

**2011 Leadership Institute:
Kiersten Beigel**

Yvette Sanchez Fuentes: Phew! Are you feeling inspired? [Applause] And just for the record, Mark, you were my first and only call. [Laughter]

Sort of building on our "Living the Dream" and Head Start as the national laboratory, Head Start as the leader in early childhood education, and building on Dr. B's great message about the importance of parents and family, most of you know that last week we released the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. This, again, is Head Start leading the way in making sure that everybody across this country understands and knows the importance of families being involved in their children's education.

So I was watching Kiersten as Dr. B was giving his remarks, and I thought that she was going to jump out of her seat. [Laughter] Kiersten Beigel is the person in the Office of Head Start who has led this effort, along with the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. She is a true believer in making sure that everything that we do in Head Start, every time we talk about Head Start, every time we talk about school readiness, we're talking about parents and families. And so I want to invite Kiersten up here to tell us a little bit more about the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. Kiersten? [Applause]

Kiersten Beigel: Thank you; thank you. That's – this has been an incredible morning, and I really – personally, I would rather just continue to listen to you guys for another hour or more. What an incredible morning. And I was – I was thinking about the theme of this, "Carrying the Torch," and, you know, quite humbly, with my 3.5 years of service in the Office of Head Start, maybe my flame would be a little more akin to, like, a large match or a small candle. [Laughter] But I think there's potential there; right? There's a lot of potential.

So I wanted to take a few minutes with you this morning to talk with you about the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, which you all received a copy of upon your arrival to your seats yesterday morning. And how many of you had a chance to tune in for some aspect of our virtual series last week on Family Engagement Week? Great. We – we actually had incredible record numbers on our email traffic last week, and I think, you know, that is really a reminder to us, as a national community, how much we truly care about families in Head Start and how much we truly care about family engagement.

I have to also take a moment, since we're all in this very large group, to – to ask if people are comfortable. Our – our current parent leaders and our – our former Head Start parents – to – to just raise your hands so we can kind of see and acknowledge you and – and honor that aspect of our... [Applause]

I think that the PFCE Framework, which I'm going to call it for short because it is a mouthful, it does really represent a next step in our history of ensuring that the work of supporting the early learning and development of young children remains a partnership – a partnership between programs and parents. And it strives to be the most effective partnership that it can be. And thinking about our history, it is certainly a step that's built upon the foundation and the steps of many others we've heard about this morning; steps that include the policies and the – and the resources outlined in the Cooke Memo and 70.2 and the parent involvement vision and the handbook, just for starters. But I think it carries forward the wisdom of those steps and the contributions of so many – so many of you and others, who aren't with us here today. And it takes us, I think, another step forward.

The PFCE Framework is not a new set of performance standards. It's not a new mandate, a new set of requirements. It's a TA resource. It's a TA resource that our national centers put a tremendous amount of time and effort in working on, and it includes the voices and the experiences of many. It includes parent voices, program staff, the voices of experts and researchers, federal and T/TA staff, community partners, and our national partners. So while it is not a mandate, we do feel that – we feel really confident that it can serve us well as a guide to good practice.

It's a bit of a roadmap with some examples of strategies. It's an approach to strive for. It's something to assess ourselves by. It's something that, over time, can be useful in helping us to define an organizational, data-driven approach. And so, our National Center is working really hard to develop training and tools to support its use, but it is going to take time; and I fear that if we waited until we had an entire full-range package for you that included a framework and assessment tools and measures and surveys – surveys and evidence-based approaches to things, that you actually might never meet us or hear from us. So... [Laughter]

We recognize that there is a lot of work ahead still. We know this, and we really welcome the opportunity to partner with you, staff and parents, to develop helpful training and resources. I was thinking about the PFCE Framework, kind of what it means and what it's saying about family engagement, and – I mean, not what it's – not what it's read – you know, not how you read it, but what it's sort of saying. People really want to know: "What is different here?" Right? "What is this next wave really saying?" And in some ways, I think it's just defining what you all do every day and have been doing for many years, but sort of in one organizational swoop.

But I was thinking, if the PFCE Framework could – could talk, and I – what would it say? And you all might be feeling a little concerned about me – [Laughter] – in saying that. You know, I'm a federal person and I've spent a lot of time with documents, and I'm a social worker by profession, so just bear with me. I need to give it some humanistic qualities here.

I think, first of all, it would say, "I really hope you read me." That's first. [Laughter] But I think what it's saying is, "Let's make an effort to move from focusing on one aspect or one dimension of family engagement to a sort of systemic and multidimensional focus. Let's not limit ourselves to defining family

engagement by, say, a classroom involvement activity or a family literacy event, even though those things are very important."

So not to minimize that, but – but what goals are those activities tied to? And, are they tied to goals for supporting parent-child relationships and parents as lifelong teachers? And how does leadership set the stage for family literacy across the program? What are the different ways that all staff can play a role in supporting rich conversations between parents and children throughout the day? The point is, I think: How can we reinforce those activities across our systems and services? And then, what difference does it make for families and children? And how do we know what difference that that made? And obviously central in all of that is: What do parents have to say about it?

So, I think the PFCE Framework is saying, "Let's get some agreement amongst staff and families. What are our goals around family engagement?" And, "Let's maximize our efforts to support family well-being, parent-child relationships, and families as lifelong educators," for example. "Let's develop all staff around family engagement based on what makes sense for their role; and let's make sure that families really feel that our program environments are welcoming, that they're culturally responsive, that they're helpful, and that they're supportive."

And finally, I think that the PFCE Framework is saying this – it's saying, "Make all your relationships and your interactions with families count in ways that are meaningful for parent goals and for program goals. Let's minimize as much randomness as we can and get as intentional as we can, as integrated as we can, and as systematic as we can, because it will make a difference for families' experiences and children's experiences in our programs."

So this week, and back in your programs, take a look at the PFCE Framework. Hold discussion groups with your management teams and your parent groups and your integrated service teams, your governance groups, and ask, "What speaks to you about this tool, and what raises more questions? What gives you new ideas?" Attend our sessions here at the Institute. We're very pleased about how much interest we had yesterday at the introductory PFCE session and glad we're going to have a much bigger space for you today. So, attend that session and learn more.

Send the National Center your feedback; and they're upstairs as well, so you can talk to them there. We see this, really, as a work in progress, and we trust that you will let us know what is helpful. And we know that you will let us know how we can refine and do better, and build better tools that can help support you. So, we look forward to that. We look forward to this coming year, building off of the Framework as a first step, building off of the things we can do in the coming years.

We thank you for your service and all that you do; and just a tremendous thank you for just an incredible morning. So...