

Dr. Bergeron's Live Webinar
July 9, 2018

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Hi, my name is Dr. Deborah Bergeron, and I am the new director of the Office of Head Start. I've been on the job for just over nine weeks; so I feel like a veteran. And I'm very excited to talk directly to you today. It's been quite a whirlwind of a couple of months of learning for me.

My background is not Head Start. My background is public K-12 education. I have 30-plus years working with children and teachers in a variety of capacities. But I do have some Head Start experience. I have been a school administrator in elementary schools, where Head Start classrooms existed. And it gave me a very different perspective when I walked into this role, my experience as an administrator in Head Start personally, was a little different than maybe some of you. I was very disconnected from my Head Start classroom as an administrator, and I reflected on that, when I took this position, and it really struck me.

And so, as I've started to go around the country, and meet with different Head Start programs and their directors, I've asked them, "What is your relationship like with the public schools?" Some people have really good, solid relationships, and others are finding this really challenging. So as a public school educator by trade, coming into this position, one of my huge priorities is going to be school readiness. And we've spent the last nine weeks or so, in the Office of Head Start, talking about this, exploring what are we doing well, and what could we do better? And part of what we want to do this year, is really put a spotlight on school readiness. And generally, the best way to do that, is through monitoring.

So you're going to see, when the new monitoring guidelines come out, some changes in terms of what we're gonna focus on in terms of school readiness. What we're going to hope from this is that you're going to start to reflect on your practice. What are you doing well? Whatever you're doing well, we need to hear about it, because we want to share that with other folks who might need support. Where are you running into challenges? And we want to hear about those, too, because we think we can be a partner with you, in breaking down the barriers between Head Start, and that kindergarten classroom where your kiddos end up when they are finished at Head Start.

In the school readiness guidelines, there are a lot of things covered, and a lot of those things I know most of us do really naturally. Things that have to do with social and emotional development. But do you really know what the expectations of the kindergarten classroom, where your children are going to end up, expect? That might be an academic expectation. Is there a certain assessment they're going to be required to take? And if there is, do you know what it is? And if you know what it is, is it guiding and informing your own instruction in your classrooms?

Those are the kinds of questions we kind of want to dig into, and figure out what you're doing, and take the best of what you're doing, and share it with others, and provide support where we think that might be needed. One of my goals, in my office, is to really break down these barriers by reaching out to the Department of Education. So my plan is to have conversations with the Department of Education, with superintendents, with principals -- in fact, at the end of the July, we've invited many of you, Head Start directors, to come on in to D.C., and we've invited principals, and we want to put everybody together, and say, hey, what's working? And where doesn't it work? And why not? These are all our kids. And our goal is to make sure that all of them are ready for kindergarten.

We know we all have the same goal, and so if we all get on the same page, we believe we can do a better job with that piece of things. So as you venture into summer, the reason for this message, really, is because I know as a former school administrator, that even though summer is busy, if you don't have children in your building, you can get a lot done.

So I'm hoping that you'll start having those conversations, reaching out to your schools, make contact with those principals, or kindergarten teachers, or superintendents, and start having conversations. Just start seeing what the vibe is between you and the receiving school, or schools that your children will attend. And that will be a really good start to what I think is going to be a fantastic school year come August or September. You'll hear more information on this as the summer unfolds, so prepare for that, and please know we are all here at the Office of Head Start to support you.

So let us know what we can do. In the meantime, I'm going to say goodbye, but I'm really hoping that throughout the next school year, I'm going to be able to send you a message, hopefully monthly, that will be personal like this, that will spearhead a single topic, that will provide you with ongoing support. So look forward to that. And many other fun things. We are working on a lot of good stuff for next school year. Have a great summer.

[End video]