MISSOURI HEAD START / EARLY HEAD START
2026-27 AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

Nominations/applications are now being accepted for the **2026-27 MHSA Awards & Scholarships**. Please take time to recognize the outstanding work and partnerships that help demonstrate the Head Start advantage in Missouri.

Completed submissions are due to MHSA by February 1, 2027.

Nominees and recipients will be contacted on or before March 1, 2027 and recipients will be recognized by the Missouri Head Start Association on May 13, 2027.

State recipients will then compete for Regional Awards & Scholarships and Regional winners will be recognized on June 8, 2027 at the R7HSA Annual Conference to be held in Kansas City, MO.

Additional details:

- Nominations/applications are to be submitted using Smartsheet form links in the Awards packet.
- State award and scholarship recipients' regional nominations are due to R7HSA by March 1, 2027. Please include a head shot photo of each regional nominee.
- Regional winners will be contacted by April 1, 2027.

HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS:

- **HEAD START ALUMNI HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR $1,000***
- **HEAD START PARENT POST SECONDARY EDUCATION $1,000***
- **HEAD START STAFF HIGHER EDUCATION $1,000***

** MHSA scholarship recipients will compete for additional Region VII $1,000 Scholarships.*

AWARDS:

- **STATE CHILDREN'S CHAMPION**
  State-level award only
- **REGIONAL CHILDREN'S CHAMPION**
  Can be a State Children's Champion, but not required
- **ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR**
- **TEACHER OF THE YEAR**
- **SUPPORT STAFF OF THE YEAR**
- **FAMILY LEADER OF THE YEAR**
- **FAMILY ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR**
- **EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**
- **ANN LINEHAN SAFETY AWARD**
  Regional-level award only

The National Head Start Association accepts nominations for NHSA awards at ***nhsa.org/scholarships-and-awards***.

Direct MHSA Awards questions to:

TINA BERNSKOETTER, Director — Executive Services
Missouri Head Start Association
573.884.5078 | Tina@MOHeadStart.org

2026-27 HEAD START

ALUMNI - HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR SCHOLARSHIP

SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA:

1. The nominee must have attended Head Start for one or more years.
2. The nominee must be scheduled to graduate from high school, be pursuing a post-secondary education, and submit name of institution of higher education that they are enrolled in or have the desire to attend. These funds may be applied to the documented cost of tuition and/or books.
3. Candidate must submit **two letters of reference**. *(20 points)*
   - *Letter of reference from someone who knows the candidate as a student (school personnel preferred).*
   - *Letter of reference from someone who knows the candidate as a community volunteer.*

Applications that do not include two references will not be considered for this scholarship.

1. **Please share key details about the candidate and family connection to Head Start and current educational environment**. (20 points)
2. **Describe candidate's volunteer contributions to Head Start, Early Head Start, or the community.** (30 points)
3. **Provide a description of candidate's educational and professional goals**. (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Alumni Scholarship

2026-27 HEAD START

PARENT - POST SECONDARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA:

1. Candidate must have a child currently enrolled in Head Start / Early Head Start for one or more years.
2. Candidate must be a high school graduate and pursuing a post-secondary education.
   Please submit proof of acceptance or enrollment in an institution of higher learning whose accreditation is recognized by the US Department of Education. These funds may be applied to the documented cost of tuition and/or books.
3. Candidate must submit **two letters of reference**. *(20 points)*
   - *Letter of reference from someone who knows the candidate as a student (school personnel preferred).*
   - *Letter of reference from someone who knows the candidate as a community volunteer.*

Applications that do not include two references will not be considered for this scholarship.

1. **Please provide details about the candidate and family connection to Head Start or Early Head Start.** (20 points)
2. **List candidate's volunteer contributions to Head Start, Early Head Start, or the community.** (30 points)
3. **Provide a description of candidate's educational and professional goals.** (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Parent Scholarship

2026-27 Head Start

STAFF — HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA:

1. Candidate must be currently employed in Head Start / Early Head Start for one or more years.
2. Candidate must be a high school graduate and pursuing a post-secondary education.
   Proof of acceptance or enrollment in an institution of higher learning whose accreditation is recognized by the US Department of Education is required. These funds may be applied to the documented cost of tuition and/or books.
3. Candidate must submit **two letters of reference**. (20 points)
   - *Letter of reference from someone who knows the candidate as a student (school personnel preferred).*
   - *Letter of reference from someone who knows the candidate as a staff member in the Head Start or Early Head Start program.*

Applications that do not include two references will not be considered for this scholarship.

1. **List candidate's current role and overall length of service in Head Start/Early Head Start.** (10 points)
2. **List candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications**. (10 points)
3. **Describe candidate's unique contributions to the Head Start or Early Head Start program or community.**(30 points)
4. Provide a description of **candidate's educational and professional goals**. (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Staff Scholarship

2026—27 HEAD START

STATE CHILDREN'S CHAMPION AWARD

AWARD DESCRIPTION: The State Children's Champion Award recognition was initiated in 2006 by the R7HSA Partnership Committee in an effort to recognize individuals who make valuable contributions to the lives of children and families across their state. The award is designed to recognize and honor individuals who "stand out" for leadership, commitment, and service and who ultimately make a difference. This award celebrates the important contributions of an individual or organization that serves as a Champion to Head Start and Early Head Start children and families.

Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination. (20 points)

1. **List candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications, and their current role in their organization** .(20 points)
2. **Describe candidate's special contributions to the success of Head Start/Early Head Start in your state**. (30 points)
3. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered the success of their efforts on behalf of Head Start/Early Head Start in your state.** (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Children's Champion Award

2026-27 HEAD START

ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR

AWARD DESCRIPTION: This award celebrates the important contributions of staff who oversee the Executive Director or Assistant Director levels of administrative work in a Head Start or Early Head Start programs.

AWARD RECIPIENT: The successful candidate will be a current employee of a Head Start/Early Head Start program demonstrating exceptional leadership qualities in their role. The application shall be submitted by the program and provide information about special contributions this individual has made within their program.

Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination. (20 points)

1. **List the candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications.** (10 points)
2. **Provide the candidate's current role and length of service in your program or Head Start/Early Head Start in general.** (10 points)
3. **Describe candidate's special contributions to the success of your local program**. (30 points)
4. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered their success and that of your program**. (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Administrator of the Year

2026-27 HEAD START

TEACHER OF THE YEAR

AWARD DESCRIPTION: This award recognizes all individuals that are involved in the education components of a Head Start/Early Head Start program including classroom lead and associate teachers, home visiting staff and instructional mentors.

AWARD RECIPIENT: The successful candidate will have 5+ years in a program serving as a classroom lead teacher, associate teacher, home visitor or instructional mentor. The application shall be submitted by the program and provide information about special contributions this individual has made working in their program.

Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination. (20 points)

1. **List the candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications.** (10 points)
2. **Provide the candidate's length of service in your program or Head Start/Early Head Start in general.** (10 points)
3. **Describe candidate's significant contributions to your program that have provided meaningful and positive impact on children and families served by Head Start/Early Head Start**. (30 points)
4. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered their success and that of your program**. (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Teacher of the Year

2026-27 HEAD START

SUPPORT STAFF OF THE YEAR

AWARD DESCRIPTION: This award celebrates the important contributions of staff who work in administration, management, facilities, food service, transportation, health, disabilities and social services.

AWARD RECIPIENT: The successful candidate will be a current employee of a Head Start/Early Head Start program serving in one of the areas of: management, facilities, food service, transportation, health, disabilities and social services. The application shall be submitted by the program and provide information about special contributions this individual has made in their program.

Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination. (20 points)

1. **List the candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications.** (10 points)
2. **Provide the candidate's current role and length of service in your program or Head Start/Early Head Start in general.** (10 points)
3. **Describe candidate's special contributions to the success of your local program.** (30 points)
4. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered their success and that of your program**. (30 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Support Staff of the Year

2026-27 HEAD START

FAMILY LEADER OF THE YEAR

AWARD DESCRIPTION: This award recognizes all individuals that are leaders in their Head Start/Early Head Start family and have made special contributions to be a leader for their family and in their local Head Start/Early Head Start program or community.

AWARD RECIPIENT: The successful candidate will be a current Head Start/Early Head Start parent, grandparent or family leader who has been an example as a leader in their family and their local program. The application shall be submitted by the program and provide information about special contributions this individual has had on behalf of their family and within their program

Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination. (20 points)

1. **Describe candidate's special contributions that support their family's involvement in the local program**. (20 points)
2. **List candidate's accomplishments that your program would like to recognize. (**20 points)
3. **List candidate's personal goals and describe how they have taken steps to work towards those goals to benefit their family.** (20 points)
4. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered their success**. (20 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Family Leader of the Year

2026-27 HEAD START

FAMILY ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

AWARD DESCRIPTION: Advocacy comes in many forms and this award aims to recognize the outstanding achievements of those that serve Head Start/Early Head Start families through a home visitation model of service.

AWARD RECIPIENT: The successful candidate will be a current Head Start/Early Head Start employee who has proven to be a true family advocate in their home visitation role. The application shall be submitted by the program and provide information about special contributions this individual has made in their program.

***Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination.** (20 points)

1. **List the candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications.** (10 points)
2. **List candidate's special contributions to the support of Head Start families in their local program.** (20 points)
3. **Describe candidate's accomplishments that your program would like to recognize.** (30 points)
4. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered their success and that of the families they serve.** (20 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Family Advocate of the Year

2026-27 HEAD START

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

AWARD DESCRIPTION: This award celebrates an individual's or organization's significant achievement through innovative community service to Head Start and Early Head Start. The nominee for this award should have excelled in addressing issues of poverty, early education or community health.

AWARD RECIPIENT: Nominee must be an individual or organization that made an innovative contribution of time and effort that has made a positive impact upon children, families, and/or communities.

***Please submit TWO letters of reference with your nomination.** (20 points)

1. **Describe candidate's specific contributions to Head Start or Early Head Start, and list names of key leaders of the effort.** (30 points)
2. **Describe the outcomes or impact of the effort on vulnerable children and families, that are unique and/or go beyond Head Start Performance Standards.** (30 points)
3. **Describe three traits that "stand-out" about this nominee that has fostered their success and that of the families they serve.** (20 points)

Please include a photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Missouri Excellence in Community Service Award

2026—27 REGION VII HEAD START

REGIONAL CHILDREN'S CHAMPION AWARD

AWARD DESCRIPTION: The Regional Children's Champion Award was created in 2023 by the R7HSA Board of Directors, in an effort to recognize and celebrate honorees who "stand out" for leadership, commitment, and service, and whose important contributions ultimately make a difference in the lives of Head Start and Early Head Start children and families across the region.

1. **List the candidate's credentials or special training/qualifications, and their current role in their organization.** (20 points)

2. **Describe candidate's special contributions to the success of Head Start/Early Head Start in Region VII.** (30 points)

3. **Describe three traits about the candidate that "stand-out" and have fostered the success of their efforts on behalf of Head Start/Early Head Start in Region VII.** (30 points)

4. **Narrative: Describe leadership roles and qualities the nominee possesses. Provide examples of how the nominee personifies excellence.** (20 points)

Please include a head shot photo of nominee.

Submit online application here: Regional Children's Champion

R7HSA DUE DATE: March 1, 2027
Direct awards process questions to:
April Noe, R7HSA • april@R7HSA.com • 816.707.6545

Region VII Head Start Association
IOWA | KANSAS | MISSOURI | NEBRASKA

Region VII Head Start Association

ANN LINEHAN SAFETY AWARD

The Region VII Head Start Association (R7HSA) established the Ann Linehan Safety Award in honor of Ms. Linehan on the announcement of her 2021 retirement as the Deputy Director of the Office of Head Start, ending her longstanding career with the Administration for Children and Families.

One only has to read Ms. Linehan's letter to grantees dated January 3, 2018, to understand the depth of her concern and passion for providing children a safe, nurturing, and loving environment. The letter contains a difficult but important message shared with grantees regarding an alarming increase in reported number of child incidents while children were in the care of a Head Start/Early Head Start Program.

The *Ann Linehan Safety Award* builds on the R7HSA *Safe in Hand* Campaign launched in 2019 in response to Ms. Linehan's letter for the purpose of raising awareness and the importance of providing a safe indoor and outdoor classroom setting including transportation services, where provided, for every child handed off by a parent/caregiver to a Head Start/Early Head Start staff member is always the programs highest priority.

2022 marks the first year the Ann Linehan Safety Award was open for applications. The award will continue to be offered annually and awarded at an R7HSA annual event contingent upon receipt of qualifying recipient applications.

Award submissions will be reviewed by an impartial panel of experienced Head Start/Early Head Start professionals with former or current direct field program supervisory/management level experience.

Submit online application here: Ann Linehan Safety Award

DUE DATE: March 1, 2027.

R7HSA Salutes

ANN LINEHAN

for

40 Years of Service

with the Head Start Program.

2022 Awardee

South Central Missouri Community Action Program

R7HSA Region VII Head Start Association
IOWA | KANSAS | MISSOURI | NEBRASKA

www.R7HSA.com • 816.707.6545
312 SW Greenwich Dr., Ste. 105, Lee's Summit, MO 64082

Region VII Head Start Association

ANN LINEHAN SAFETY AWARD

CRITERIA: Criteria for the award is set at the highest level in an effort to recognize a recipient who has demonstrated the following:

1. The recipient meets and exceeds 45 CFR §1302.47 of the Head Start Program Performance Standards by establishing a system of health and safety practices ensuring children are kept safe at all times.
2. The recipient can describe how they have exercised due diligence in their response to serving infants, toddler, children, and families mitigating the spread of communicable diseases.
3. The recipient meets state Child Care licensing regulations.
4. The recipient has been incident free for the last twelve months and has not been cited as non-compliant on their most current Focus Area Two 2 monitoring review in respect to Performance Measure 4 (PM4) Safety Practices.
5. For programs involved in child care partnerships, please describe how your program has successfully supported partners in providing safe and developmentally appropriate environments designed to protect the health and safety of children, families, and staff. Please expand on resources, professional development, including partners in program planning activities as well as other direct support your program has provided to ensure they are successful in implementing comprehensive services that promote the well-being of all children in your care.

In addition to the criteria previously listed, the recipient must include a one-to-two-page self-reflection narrative describing how their program has used innovation to go beyond regulations and requirements, mirroring the message in Ms. Linehan's January 3, 2018, letter, *"Keeping Every Child safe, and feeling loved Every Moment while in our care, which is foundational to Head Start and Early Head Start programs."*

DUE DATE: March 1, 2027 Submit online application here: Ann Linehan Safety Award

"Keeping Every Child safe, and feeling loved Every Moment while in our care, which is foundational to Head Start and Early Head Start programs."

R7HSA Region VII Head Start Association
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