



A Webinar Series for COVID and Beyond

School-Community Partnerships for the Whole child: Collaborate to Improve Teaching and Learning

Panelist Biographies



Nicole Beard is a principal with the Lansing Public School District, located in Lansing, Michigan. She has been in education for over 20 years and has worked in the public schools and at the collegiate level. Her doctoral work examined the decision-making practices of the local school board and its relevance as a result of the changing educational landscape. Her passion is working diligently to mitigate circumstances that prevent students from reaching their true academic potential. Nicole is a proud member of the Jeremy Winston Chorale, a professional ensemble that performs throughout the United States and to many countries. She plays an active role in her church and enjoys spending time with her friends and family and with her husband, Calvin, and their French Bulldog, Mugsy.



Susan DeRiso is the Director of Literacy & Title I for The Woonsocket Education Department, in Rhode Island. She has more than thirty years of experience in K-12 instruction, educational consulting and professional development. Susan also possesses expertise in various reading interventions, reading assessments and program implementation. She has served as a Rhode Island Program Manager for Reading First, a member of the NAFEP Board of Directors, Reading Specialist/Coach and Early Childhood Classroom Teacher. In addition, Susan has worked as a freelance writer for numerous educational publications.



Jason Sachs joined Boston Public Schools (BPS) as Director of Early Childhood in 2005 to oversee the expansion of Kindergarten 1 (K1) classes and coordinate kindergarten and pre-school programs for three, four, and five-year-olds. In 2017, he was promoted to Executive Director of the Preschool to 2nd grade office. Since the inception of Early Childhood Department, Jason has led an effort to deliver a universal high-quality system of early childhood programs for BPS including the successful implementation of the PreK-2nd grade curriculum, professional development system for teachers and principals, expansion of NAEYC accredited classrooms in Boston which all helps prepares students for successful transition into the elementary grades, and a comprehensive evaluation system of both classroom quality and child outcomes. Previously, Jason has worked in the Massachusetts Department of Education's Early Learning Services division for six years as a research and policy consultant and was a former board member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). He graduated from the Los Angeles Unified School District and received his Master's in Applied Child Development from Tufts University and obtained his doctorate from the Harvard School of Education. Jason currently lives in Somerville with his wife Elif and co-owns Moe Fencing in Somerville, where they have successfully coached national and High State Champions.



Betty Underwood is currently the Director of the Rewarding Educator Achievement and Performance Grant (REAP) for the Lansing School District in Lansing, Michigan. She has worked with the Lansing School District as a consultant and iCollaborate Project Leader for the past eight years. Prior to that, she worked as FirstSchool Implementation Director for Michigan through a collaborative MSU, UNC project, and with the Michigan Department of Education. Betty has also worked as a teacher, curriculum consultant, professional development leader, coach, elementary principal, and school improvement facilitator at the local and state levels.



Mary Varr has been a leader in the early childhood field for more than 34 years. Before becoming Executive Director for Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association, Inc., she was an early childhood and school age Child Care Director for 24 years. In addition, she served in a volunteer capacity for The YMCA of The USA's training system and was on her local school committee for 8 years. She is a current board member of The National Head Start Association, The New England Head Start Association, the Pawtucket YMCA and sits on The Rhode Island Early Learning Council as well as the state's Child Care Commission. She holds a BS in Human Services from Springfield College, as well as an AA in Early Childhood Education.

