

Virtually Transitioning from Head Start to Kindergarten: July Vlog

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Hello, Head Start, and welcome to this month's vlog. I'm so excited to be in my actual office filming this one. Slow transition back to the office, and happy to be here to share some words around transition.

And transition to kindergarten, despite the current state of things, we still have to think about how our children are going to transition, how our families are going to transition. So, I'm super excited to talk about this. You guys know this is a topic that's near and dear to me, especially as it relates to the public school system. So, stay tuned.

But first, of course, we start with our love note and we're going to shout out Bemidji, Minnesota. They are working in this virtual environment with their local school system to increase the attention to the needs of kids with IEPs and transition. And what they're doing is they're looking at how to take current resources and combine them with CARES funding to reach more children and families in the school district.

So, I love the fact that they're thinking about different ways to reach out. But I really love that they're working with their school system to do it because I think that's going to be the way to really make a difference. So, with that in mind, we're going to, we're going to talk a lot about transition today, and what does that mean in in this time where a lot of us are still remote? What does it mean in terms of—in terms of resources and what's out there for you? So, of course, we—transition is so important in Head Start; 320,000 children every year go from Head Start to kindergarten.

So, this is something that impacts so many of our school systems and the more we work together, the—the better job we're going to—to do. And, of course, this — this work, this transitions work can continue even if you are still remote. There are a lot of new resources available to you. I'm going to share some of those with you today. And, you know, everybody plays a role in a successful transition of a child from Head Start to kindergarten. And it's not just the child who is transitioning; it's the family who is transitioning as well, and Head Start has created and updated nearly 30 new resources for you.

All these links are going to be here for you in one — one place, and hopefully you will find them helpful to you. Another top-level call-to-action would be around families and children and—and making this transition together. So, we don't just look at this as, how is the child going to step into a kindergarten classroom? We're looking at the family. We know that the family is the most important ingredient here. And if we can help to make that transition for that family from the Head Start program to the kindergarten, or to the elementary school in general, that relationship with the school, if we make that strong, we know that's going to carry through far beyond kindergarten for that child.

So, again, there are resources available for you here on how to create strong ties, from Head Start to kindergarten, and they are remote resources. So, they will work whether or not you're

able to get together face-to-face at this point. Sharing information is a really big part of this process, of course.

As I said, 320,000 children are going to leave Head Start and enter kindergarten in the fall, regardless of whether they've been in a classroom, based on their ages, they're going to be ready to enroll and we want to be there to try to help to make that ... as successful a transition as possible. And even though programs are closed right — right now, or maybe they're operating virtually, beginning to reopen year-round centers or beginning summer programming efforts to support this transition to kindergarten will continue for everybody. And it doesn't matter where you are, or where you are in that reopening process. We need to be encouraging our educators to record videos for their children, for their families.

Planning, virtual PD is really important, remembering that your staff are going to be eventually coming back, and creating an opportunity for them to grow virtually right now could be the answer to that. Partnering with your receiving schools in new ways. This is going to require, perhaps virtual attendance at meetings, making phone calls, setting up those touch points with those key people in your receiving school, and maybe even just calling families on the phone, touching base with them. I know a lot of our programs are doing that. Head Start is really leading the way to making sure this transition is smooth. We have you covered here at the Office of Head Start. So many exciting resources.

I'm going to highlight four of them for you. We've got a "Transitioning to Kindergarten: Partnering with Families and — and Schools" simulation. This is so exciting. You have to check this out. So, this is going to help you with that transition process and you literally can walk through it in a simulated environment. Very exciting.

And then, of course, our "Building Bridges" video series, which we launched prior to the — to the COVID situation. So, some of you may already know it's out there, but there are three videos right in a row that have to do with leaders supporting successful transitions, educators, supporting successful transitions, and then family engagement and transition. So, I highly recommend you check those out and then figure out a way to share those with your school system. Maybe, there is a virtual school board meeting that you can attend and be a speaker and share some of these videos.

Maybe, there's a — a school meeting with staff, or leadership. But in some way, get those videos in the hands of the school system, because they're really good. We get really, really good responses when they — when they see them. We've also got a "Transitions to Kindergarten Activity Calendar" for families and educators. The ink is going to be here, for you, as well. And then finally, "Your Child is Going to Kindergarten: Making the Move Together," which is a tip sheet for families about what to expect during that kindergarten transition. So, you can find all of these resources right here, super handy for you.

And — and what we want you to really think about is, you know, making sure that program staff remember to individualized transition activities. Every family is different. Every child is different. What do specific families and children need? If — if you're transitioning a child, who's an oldest in a family, that's the first time that family's entered an elementary school. That's a big deal. So, really handholding that family is probably going to be important.

Unlike say a child who may be a fourth in line, and that parents' already integrated into the school system. They may be a really good candidate to mentor another — another child and — and and link them together in partnership; they could be a resource to you. So, just looking for the differences in the families and the children and how you can tailor those — those processes is really important. Remember to inspire and affirm families as they engage in transition to kindergarten, and to view themselves as the most important influencer; this is a key piece.

It's one of my favorite components of Head Start is looking at that — at that parent in the family as being the most important ingredient and really instilling them in that space before they enter the public school system, so they feel empowered Work with your community partners to offer comprehensive services and family supports. We know you already do that, but really putting a transition lens in front of that. What does that mean for transition to kindergarten? How is it different than it was when they were part of the Head Start program?

Also, I want to turn your attention to the ECLKC, that we have a newly designed page around transition. I'm providing it for you here; please click on it. What you're going to see are kind of these four buckets: Family-School Connection; Child-School Connection; Program-School Connection; and Community-School Connection.

So, I—hopefully you'll see this organization as helpful in terms of you being able to tap into these resources. It's everything you could need, including how to host your own virtual shared PD event. So, I highly recommend you look into that. You'll find multimedia resources and all kinds of goodies. And don't forget to consider your DLLs. If you're in an — an area where— that's part of your population, we've got resources here for you related to DLL. And we just want you to remember, especially in this remote time, how important that — that aspect is. And finally, not least of all though, is Early Head Start. Remember there's a transition that children and families make from Early Head Start to Head Start—it's probably not as stark a difference, but it's still really important.

And, you know, we like to — to really remind you that during an Early Head Start experience, it's kind of constant transition—watching children, the child grow, and really transitioning that parent into this active participant in his or her child's not just day-to-day life, but this piece of — of a program that ultimately turns that — that parent into an advocate for the child long-term. So, looking—We have tip sheets around Early Head Start here, as well. So, we're not forgetting our — our Early Head Start friends, especially during this 25th birthday year, which I'll remind you on every vlog this year, but really, really important. So, please check that out. And finally, I do want to remind you that there is a MyPeers group, community. It's a Head Start School Connections Community.

And if you're not part of it, you ought to be; it's a really good way to talk about transitions, things that are working. There are so many good ideas out there. And maybe you're the one that needs to be sharing your good ideas; make sure that you're connecting with folks on this topic. MyPeers is a great way to do that.

We also have launched a hashtag, of course, we have. I love these hashtags. They're a great way to — to lift a message. #KeepTheirHeadStart. And this is where we're going to post all of our great transition events, ideas, and resources. So, if you aren't on Twitter, get on Twitter,

follow me, OHS_Director. And then post your transition activities and highlight them, and brag about them, and #KeepTheirHeadStart in that post, and make sure that we're sharing these great ideas.

We did a great job as we transitioned to virtual work-at-home of highlighting all of our Head Start cuties, and we've really seen that light up and ... and been able to share just these incredible activities at home and the smiles on the kids' faces. So, we know there are ways to use social media to really spread the word and—and the communication is the key piece. So, please get online. #KeepTheirHeadStart. and support the—this — this effort to really push these ideas out there.

And, of course, the last message of all.

Don't forget: Head Start is access to the American dream. Go make dreams happen.