

## **Moving Onward and Upward into a New Program Year**

Khari Garvin: Well, hello, everybody. Khari Garvin here, the director of the Office of Head Start. I just wanted to take a few minutes to say welcome back – welcome to you new staff who have joined the Head Start movement this year for the first time. And also a special salute to those of you who are continuing to serve in your Head Start program, whether it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> year or 22<sup>nd</sup> year. We often say that Head Start is heart work. The calling card of the Head Start program has always been the way our staff care for their children and families.

As many programs start up this year, I want to remind you that child health and safety is the most fundamental commitment of our Head Start program. Our programs must be safe places for vulnerable children who might not have other opportunities to thrive. Every staff person is responsible to ensure that their Head Start program is a safe place for children, both physically and emotionally. This ranges from strategies like active supervision to safe environments. It also includes making sure staff members themselves have the support they need to effectively serve.

The Head Start program has an unwavering commitment to equity, inclusion, and belonging. And fundamental to this commitment is the belief that all children, families, staff, and communities should have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. Many of our children have been adversely impacted by persistent poverty, and racism, and bias. We welcome each unique child and their families with a workforce that is representative of the communities served as well as programs that intentionally embed the language, culture, and the real lived experiences of their community in their systems and services.

Let us renew our commitment to reaching the children, families, and communities of greatest need and serving them with dignity and respect. Lingering effects of the pandemic have disproportionately effected people with the lowest incomes. Let's be sure that we are always recruiting the children and families who would benefit most from Head Start, especially children and families experiencing homelessness.

Let me just say thanks once again to each of you – to our teachers and teacher's assistants, home visitors, family service workers, health coordinators, cooks and transportation staff, and custodians – there's so many of us working to prepare America's most vulnerable children to succeed in school and in life. Everyone has an important role to play. We're so glad that you are here spending your time and energy improving the life outcomes of children and families of your community who need you the most.

As we continue to move the Head Start program, I just want to simply say, "Onward and upward." Talk to you again soon.