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Contact: Heather Hunter
Stetson University Media Relations
P: 407-489-4138
heather.hunter@stetson.edu

2018 Poverty & Homelessness Conference at Stetson University

Educators and administrators gather at sold out conference to focus on building inclusive learning spaces for homeless students.

DELAND, Florida, March 1, 2018 – School can be a stressful time for some students. Now, imagine you are student who worries if dinner will be on the table, or one who moves several times a year, or who needs to finish homework before the sun sets because there is no lighting in the car you are currently living in. How stressed would you be? These situations are a reality for the estimated 2.5 million children and youth experiencing homelessness every year in the United States (National Center on Family Homelessness). As the number of school-aged children living in poverty and without homes continues to rise, Stetson University will host the third annual [Poverty & Homelessness Conference](#) (PHC), titled “Dismantling Oppression & Poverty: Building Inclusive Learning Spaces.” The 2018 conference is a collaborative initiative between Stetson University, Volusia County Schools, and the Volusia United Educators. The sold-out event will be held on Friday, March 9 from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and will feature keynote speaker Dana Godek, Ed.D., Director, Federal and State Programs, School District of Palm Beach County.

More than 400 educators, administrators and community leaders are expected to attend the conference. [Rajni Shankar-Brown, Ph.D.](#), associate professor and the Jessie Ball duPont Endowed Chair of Social Justice Education at Stetson, is the founder and executive director of the PHC. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the National Coalition for the Homeless. Shankar-Brown explains that this year’s theme “Dismantling Oppression & Poverty: Building Inclusive Learning Spaces” will focus on providing educators and community partners ideas to build and sustain equitable learning environments to improve student’s academic success and social-emotional wellbeing. The conference will provide culturally-responsive strategies for educators and community partners to effectively reach students living in poverty.

“When my parents came to the United States, they experienced homelessness and have since dedicated much of their lives giving back to those in need. My siblings and I were raised with a deep awareness of how poverty impacts lives and how community engagement can be a powerful means to advance social justice,” says Shankar-Brown. “For me, the goal of the PHC, is bringing together a diverse group of

committed educators and community leaders to build more inclusive schools and communities to make a positive impact in the lives of children.”

The following topics will be addressed at the conference:

- Poverty Awareness
- Systems of Inequity
- Working with Low-Income Families
- Nutrition & Health Implications
- Art Integration & Resiliency
- Responsive Curriculum and Instruction Strategies
- Housing Instability Implications
- Supporting English Language Learners in Poverty
- Empathy and Inclusion
- Supporting LGBTQ Youth in Poverty
- School Leadership Practices

Dana Godek is Director, Federal and State Programs, School District of Palm Beach County. She serves as the Director of Federal and State Programs for the School District of Palm Beach County, where she is responsible for the administration of Title I Part A, Title I Part C, Title II, and resource development functions that support the 11th largest district in the Country. She brings over 20 years of experience, having served the College Board as the Director of Strategy and Outreach where she consulted with State Education Agencies on policy and governance and Local Education Agencies on federal programs and resource development efforts. She served Palm Beach State College for six years leading their federal legislative efforts and their competitive fund development efforts.

She has experience in four different school systems as a classroom teacher, administrator, public information officer and government relations strategist. Dana is a Certified Fund Raising Executive and has worked in the not-for-profit industry as a chief development officer and national consultant. She lives in Wellington, Florida with her husband Bernard, a retired Army Colonel and the President and CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Palm Beach County and their eight-year-old son, Jonathan.

About Stetson University

Founded in 1883, [Stetson University](#) is the oldest private university in Central Florida, providing a transforming education in the liberal arts tradition. Stetson stresses academic excellence and community-engaged learning, and consistently earns high marks in national rankings. Stetson encourages its students to go beyond success to significance in their lives, the lives of others and their communities. [Stay connected](#) with Stetson on social media.