

## **Responding to Food Insecurity During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Hello, Head Start community. I hope everyone is doing well. By the time you see this, we'll be smack dab in the holiday season, Thanksgiving behind us, the winter holidays – Christmas and Hanukkah and Kwanzaa – coming up, and the holidays bring up all kinds of things for folks. It's joy for many and for some it's a tough time.

But it certainly is a good time to talk about food insecurity, especially in the middle of the pandemic, as we are all continuing to experience. I published a letter recently talking about food insecurity and I wanted to also marry that with a personal message to you about how important right now it is that we really focus on this issue as hubs in our community.

Initially in March, this is probably the first thing that our programs made sure was handled well, which was making sure families received food. We got lots of calls about flexibilities, "Can I do this? Can I do that?" and we made sure to address those. And people got super creative and they made sure their families were taken care of.

It's been a long time and it's easy to lose focus on something. There's a lot going on. So, it's just a reminder. I'm not sure if you're aware, but the number of children living in households struggling with food insecurity right now is three times what it was before the pandemic. So, we know the need is out there.

And we know it's our minority families that are hardest hit. We know it's our Head Start potential enrolled kiddos and families that are hardest hit. And we also know that we're the kind of organization that is just creative and innovative enough to make sure that people are taken care of. You know, I've kept – tried to keep in touch at the ground and learned so many creative things.

We've got programs that have purchased additional freezers and sealers so that they can better store and prepare food for family delivery. We have a collaboration with grocery stores, which have been super clever, that haven't just provided food to the program to distribute, but other really creative collaborations that have resulted in resources for families with local grocery stores. Food banks, of course. I heard a program is doing something called a "knock and drop". They knock on the door and then they drop the bag or box of food for the family.

And there are so many flexibilities that we've been given. Take advantage of those. You know, CACFP, Office of Head Start, we want to make sure our children are getting the nutrition they need and that we can make it through this tough time and come out the other side, healthy and ready and thriving. So, I want to thank you for all of the work you have been doing, encourage you to keep doing it, as tiring as it might feel. You are awesome.

And also to remind you that, in January, Office of Head Start is going to do a webinar around food insecurity and flexibilities and give you some more deep information. This is really just a

reminder. And while I'm here – and I know you're going to get this sometime in December – happy holidays to you.

I hope in all of this hard work and dedication that you find some time for yourself and for your own family, that you get to unplug and recharge your own batteries, and enjoy what we know to be grateful for. As hard as times are, we are all so grateful for all that we have and I am grateful for you. So, happy holidays and keep taking care of those families.