NEWS | POSTED OCTOBER 15, 2021

SRCD State Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Drew McGee

2020-2021 SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow at the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) in the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

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Introduction: As part of my State Predoctoral Fellowship, I have worked on several projects within the OEC that align with my professional goals to address early childhood stress and improve child development through primary prevention and intervention strategies, improve quality and access to early childhood services, and shift cultural norms and expectations around child and parent health across my career. These goals and priorities, focusing on expanding access and implementing early intervention and prevention efforts. Three separate areas of work that exemplify my experience as part of the OEC are:

i. Home Visiting expansion,

ii. work to identify, describe, and make recommendations improving early childhood mental health (ECMH) consultation services across Colorado,

and iii. working on a series of policy briefs and shareouts to various workgroups and task forces regarding parent perceptions of supports and their communities.

These projects have been instrumental in expanding my understanding of policy research's iterative nature, evaluation scope, and the essential need for collaboration among private, public, and research partners.

Portfolio Entry 1: Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Colorado Service Delivery Outside Early Care and Education Settings Report

Project Overview:

Background: HB 20-1053 is legislation divided into four parts with parts 1 through 3 focusing on supporting the early childhood education workforce and directs the Department of Human Services (CDHS) to establish licensing standards, technical support, and financial incentives for high-quality early childhood programs. Part 4 of the bill directs the department to design, implement, and operate a statewide early childhood mental health (ECMH) consultation program, including job qualifications and expectations, expected outcomes, and guidance on dosage across a range of settings outside of early care and learning. Alternative settings within this definition include but are not limited to early care and learning, elementary schools, home visitation, child welfare, public health and health care, early intervention, and family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care.

Early Childhood Mental Health consultants have deep expertise in early childhood, social-emotional development, and mental health. Consultants partner with early childhood professionals and caregivers, providing support and training to increase their confidence and ability to promote children’s healthy social-emotional development and address behaviors they find challenging. Additionally, ECMH consultation includes referrals and follow-up for children and families to community-based services and training and staff development activities to build providers' knowledge of mental health issues in infancy and early childhood. The benefits of ECMH consultation include improved classroom or other learning and care environments, reduced incidents of challenging behaviors, increased understanding of typical child development, and reduced caregiver stress and teacher turnover which, in turn, can increase staff retention and reduce the likelihood that a child will leave a program. Over the long term, research shows that children who attend early childhood programs that promote their social and emotional development are more likely to graduate from high school and enter college, and are less likely to repeat grades or become involved in the criminal

justice system. In all, these services and programs across settings have not been mapped, and Part 4 of HB-20 1053 makes charge within the bill to clarify and map the current state of ECMH consultation.

Goal(s): To describe ECMH consultation across settings, including workforce qualifications, practices targeting ECMH in these settings, innovative practices, and the need for additional support in each setting; To provide recommendations for improving and integrating ECMH consultation services across Colorado in alternative settings.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Conducted a series of 25 60-90 minute interviews with 35 key stakeholders to gather qualitative information and collateral reports related to implementing ECMH consultation services in their setting or agency.
- Conducted background research to integrate into a final report; read and noted collateral reports from key stakeholders to inform final report writing.
- Solicited feedback from key stakeholders for their specific written sections
- Presented main findings and recommendations to OEC leadership
- Integrated feedback from key leadership to the final report
- Drafted, edited, and finalized full final report for ECMH consultation services across alternative settings to assess innovations, demand, unmet need, and recommendations for the implementation of ECMH consultation services

Activity Focus Keywords: Community Collaboration, Conduct Interviews, Cross-Agency Collaboration, Disseminate Findings, Document Review, Evaluation, Needs Assessment, Policy Analysis, Presentation, Transcribe Qualitative Data, Written Report

Policy Area Keywords: Consultation, Center-based Child Care, Early Intervention, Early Childhood Mental Health, Early Learning Provider (ELP), IDEA Part C Services, Professional Development, Workforce, Workforce Development, Program Implementation

Portfolio Entry 2: Home Visiting Task Force – Financing Options Policy Brief

Project Overview:

Background: Home Visiting services provide a foundational support system for Colorado families with children under six. Home visiting has positively impacted various child, parent/caregiver, and family outcomes across systems and developmental areas. These include maternal and child health improvements, improved positive parenting practices, improved child development and school readiness, improved economic self-sufficiency, and reduced juvenile delinquency and child maltreatment. The State of Colorado operates and supports a strong network of seven evidence-based, state-funded Home Visiting programs, with two additional national home visiting models coming soon. The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) formed the Home Visiting (HV) Investment Task Force to develop recommendations to improve access to HV services across the state. The task force developed the plan from a series of workgroups and meetings across FY 2020-2021. The Fellow provided a research brief detailing Home Visiting financing options in anticipation of the HV Investment Task Force scope and meetings.

Goal(s): To research, write, and present a policy brief to examine the sources of federal, state, and local funding options available for Home Visiting programs state-wide.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Conducted a literature review and policy scan to identify funding sources across sectors, including federal, state, and philanthropic practices.
- Synthesized practices and financing options into a four-page financing policy brief to present and share with the Home Visiting Investment Task Force.

Activity Focus Keywords: Disseminate Findings, Document Review, Literature Review, Policy Analysis, Written Report

Policy Area Keywords: Financing, Home Visitation, Family Engagement, Program Alignment, Research-Practice Partnerships, Systems Alignment, Workforce

Portfolio Entry 3: Home Visiting Task Force – Home Visiting Investment Plan

Project Overview:

Background: See portfolio entry 2 for further background. As previously stated, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) formed the Home Visiting (HV) Investment Task Force to develop recommendations to improve HV services across the state. The task force developed the plan from a series of workgroups and meetings across FY 2020-2021. The HV Investment Task Force has collected survey responses from parents to determine the strengths and areas for growth across the home visiting programs in Colorado. This survey has responses from 1,431 parents or caregivers, and those results are being used to inform the strategies and recommendations from the task force.

Goal(s): To provide data and analyses to inform recommended strategies and the high-level HV Investment Task Force implementation plan; To identify gaps in HV across the state of Colorado and develop a series of recommendations and strategies to improve HV workforce competencies, funding for HV programs, and improve outcomes for families.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Attended and contributed to full task force meetings and various working subgroups as part of the HV Investment Task Force to further inform the strategies and recommendations of the task force. The subgroups the Fellow attended included:
    - The Coalition and Advocacy subgroup to lend expertise in grassroots and nonprofit programs and coordination and further learn about these efforts at a state level
    - The Financing and Funding Opportunities subgroup to learn more about tax and fee structures, investments across private, local, state and federal options, and provide further information derived from the funding brief written for the task force.
- Cleaned, analyzed, and synthesized results from respondents to the parent survey in order to form a baseline understanding for the task force.
- Seek feedback and further suggestions for data analyses from content area experts also involved in the HV Investment Task Force.

Activity Focus Keywords: Community Collaboration, Cross-Agency Collaboration, Data Analysis, Data Collection, Data Visualization, Disseminate Findings, Framework Development, Literature Review, Needs Assessment, Presentation, Professional Development, Strategic Plan, Written Report

Policy Area Keywords: Financing, Home Visitation, Family Engagement, Program Alignment, Research-Practice Partnerships, Systems Alignment, Workforce, Advocacy and Coalition

Portfolio Entry 4: Policy brief "Racial Disparities in Perceptions of Community Supports: Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research with Children and Families"

Project Overview:

Background: In partnership with Chapin Hall, the Colorado Office of Early Childhood (OEC) created a brief parent and community asset survey in 2016 to understand better how Colorado parents perceive service access, culturally responsive supports, and informal supports. Data described in the current brief are drawn from this survey. This survey is distributed among parents with various identities and experiences, including active military families, families receiving home visiting services (as previously mentioned in Home Visiting portfolio entries), and parents more broadly across Colorado as part of specific efforts to create local child maltreatment prevention plans. The survey addresses three core areas: (1) community resources; (2) community quality; (3) and parental capacity.

Many social, economic, structural, and community factors (such as chronic stress, insufficient financial and social supports, environmental exposures, implicit bias, and systemic racism) contribute to documented health disparities. These disparities are not only persistent but increasing. Key events in the past year—including the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on families, police brutality against Black and African American communities recently highlighted in the media, increased violence against Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) individuals, and growing attention to systemic racism and resultant inequities across all levels of society—motivated us to look at disparities or differences in data related to parents/ caregivers and access to early childhood services.

Goal(s): To analyze parent asset survey data set to inform policy, practice, and research recommendations that move upstream and emphasize a comprehensive, prevention-forward approach to equity and access in family strengthening efforts and outcomes across programs and departments.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Cleaned, analyzed, and synthesized results from respondents to the parent asset survey to assess differences, strengths and challenges among parents that identify as historically marginalized groups

and more dominant racial and ethnic identities.
- Conduct background research and policy review to inform recommendations and ascertain how the present data aligns with previous efforts.
- Synthesize and write a final policy brief that provides recommendations to integrate further equity efforts and antiracist practices across program implementation and policy efforts.
- Created and delivered a presentation as part of OEC's ongoing series of office-wide "Café Conversations"
- Facilitated discussion about the policy brief among staff
- Developed communications plan for policy briefs to be utilized for disseminating other office reports and projects

Activity Focus Keywords: Community Collaboration, Data Analysis, Data Collection, Data Visualization, Disseminate Findings, Implementation Research, Literature Review, Needs Assessment, Policy Analysis, Presentation, Strategic Plan, Survey Design, Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Center-based Child Care, Child Maltreatment, Culturally responsive practice, Equity, Family Child Care, Family Engagement and Support, Early Childhood, Research-Practice Partnerships, Service Access, Social Capital, Systemic Racism, Systems Alignment, Instrumental and Formal Supports, Community Perceptions

Read more about Drew's fellowship experience