, addresses, or other identifying information in letters, emails, or public posts. Protect your family's privacy and safety.

Adapt as Needed

Feel free to edit and personalize these materials so they reflect your own voice and situation. If you have questions about content or advocacy rules, reach out to your Head Start program staff or IHSA for guidance.

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Questions & Updates

For the latest toolkit versions or any questions, contact IHSA at info@ilheadstart.org or visit ilheadstart.org/advocacy.