

**Leading the Way Forward:
1st Office of Head Start National Leadership Award for Effective Family Engagement**

Yvette Sanchez Fuentes: Hello, everyone. So hello, Head Start. [Cheering and applause] Hi, everyone. Good afternoon, and welcome to the 2nd Annual National Birth to 5 Institute. For those of you who don't know me, I am Yvette Sanchez Fuentes; I serve as the director for the Office of Head Start. I am in my fourth year and into our second term, so I'm excited to welcome you.

I want to take a moment, because I think it's always important to recognize all of those who work hard every day on behalf of vulnerable children and families across this country, especially during these difficult times. But I want to thank all of you for being with us this week. I want to thank the 3,000 people who came in from across the country to be with us this week. And I also want to give a special welcome to those who are joining us virtually. Every plenary during the next couple of days will be Web-streamed live. So we have about 400 folks out across the country joining us via the Internet, so welcome to you all.

You know, you are the frontlines of ensuring that our Head Start children and our families are ready to succeed in school and in life, and so I am just humbled to be here with all of you today. I just want to very quickly thank all of our training and technical assistance National Centers who have worked really hard to think outside the box and put together some sessions for the next couple of days that really get into thinking about what happens in our local Head Start programs.

I want to thank my colleagues at the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, and of course, our friends over at NAEYC and our friends at the National Head Start Association for all of their support in bringing all of this together. And of course, I want to thank our team at PalTech. Many of you have seen them all day today. They do absolutely everything they can to make sure that you are comfortable and that your experience is the best that it can be. So please, if you need anything while you are here, make sure that you reach out to some of those staff. But I want to thank Judy and Jenna and the whole team at PalTech. What you do every day is amazing for us; so thanks, guys. Yep. [Applause]

And then, of course, I want to – you know, last but not least, I want to thank Sarah Merrill. Where is Sarah? I can't see with the lights. But Sarah – there she is. [Laughter] Sarah Merrill is at the Office of Head Start, and she took on the task of leading all of us – imagine that – here in DC and throughout the Regions in coming together to get organized and to put this second annual – second biannual institute together. So I'm grateful to Sarah for her leadership and her calmness as we move through this process. [Applause]

And, of course, I want to thank all of the parents that are with us today and through the next couple of days. I know how hard it can be to take time off from work and to be away from your families, so thank you. Thank you for the trust that you put into your Head Start programs every day. Without you, Head Start wouldn't be what it is today; so, thank you. [Applause]

So you all have heard me say this time and time again, but I want to remind everyone that President Obama and this administration are fully committed to Head Start. Whether it was creating the largest expansion of Early Head Start since its inception during intense budget cuts, no administration has been more committed to Head Start than this administration. [Applause]

Now I have a little bit of bad news, right, but better that we all hear it together. So you all know – you probably saw the e-blast and the email go out on Friday that we have received our final numbers for fiscal year 2013. I've heard folks chatting about it, so I know that many of you are aware. But I just want to share with folks that while all programs will have to reduce their annual operating budgets by 5.27 percent, one thing that we were able to do is we were able to maintain. So, no program will see a reduction in their training and technical assistance dollars. And I would just encourage you to, please, when you go back home – and I know you've been planning and I know you've been thinking about it, but as you continue to make those final decisions, please keep in mind what's going on in your communities and how you can best support your staff and your parents as they continue to support kids and families.

I also want to remind not just the folks in this room but everybody live-streaming, and hopefully as this gets out far and wide, that because of these cuts, we are expecting to see a reduction of almost 70,000 kids across the country in our Head Start programs. And I know that is a hard thing for all of us, but I also know that in Head Start we're going to continue to move forward; but most importantly, that you as leaders in your program and as folks who see kids and families every day, you're going to make sure that you maintain the quality Head Start services that our children and our families deserve.

And so with that, today I want to talk a little bit about our priorities. And so building on the success of the first National Birth to 5 Institute two years ago, we're gathered here together to talk about the importance of the leadership – leadership today during these difficult times, but also leadership in how you move forward in your programs and how we can best support Head Start leaders in their efforts to promote school readiness within systems and services that are data-driven and ultimately support your organizations in becoming learning organizations.

In current budget times and with increased accountability, now more than ever, Head Start leaders across the country – and that includes all of you in this room today – must make the best use of data to improve program services for children and families. Leaders must use effective systems to collect, to document, to analyze, to interpret, and to use data to make decisions to ensure quality services that promote school readiness and continuous program improvement.

You know, many of you who know me know that I always think that we have to look back. And all of you know that since 1965, Head Start programs across this country have served over 29 million children and their families. And as you've heard me say many times before, this administration has made raising the bar on quality for all of our Head Start programs a major priority. And you've seen this since January 2010. Many of you saw it when we launched the Head Start Roadmap to Excellence.

You know that we've taken specific actions to improve school readiness outcomes for Head Start children to promote their long-term success. And as you all know, there were two overarching actions that we specified in the roadmap. The first, increasing every Head Start child's exposure to effective, appropriate learning experience, both in the program and at home, and assuring the integration of Head Start into a continuum of high-quality care.

So in the planners that you got in your bag... Everybody got their planner, right? You're going to see in there the OHS priorities, so please take a look at those. Multiple efforts have been taken to implement these specific actions, including the implementation of the Designation Renewal System, making changes to the Head Start monitoring system, strengthening and revamping our training and technical assistance system. We've also revised the Child Development and Early Learning Framework and

strengthened our collaborations and our partnerships with other federal programs, including our colleagues at the Office of Child Care and the Department of Education.

And while all of this was going on, Secretary Sebelius also re-charted the advisory committee on Head Start research and evaluation. The committee was tasked with providing feedback on the Head Start Impact Study, published in January of 2010, identifying research-based recommendations for improving Early Head Start and Head Start practice, and identifying priorities for our future.

You know, in Head Start, data is a broad term, and it takes into account demographics about participants, information on program services to children and families, the status of individual children and groups of children, staff qualifications and training, administrative information, and much, much, more. You all know this. But we have to ask ourselves: What data will be collected and for what purpose? And I challenge all of you that when you go back to your programs at the end of these three days, or at the end of the week, to take into account these two important pieces: Why are you collecting the data that you're collecting and how are you using it to make informed decisions about your program?

So as you'll see from your planner, from all the information that you've gotten over the last couple of weeks about this Institute, you'll see that we are focused on data, and we're focused on supporting you in creating learning organizations. So over the next few days, you'll attend sessions and receive training and information on everything from school readiness to effective management systems to program planning, and most importantly, to implementing a comprehensive birth to 5 program for children, families, and communities.

I want to point out very quickly that when the committee talked about a learning organization, they weren't just talking about individual Head Start programs. They were talking about Head Start as a community. And at the Office of Head Start, we've taken this recommendation, this challenge, very seriously. And we've been thinking about how do we create a learning organization, all the way from what we do here in Washington, DC, down into our Regional Offices, and down into what you do.

We know that a learning organization is made up of people skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge. Learning organizations feature three main building blocks: supportive learning environments, concrete learning practices, and leadership behavior that provides reinforcement. And over time, you will hear more about that.

These three building blocks of learning organizations reinforce one another, but they also offer all of us the opportunity to step back and to reevaluate what we do every day, whether it's in our office here in DC, in our Regional Offices out across the country, or in your programs. It forces us to reevaluate our management operations to see if we could tweak certain aspects to improve our outcomes and efficiencies even more than we already have.

So over the next few days in your sessions, think about the three building blocks; think about how you use data within your organization; think about how you can improve your use of data within your organization; think about what decisions you make on a daily, a weekly, a monthly, a yearly basis; and how do you use data to make those decisions. But most importantly, please keep in mind that you're learning, and all of this knowledge cannot end when this Institute ends or when you get back on that plane. I urge you to please take back all of the information that you're going to get over these next

couple of days. Take it back to your organization, share it with your staff, and continue to reach out to us at the Office of Head Start so that we can better support you.

And so with that, I'm going to stop talking. And I'm happy to introduce to you Roberto Rodriguez. He was a special assistant to the President for education policy at the White House. Many of you are familiar with Roberto. He is a close and old friend of Head Start, and I can assure you that there is not a better advocate or more fierce supporter for Head Start than Roberto. So, please welcome Roberto. [Applause]

Roberto Rodriguez: Hello. Good afternoon, everyone. All right, I'm excited to be here with you this afternoon. I'd like to begin by thanking all of you for taking time away from your programs and your communities that you serve to join us here in Washington. And I want to just thank you for all that you do so well on behalf of thousands of our Head Start children and families.

I want to give a special thanks to Yvette Sanchez Fuentes for outstanding and steadfast leadership at the helm of our federal Head Start program. Could we give Yvette a round of applause? [Applause] We – we really appreciate you, Yvette. We appreciate your service to our administration, and we thank you for all that you do each and every day on behalf of Head Start.

These are really exciting times for those of us who are passionate about early childhood education. And two months ago, in the president's State of the Union Address, he outlined his goals for our country and for our country's education system. In his remarks, the president noted that our work is about making a nation that is more prosperous and about making sure that our prosperity is more sustainable for a greater share of our country. A thriving middle class has always been America's engine of the American dream and of economic growth, and reigniting that engine is certainly the defining challenge of our time.

So the president laid out, when he spoke, a plan to build on the progress we've made during this first term, a plan to make America a magnet for jobs and manufacturing, to equip our – our sons and daughters with the skills and the education that they need to be able to do those jobs, and to ensure that hard work leads to a decent living. The president set out, in this second term, to build a stronger, more stable ladder of opportunity into the middle class. This is a ladder that will hold strong for the hundreds of thousands of children and families who are looking upward, working hard to reach and fulfill the promise of the American dream.

So as Americans, we know that we won't solve every challenge we face, but the president certainly believes that there are some steps that we can take right now: to invest in clean energy; to invest in manufacturing; to invest in infrastructure; and, yes, to invest in education; to create jobs; to grow our economy from the middle class out and not from the top down. And that's the common ground upon which the American people expect Congress to act and to get the job done.

So that first rung on that ladder of opportunity involves providing a world-class complete and competitive education for every one of our sons and daughters. Our president fundamentally understands that the best way to build and support a thriving middle class is through a world-class education. He also firmly believes that education must begin at birth. He believes that a child's zip code must never predetermine his or her access to a high-quality education, and he also understands well the stubborn opportunity gap that still confronts far too many of our children. It limits their life chances

before they even enter school. And he's committed to making sure that our children get a healthy start in life and get to school ready to learn and ready to succeed on day one.

So our administration has made important investments to that end. We've expanded Head Start through the Recovery Act; we've reached hundreds of new classrooms and over 60,000 new infants and toddlers in that program. We've invested in expanding home visiting through the Affordable Care Act to reach over 200,000 children across all 50 states. And we're taking on new challenges, like the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, to build a strong and stable system of standards and support to make sure that each and every one of our young people has a great shot at a high-quality early education.

His second term agenda doubles down on this work. And in so – in so doing, the president is proposing an ambitious new vision for early education, investments of federal resource that we know will return and will return the highest on every dollar spent, and those are investments in our youngest children.

Now, I know there aren't too many people who get excited about the release of a federal budget. You know, a budget – this happens every year. It's a cycle here in Washington. But, you know, a budget isn't just a set of numbers. It really is a statement of values. It reflects the aspirations of our citizens and of our leaders. And that's why we're so proud of the president's 2014 budget, because it continues to prioritize our most vulnerable children. It continues to prioritize investments in education, and particularly in the early years, even in this – even in this tough fiscal time. It begins with a big vision, and the President has called for a historic \$75 billion investment over 10 years to deliver high-quality preschool for every child in America.

We're... [Applause] Yes, you can clap to that.

We're seeking to close the school readiness gap and make sure that our children have the chance to enter – enter kindergarten ready for success. This "Preschool for All" proposal will help create new partnerships to help ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready; and partnerships between our federal government into the states, between our – our early childhood providers, our communities, our parents, our families. And most importantly, a partnership that will help deliver the promise that all of our 4-year-olds need to be able to enter school ready for success. It's an investment we know that we need to make, and it's fully paid for in this budget by imposing a new tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products. [Applause]

Second, the president further proposes meeting this initiative with an expansion of our evidence-based voluntary home visiting program. This is a program that we were proud to launch four years ago, and through which states are implementing programs to make sure that our families have the opportunity to have a visit from social workers, from nurses, from early educators, and other professionals to really connect our families with a network of resources that we know will help improve our children's health, development, and their ability to succeed later in life.

And finally, the president has proposed a bold, new \$1.4 billion investment in a new Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership, [Applause] a partnership that will help uplift and utilize Early Head Start standards and record of success to reach across into our child care subsidy system and use our Early Head Start centers and our broader Early Head Start framework as a hub to improve quality and expand the supply of high-quality infant and toddler care for communities across this country. [Applause]

This is a significant investment. It's a huge opportunity, and we'll need your leading voices and your energy to be able to keep the momentum going. We need you out there making sure that people know that this is one of the single best investments we can make in our nation's future. You know, as leaders, you also know you can't lead alone. You have to work with others. It means your staff and your community and your families all have to work together to be able to help our children get ahead. And if our Head Start children are to succeed in school and in life, their families also need to be engaged. The data here is clear. [Applause] Yes.

So today at this Leadership Institute, we're honoring 12 regional award winners for their commitment to family engagement and for their strategies for engaging families in new, innovative, effective ways. We honor Head Start leaders like those in Boulder, Colorado – Where's Boulder? [Applause] All right. – who supplied families in their area with materials and tools and engaged them in the creation of a family garden.

Now our first lady, Michelle Obama, knows a thing or two about the importance of a family garden. She's brought this wonderful tradition to the south lawn of the White House. And earlier this month, as she does every year, she invites students from around the country to join her in planting the White House kitchen garden. So they roll up their sleeves and they get their hands dirty. They grow. They harvest. They serve the vegetables later in the summer. They donate many of those to local charities.

And the first lady uses this garden to teach young people about the importance of healthy eating, to give them a better understanding of nutritious foods. Schools working with the first lady on that project will connect that garden experience to their social studies projects back in their classrooms. They'll help teach their students about American history, about the history of presidents who had a role in gardening and in land stewardship.

But the folks in Boulder know that a family garden provides an even more important lesson. It builds community, it promotes family learning, and it can strengthen family connections and family engagement. I hear 50 percent of the Head Start families in Boulder reported that they tended to the garden every day together. So you're building stronger communities and family cohesion, not to mention avid garden lovers and veggies – veggie lovers for years to come.

But this afternoon, we're also honoring Head Start leaders like the "Get a Move On" program from the Kokomo Center Schools in Indiana. Where's – where's Indiana? [Applause] All right. So this is a program that identified a challenge in their local communities and used family and community engagement in an innovative and effective way to tackle it. So in this case, the Kokomo Center identified the challenge that is near and dear to the interests, again, of our first lady and of our administration.

See, nearly a third of children and families at that center were overweight or obese, so the program developed a comprehensive strategy that uses music to encourage movement. So as I understand it, these days you have Head Start children that are jumping, stretching, even galloping in your hallways. They've started – they've started a walking club for parents, staff, and children in the community, and that keeps them energized toward their goal. And we have newsletters that are going home to keep parents engaged in the topic of healthy eating and healthy living and to offer tips on nutrition and exercise.

So, from building a community garden to engaging families to embrace exercise together, these regional award winners that were being – that we're honoring this evening have focused on engaging parents as

their child's first teacher and lifelong educator. These programs recognize that school readiness must include healthy bodies and healthy families that are ready to embrace learning. And certainly, the first lady would appreciate your efforts.

But to a broader point here, each of the winners tonight is a beacon for how we should approach parent and family engagement. Each works hard to gather outcome data. You look at your results, you see that family engagement makes the difference, and you refine, you take those results, you revise what you're doing, and you make it even stronger. Family engagement happens in the home, in our early childhood programs, in our schools, and our communities. It's a shared responsibility with all those who support children's learning. Our families play a critical role in helping their children be ready for school for a lifetime of academic success; and engaging parents as their child's first teacher closes the school readiness gap. We know it makes a difference to the later academic achievement of children.

So regardless of the program or the setting, parent and family engagement matters. Community engagement matters. This is the work of building relationships and connections that will support the well-being of families, that will forge strong parent-child relationships, and strengthen the ongoing learning and development of parents and of children alike. It's important. And when parent and family engagement activities are systemic and integrated across a program, family engagement outcomes are achieved. The results are children who are healthy, who are ready for school, and ready for life.

We all should recognize the importance of parent and family engagement. This work also can't be an afterthought. It needs to remain at the foundation of our strategies at the local level to strengthen the education and development of our children. It must remain at the forefront of our policy discussions here in Washington to bridge America's opportunity and achievement gaps. And perhaps no other program appreciates or understands this better than Head Start. [Applause]

You know, for over 48 years, your programs have been valuable partners with families in laying the foundation for later success in school and in life. Over the arc of Head Start's history, the work of engaging parents and empowering families has been at the center of the program; and Head Start's parent involvement strategies have continuously evolved over time as your programs have tested new strategies and ideas and learned valuable lessons. Our administration has been proud to contribute to that fabric. Through the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework issued by our Office of Head Start, we've set a roadmap for progress in achieving the kinds of outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families.

So as the winners here tonight have demonstrated, this Framework can be used in program-wide strategic planning, program design and management, with governing bodies, and with parent groups and parent councils alike. The work you do each and every day at the local level to reach out and engage our parents and our families, it makes such a difference. You're empowering them. You're engaging them to play a central role in their child's learning. You're providing the tools that parents need to be confident, to be active in their child's development. You're helping your parents – your helping our parents reach their own life goals and build a brighter future.

So for over 48 years, Head Start has provided our nation with leaders. Head Start parents are leaders in their communities, in their Policy Councils, in their governing bodies. Head Start graduates are leaders. We see them around the country as teachers, doctors, members of Congress, artists, computer technicians, mechanics across our neighborhoods. You're here this afternoon because you're leaders. You're here because you understand the importance of engaging our parents, our families, and our

communities in the work of supporting our children's learning and development. You're here because you're an advocate for your children and your families. You know what a difference it can make to provide them with that full continuum of early learning, from birth through kindergarten and beyond.

You know what it means for their chances of success in school and in life. Not everybody knows what you know. Not everybody is aware that less than a third of our 4-year-olds in poverty even have access to high-quality instruction, while 90 percent of our highest income children attend high-quality preschool. Not everybody understands the consequences of that opportunity gap. Not everybody understands how it leaves our highest need children behind at life's starting point.

So providing high-quality programs and services to our country's youngest learners, it gets them off to a strong start, it pays huge dividends later in life, later down the road in terms of the societal benefits. And the president has put forth a bold and transformative plan to reach more of America's children and families in need. Turning it into a reality is not a sure thing, but your voice is the factor that will make the difference in moving this from vision to reality. So we're all in as an administration.

I want to thank all of you for everything that you've already done to get us to this point and for everything that I know you will continue to do for your children and your families as their best advocates. For our youngest and smallest Americans, we have the opportunity here to do something very, very big – big for them and big for our country. Thank you again so much. [Applause]

So I was proud to be at the first Office of Head Start Leadership Institute]in 2011, when we recognized Sargent Shriver, Ed Zigler, and Dr. Berry Brazelton as the architects of Head Start. And with that event as a spring board, Yvette decided to initiate a tradition of recognizing leaders nationwide who promote Head Start's vision and mission. Yvette selected the Leadership Institute as the best forum here for granting the Office of Head Start National Leadership Award; and this leadership recognition will be connected tonight to parent and family engagement. She'll now tell you more about the recognition of Head Start's commitment to its families. Thank you. [Applause]

Yvette: All right. So, here we go. So here is a quick overview. So let me start by saying that this past winter, 95 programs nationwide submitted an application, including an essay, explaining family engagement features of their program. And so, if you're in the room or you're watching virtually or you're just out there, I want to thank all of those who submitted their applications. Really. The work that you're doing is amazing and outstanding, and we need to make sure that we are sending that message out loud and clear.

Each program described the effectiveness of goal implementation and how their work was grounded in the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. They also addressed the role of leadership and how their family engagement efforts resulted in positive outcomes for families and children.

Each Regional Office selected an award recipient. These 12 program winners will be announced shortly, and they'll be honored at the regional meetings tomorrow afternoon. From these 12, the central office here in Washington, DC selected a national award winner, who we will announce today. The regional award recipients demonstrate the varied ways that a comprehensive and systemic approach to family engagement can be accomplished. From inner city to suburban to rural settings, to our migrant programs to our tribal programs, each program adapted its family engagement approach to meet the needs of its population, its families, its children, its community, including teen parents, homeless families, and culturally and linguistically diverse families.

So let me take a moment to tell you about the individual programs who were selected, starting with Region I. So, Region I: Central Vermont Community Action Head Start, offers services for pregnant and parenting teens. As we know, family engagement is especially important for teens. Many of them have not experienced supportive parenting or community involvement. Central Vermont focused on four family engagement goals in their family literacy center.

Their teen parents engage in 20 hours of classroom education, along with meeting their high school graduation requirements. These teens prepare to support their children financially, emotionally, and socially so their children will be ready for school. As you can see, the parents spent time growing and harvesting healthy food. They also prepared breakfast for community partners. Over the last year, four of the nine parents enrolled earned their high school diploma; four others advanced to the next grade. So congratulations, Central Vermont. [Applause]

Region II: Acelero in New York State revised their mission statement to focus on outcomes that close the achievement gap for preschool children. To accomplish this mission, they questioned everything they did and took the following steps.

Acelero cross-walked the PFCE Framework against their current family services practice to ensure high-quality services. They introduced family life practice goals to ensure that their 4,000 children were as prepared for kindergarten as their middle-income peers. And they worked with parents to create family goals and to measure progress on a quarterly basis. And this led to continuous program improvement, and most importantly, in helping those parents reach their goals. Congratulations, Acelero, Inc. [Applause]

Region III. The family services staff of Stafford County Head Start and Early Head Start in Virginia formed a professional learning team to – to provide leadership and family engagement. This team decided to improve family well-being outcomes because their data showed that poverty negatively impacts school readiness. They used the following approaches.

With the family assessment tool, staff and families identify areas of need and regularly monitor progress. Every week, the team meets to share data on family goal progress. They share community resources and they decide how to best support families. Every month at staff meetings, there is a focus on family outcomes and what it means. Last year, 71 percent of the families met or made significant gains on their goals, a 41 percent increase from the previous year. Talk about using data. The program expects even greater gains for families this year. Congratulations, Stafford. [Applause]

Region IV. Lee County Public School Board in Florida revamped their entire application system to include parent interviews and family surveys. They report the following outcomes. Now, staff better understand family situations, identify patterns in the community, and focus their recruitment efforts. The information from the interviews and surveys feeds their revised family partnership agreement form. Goals are in the family's own words and focus on the areas that parents identify. Information from the parent interviews and family assessment surveys was used for planning to increase in the intensity of services to families.

And the program created a two-tiered approach to family support. In tier one, families receive support from their family service specialist. In tier two, families, including all teen parents, receive additional

support from social workers, nurses, mental health specialists, or other needs as specified.
Congratulations, Lee County. [Applause]

So Region V, Kokomo Center Schools Head Start, we'll just chat briefly about this one. In Indiana, Kokomo Center Schools focused on the health and wellness aspect of school readiness. Nearly one-third of their enrolled children, as well as parents and staff, were overweight or obese. The program started an exercise program set to music called "Get a Move On." In the hallways, they galloped, jumped, or stretched. They sent home newsletters about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and tips on nutrition and exercise. Community partners worked with the program to educate parents on these topics.
Congratulations, Kokomo. [Applause]

Region VI. At Youth Development, Inc. in New Mexico, parents and staff established four goals related to the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. The goals include promoting economic self-sufficiency, parent training and advocacy, and increased interaction with the community. Another goal was supporting families as lifelong educators by engaging them in their children's learning. Families received take-home parent-child activities and they connect children's learning experiences between home and the program. Nice work, Youth Development, Inc. Thank you. [Applause]

Region VII: Douglas Community Services in Missouri adopted a system-wide approach to focus on parenting and life skills education. In this rural program, there are multiple barriers to family stability, and theirs was a three-year effort. Three times a year the program uses data from family services to design their approach and plan the use of resources.

As a result of their family engagement work, 515 adult family members completed at least eight hours of parenting and life skills education. Training topics include relationship-building; conscious discipline; budgeting; health, nutrition, and wellness; job readiness; and transitions. Last year, 96 percent of families successfully progressed toward achievement of their goals. Well done, Douglas Community.
[Applause]

Region VIII, you heard a little bit about them. Boulder County, in Colorado, used a family garden to – family garden project to engage families. The program supplied 16 families with materials and tools. A master gardener from the community mentored the families in preparing, planting, and harvesting the vegetables. Fifty percent of the families report – reported that they tended the garden daily together. Parents say that they believe their children will be avid gardeners and veggie lovers for years. This project provides a model for offering families methods for controlling what they eat, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and for spending time together. Well done, Boulder. Nice. [Applause]

From Region IX, Southwest Human Development Early Head Start and Head Start in Arizona developed a system to use individual and aggregated parent, family, and community data. They created a program-wide PFCE continuum of practice tool. This allowed their 24 sites to share a definition of family engagement measures and program practices. The goal was to engage families in school readiness activities in the program and throughout the community. The program aligned the data collection system with the tool.

As a result, data analysis improved and enhanced their continuous improvement efforts around their school readiness goals. This family engagement model created opportunities for parents to become empowered as community members. They also learned important relationship and problem-solving

skills to help them promote their children's school readiness. Congratulations, Southwest Human Development. [Applause]

Region X, Friends of Children and Families in Idaho – [Cheering] Okay. All right, y'all – took steps to implement the entire Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework in a systemic and integrated way. They – they revised their family agreement form to reflect the seven family engagement outcomes and created a curriculum reflecting the outcomes for their regularly scheduled family gatherings. They created a survey to get parent feedback on the effectiveness of their school readiness and family engagement strategies. The data led to recommendations for improvement. A pilot project focused on the outcome of families as lifelong educators, because reading and vocabulary are predictors of school readiness.

As a result, parents' knowledge about the importance of home language development has improved. This is important because in this program, there are 17 different home languages. Parents now understand how family literacy – or how home literacy and activities impact school readiness. They learned that books made from everyday materials at home can increase literacy skills. Congratulations, Friends of Children and Families. [Applause] Woo.

Okay, Region XI. Honoring the gift of teaching and learning is the family engagement goal for the Nisqually Indian Tribe – for the Nisqually Indian Tribe Head Start in Washington State. Congratulations. [Applause] The Tribe honors the roles of parents and grandparents as their children's first teachers. They have implemented "The Way of the Circle," which is passed from generation to generation in the form of stories, traditions, and customs. They use this method to also promote parents and grandparents as senior partners in the well-being of their children and families.

The Tribe models healthy life choices through positive words, eating habits, and physical activity. The Tribal Council sponsored a "Biggest Loser" challenge. Over 30 teams participated. A Head Start staff team came in third place and lost a combined total weight of 150 pounds. Well done! [Applause] Talk about community.

And finally, last but not least, Region XII. The Oregon Tribal Development Coalition – [Cheering and applause] I knew it – provides Head Start and Early Head Start services to children from migrant and seasonal farm worker families. The program used their PIR and self-assessment data to shape family engagement practices that promote family engagement goals, especially lifelong learning, health, and wellness. They developed an agency template to use the PFCE Framework as an umbrella for systems and practices.

OCDC has improved identification and support to children and families with health conditions, increased opportunities to learn about healthy lifestyles, and offered more education about positive parenting and achievement of career and life goals. To improve their services, they mentor parents as trainers of other parents. At one site, staff co-trained parents, who became leaders in promoting healthy eating and gardening.

And now, you've heard about how our programs nationwide have implemented not just the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, which you heard Roberto talk about, but of how they're using family engagement as a basis for everything that we do in supporting our kids and families.

And so with that, I am pleased to announce the first Office of Head Start National Leadership Award – if I botch your last name, I apologize now – Elizabeth Dilley, [Cheering and applause] executive director for Friends of Children and Families in Region X. Congratulations! Do you want to come up? [Applause]

Elizabeth Dilley: Wow. Okay, you just found a way to keep me quiet. [Laughter] It doesn't usually happen in my program. I just want to say I'm extremely grateful for being recognized – our program being recognized for this honor. It is the only reason that we exist, is to serve families and children. And I talk about the honor and the privilege that we have to provide opportunities for families who otherwise wouldn't have those opportunities. And I am often quoted as saying, "Lucky me to be able to come to work every day and live a purpose-driven life in this work." And the paparazzi down here – paparazzi of one [Laughter] – past parent – past parent in Head Start. [Applause]

I've been doing this work for 25 years; and in that time, I've had a couple of epiphanies along the way. And I'm going to give credit to Dr. Tim Nolan for his leadership and having the opportunity – I've heard him speak early in my career about what it is that makes us different than everybody else out there. What is our distinctive competence? And that is the one thing that we do better than anybody else; and that is to enter into a relationship with families that's built on compassion. And at the center of that is trust and respect. Yes. [Applause]

So with a humble heart, I accept this on behalf of the children, the families, the staff. Thanks to the staff for their dedication and coming to work every day intending to make differences for families. And for our parent Policy Council and their leadership – we wanted our Policy Council chair to come with us, but she just recently gave birth. And so– and to our board of directors for the leadership. And so on behalf of everyone in our program, thank you very much. [Music and applause]

Yvette: Thank you, Elizabeth, and thank you, Friends of Children and Families; and to all of you for everything that you do. Before I let you go, I have to give you a couple of housekeeping issues. So please make sure to visit the National Center exhibit tables to learn more about the resources that were shown on the screen before we started. So everything is out here in the main hall. There are other exhibitors, including the Head Start Enterprise System and the Office of Head Start Archives, in the hall. I would suggest that you all go by and visit that. You'll see a lot of very interested things, one especially about how we got our blocks. There's also a table with Office of Head Start publications you can take home.

And what I really want to mention to you is that the Office of Head Start will be introducing a new resource, the "Head Start Father Engagement: A Birth to 5 Programming Guide" that aligns with the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. So, please keep an eye out for that. We'll be sharing this guide on the ECLKC during Father Engagement Week, which will be June 3rd through the 7th, along with other resources.

And so with that, I'm looking forward to these next few days together. I know that we are going to continue leading the way in family engagement, and we're going to continue strengthening our relationships with each other and with our partners out in the communities. Now, as much as ever, we are called upon to ensure that every child and every family enrolled in our Early Head Start, in our Head Start, in our Tribal, and in our Migrant programs receives the highest quality experience that they can in our Head Start programs, because we know that that is what they deserve and that's what we are called to do.

So with that, thank you all. I hope that you have a lovely evening, and we will see you tomorrow.