NEWS | POSTED DECEMBER 18, 2019

# December 2019 Spotlight on SRCD U.S. State Policy Fellow: Meghan McDoniel, Ed.M.

Meghan McDoniel, Ed.M., is a former SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow who was placed in the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning.

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Before pursuing a graduate degree in developmental psychology, I spent two years teaching publicly funded preschool in St. Louis, Missouri. It was in the classroom where I realized I was passionate to both understand and help support children's social-emotional experiences during their early school years. In my graduate research, I have examined familial and contextual factors that impact social-emotional development during early childhood. Having worked on early childhood research and in an early childhood classroom, I sought the opportunity to connect my experiences and help translate research to the field of early care and education (ECE) during my SRCD Pre-Doctoral State Policy Fellowship.

During my 2018-2019 fellowship year, I worked at the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), a state agency housed jointly under the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. OCDEL is led by the deputy secretary who oversees OCDEL's four

bureaus. This includes the Bureau of Certification Services, the Bureau of Early Intervention and Family Supports, the Bureau of Early Learning Resource Center Operations, and the Bureau of Early Learning Policy and Professional Development. I learned the importance of understanding the structure of these ECE agencies as they oversee a complex mixed delivery system that spans early care and education services across the state.

In January of 2019, OCDEL received notice that they had been awarded funding from the Federal Office of Child Care (OCC) in the Administration for Children and Families Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5). This grant was designed to provide funding to states to build upon the systems that help support early care and education programs. Pennsylvania's project, *Raising the Bar, Raising the Floor: Systems Building for the Future of Pennsylvania's Early Care and Education System*, was comprehensive in building capacity across OCDEL's various programs and initiatives. I became involved in a number of the projects under PDG B-5 during my fellowship year. I was able to help expand the PDG B-5 Needs Assessment to ensure that it aligned with previous needs assessments, reach and risk reports, and priorities. I also participated in developing and designing updates to Pennsylvania's ECE data systems to be able to share relevant and up-to-date provider information with both OCDEL and families. Finally, I worked on a project in collaboration with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) to conduct a systems analysis across Pennsylvania's ECE systems and policies. Through each of these projects, I have learned how to communicate with policymakers and researchers about data, policies, and agency priorities.

Because of the SRCD fellowship, I have had the opportunity to build my understanding of the entire ECE system. I have been able to connect my experiences as a teacher and a researcher with the larger structural system designed to inform state-wide policies and practices. Since finishing the fellowship, I have continued to work with OCDEL and their research partners to help create data-driven decision-making within the PDG B-5 grant. I am immensely grateful to the entire SRCD policy team for this incredible opportunity and their support throughout my experience. This fellowship has shown me that to help improve outcomes for children and their families, we need to build and support efforts at all levels of the system.

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