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SRCD State Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Jenn Finders

2020-2021 SRCD State Policy Post-doctoral Fellow at the Indiana Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL)

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Introduction: I selected these projects to showcase in my portfolio because they represent the breadth and depth of my work during my fellowship at the OECOSL. I was involved in a variety of projects that aimed to address challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and advance existing policy priorities that had already been by the early learning community. This work often sought to leverage federal funding to support child care providers who accept subsidies, expand access to high-quality care among families with low incomes, and provide information to the workforce and stakeholders. Many of these projects involved collaborations with other state agencies, advocacy groups, educators, and philanthropists.

Portfolio Entry 1: COVID-19 Response and Recovery Initiatives

Project Overview:

Background: The COVID-19 global pandemic caused major disruptions to child care providers and families with young children. Federal relief dollars were allocated to lead agencies responsible for administering Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) to facilitate recovery and reinforcement efforts. The purpose of these projects was to collect data for the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL) to inform their strategies for repairing and strengthening the child care and education system

Goal(s): To 1) understand the child care landscape and the impact of COVID-19 on program health and outlook and 2) identify the barriers parents working in essential industries experienced with regards to locating, accessing, and paying for child care.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Developed and administered provider and parent surveys
- Analyzed data and presented findings to the OECOSL and its partners
- Contributed to federal funding plans and offered input on COVID-19 guidance
- Identified metrics for assessing recovery and success of initiatives

Activity Focus Keywords: Survey Design, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Data Visualization, Disseminate Findings, Presentation

Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Fund, Child Care Subsidy, Workforce, Vouchers

Portfolio Entry 2: Approaches to Expanding Access to Care

Project Overview:

Background: An additional consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic was large reductions in enrollment in state-funded prekindergarten and child care programs across the state. The low supply and demand created a surplus in the budget that had been allocated to administering these programs. The purpose of these projects was to investigate approaches to repurpose funding in innovative ways that would expand access to high-quality care among traditionally underserved populations.

Goal(s): To 1) develop a summer kindergarten transition program for children with limited prekindergarten experience, and 2) perform a multi-state scan of contracted slots payment methodology.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Conducted a literature review on evidence-based summer learning programs
- Developed an evidence brief with recommendations of key ingredients to include
- Collaborated with the Indiana Department of Education
- Researched contracted slot payment methodologies across multiple states
- Identified policy and program options for the OECOSL to consider

Activity Focus Keywords: Cross-Agency Collaboration, Program Development, Literature Review, Policy Analysis, Written Report

Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Fund, Child Care Subsidy, Contracted Slots, Prekindergarten to Kindergarten Transition

Portfolio Entry 3: Assessments of Kindergarten Readiness

Project Overview:

Background: The birth–5 strategic planning group was created to fill certain gaps identified in the state's needs assessment, including establishing a balanced approach to assessing kindergarten readiness. The purpose of the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Taskforce was to recommend developmentally appropriate SEL assessments that early care and education providers could utilize in practice and that would provide information to advance policy goals.

Goal(s): To 1) determine SEL assessment options that align with educator needs, and 2) identify potential indicators of kindergarten readiness to share with stakeholders

Contributions of Fellow:

- Participated and provided input in monthly SEL taskforce meetings
- Developed and administered child care provider and kindergarten teacher surveys

- Analyzed data and presented findings and recommendations to the SEL taskforce
- Identified indicators of kindergarten readiness to be publicly shared with policymakers

Activity Focus Keywords: Survey Design, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Data Visualization, Disseminate Findings, Presentation

Policy Area Keywords: Prekindergarten to Kindergarten Transition, Preschool Development Grant B-5, School Readiness, State-funded Preschool

Portfolio Entry 4: Evaluation of a Quality Set-Aside Activity

Project Overview:

Background: The 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) stipulated that lead agencies dedicate a portion of their funding to one or more allowable quality set-aside activities. Until now, the relative efficiency of investments in quality initiatives has not been systematically evaluated. The purpose of this project was to develop and test a framework for analyzing the return on investment for the quality activities that the OECOSL supports.

Goal(s): To lead a cost-benefit analysis of the quality set-aside activity supporting the voluntary pursuit of national accreditation

Contributions of Fellow:

- Collaborated with the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (INAEYC)
- Developed a framework and logic model to guide evaluation
- Conducted a cost-analysis of the INAEYC accreditation scholarship program
- Prepared administrative data for the impact analysis
- Wrote sections of the annual Quality Progress Report (QPR)

Activity Focus Keywords: Evaluation, Framework Development, Administrative Data, Data Analysis, Community Collaboration, Implementation Research
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Block Grant, Quality Improvement, National Accreditation Standards, Professional Development, Annual Report

Read more about Jenn's fellowship experience