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February 2020 Spotlight on SRCD U.S. State Policy Fellow: Rachel Katz, Ph.D.

Rachel Katz, Ph.D., is a former SRCD State Policy Post-doctoral Fellow who was placed in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Early Intervention

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I believe that it is impossible to create truly effectual initiatives for children and families without extensive research and understanding of child development. Accordingly, my desire to use developmental science to inform practice and policy initiatives and my keen interest in the integration of research, practice, and policy led me to pursue the SRCD State Policy Postdoctoral Fellowship. I had previously participated in activities centered on connecting research, practice, and policy and learned the importance of using research to advance policy initiatives. However, I knew that I needed additional training and experience in research-practice integration so that I could better incorporate this approach into my future work and bring together the goals of diverse stakeholders to better address the needs of children and families. The opportunity to be fully immersed in a state executive branch agency focused on early childhood practice and policy was extremely formative. My experiences throughout the 2018-2019 fellowship year helped to enhance my skills as an applied developmental scientist and solidified my passion for using research to create evidence-based

programs and policies for children and families. I continue to be passionate about fostering communication between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as well as engaging in effective data-informed action and research translation.

As a SRCD State Policy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) in the Division of Early Intervention (EI), I used my research and early childhood expertise to inform practice and policy initiatives at the state level and to support and improve the agency's data collection methods, evaluation process, and research activities. I primarily worked to evaluate and analyze state and program level data and develop effective continuous improvement strategies to ensure quality, consistency, and sustainability. The majority of work that I was involved in was related to the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), a multi-year process to drive innovation in the use of evidence-based practice in the delivery of services to children with disabilities and developmental delays. For decades, there has been a strong focus on compliance and program quality related to Federal regulations for Early Intervention. However, there is still a need to systemically improve results as many states are not seeing improvements in outcomes of interest. The SSIP helps states to communicate how they are planning to focus on their results and what state data look like, leading to data informed action and positive child development. Over the fellowship year, I worked to evaluate a variety of SSIP-related components and refine the associated data collection methods, evaluation processes, and research activities. I also supported quality improvement activities and worked to develop additional ways to integrate research-based practice into the EI system.

My postdoctoral fellowship work underscored the complexity and challenges of research-practice-policy integration. I was able to experience firsthand the issues associated with establishing partnerships and gaining support from diverse stakeholders. I learned that breaking out of silos and building bridges was more than just bringing everyone to the same table and sharing diverse perspectives. I also learned the importance of bringing research, data, and data-informed practice to the forefront of conversations as well as communicating the benefits of developing effective goal setting, data collection methods, data examination procedures, and data-informed practice. These skills will be invaluable in my future research and professional endeavors, helping me to conduct applied developmental research while facilitating research-practice-policy partnerships.

In my future work, I plan to build on the skills that I developed throughout my fellowship experiences and continue to foster the connections I developed with state and federal fellows, the SRCD policy team, my academic mentor, and my placement supervisor. In my current position as the Research Specialist for the

Educare Learning Network at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, I continue to be actively engaged in research-practice-policy integration and applied developmental research that promotes positive development in underserved children and families. I also continue to work with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health as a consultant to the division of EI. Ultimately, I hope to use my research to create evidence-based programs and policies and facilitate research-practice-policy partnerships in order to conduct research that is relevant to the needs of policymakers and practitioners and to ensure effective translation of research into practice. The SRCD State Policy Postdoctoral Fellowship was instrumental in helping me begin to achieve these goals and I am immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to be involved in this transformative fellowship.

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