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SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Jackie Gross, Ph.D.

2021-2022 SRCD Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

AUTHOR

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Introduction: My placement is with the Office of Research, Planning, and Evaluation (OPRE), which is situated within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF). OPRE is responsible for conducting research and evaluation projects to inform the programs administered by ACF program offices, such as the Office of Head Start, the Office of Child Care, and the Children's Bureau. OPRE conducts this work primarily through competitively awarded grants and contracts, including initiating new projects each year through solicitations. I was placed in the Division of Child and Family Development, where I worked on research and evaluation projects focusing mainly on Head Start/Early Head Start and child welfare. These portfolio entries provide an example of my contributions to each of the three major activities I engaged in during my placement this year: (1) supporting contract management (from processes leading up to the award of an anticipated new contract, to ongoing collaboration with current contractors and ACF program offices), (2) the creation/dissemination of written

products such as research briefs and reports, and (3) participation in workgroups.

Portfolio Entry 1: Financing for ECE Quality and Access for All (F4EQ) Project

Project Overview:

Background: The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE; the placement office) awarded a contract to NORC at the University of Chicago, with partners Start Early and the Children's Equity Project at Arizona State University, in February 2022 to complete the work under the F4EQ project. The purpose of the project is to better understand the landscape of Head Start's participation in or use of braided funding (i.e., bringing together multiple funding streams to meet the total cost of delivering high-quality programming). Specifically, the goals of the work are to identify the most common braiding approaches involving Head Start, to examine how these approaches can equitably advance the provision of high-quality, comprehensive ECE services, and to document how participation in braided funding relates to Head Start's engagement with other ECE programs and systems efforts. To meet these goals, the project team will conduct a descriptive study of financing in ECE programs that include Head Start funding.

Goal(s): To assist with announcing the new project across various channels and to assist with the development of several early project deliverables

Contributions of Fellow:

- Assisted with announcing the new project across various channels, including posting the project description on the OPRE website and briefing the U.S. Government Accountability Office and the Congressional Research Service
- Contributed to the development of the project dissemination plan and technical expert and stakeholder engagement plan
- Assisted with developing a plan and approach for conducting a review of the knowledge base on braided ECE funding approaches and the role of Head Start within the broader ECE financing system
- Contributed to the development of the Environmental Scan Plan, which describes the project team's approach to conducting an environmental policy scan of state, local, and Head Start governance structures and ECE braided funding policies
- Contributed to the development of an Information Collection Request for a generic information collection to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), for the purposes of conducting key

informant interviews as part of the Environmental Scan of federal- and state-level Head Start and ECE policies on braided funding

Activity Focus Keywords: Annotated Bibliography; Document Review; Literature Review; Survey Design
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF); Cost of Care; Head Start; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE); Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K); Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS); State-Funded Preschool
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Federal and state policy connections; Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice

Portfolio Entry 2: The Early Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (Baby FACES)

Project Overview:

Background: The Early Head Start (EHS) Family and Child Experiences Survey (Baby FACES) is a series of ongoing descriptive studies aimed at maintaining an up-to-date, extensive knowledge base to support Early Head Start policies and programs. Specifically, Baby FACES aims to inform program planning, technical assistance, and research at the national level by: (a) providing descriptive information about the quality, frequency, and intensity of EHS services; (b) describing the characteristics, qualifications, and professional supports provided to EHS staff; (c) identifying key characteristics of families served in EHS; (d) learning how EHS children and families are faring in key areas of child and family well-being; and (e) exploring associations between the type and quality of EHS services and child and family well-being. The current (second) round of Baby FACES 2018 was launched in 2015 using a repeated cross-sectional research design with a nationally representative sample of programs, centers, classrooms, home visitors, and children enrolled in EHS. Data collection first occurred in 2018 and was repeated in 2022, including interviews with parents, teachers, home visitors, center directors, and program directors; assessments of child development via parent- and staff-report; assessments of parent-child relationship quality via parent-report and observations; and in-depth observational assessments of EHS center-based service quality and home-based service quality.

Goal(s): To assist the placement office with the management of the Baby FACES contract, including ongoing collaboration with the contractor, and to assist with the development of multiple Baby FACES dissemination products such as research briefs.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Contributed to the development and dissemination of written products, including three research briefs presenting findings from Baby FACES data collection. One example is a research brief posted on the OPRE website about how Early Head Start programs support positive parent-child relationships (i.e., whether programs promote more positive parent-child relationships when they focus their goals, professional development, and the content of their home visits on those relationships).
- Presented research findings from Baby FACES 2018 to the Director of the Office of Head Start (OHS) at the OHS quarterly briefing with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
- Attended and contributed to meetings with the contractor, including providing feedback on study design and methods

Activity Focus Keywords: Data Collection; Disseminate Findings; Presentation; Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Head Start; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE); Early Head Start
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: How data informs decision-making; Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice

Portfolio Entry 3: Understanding Post Adoption and Guardianship Instability (PAGI) for Children and Youth who Exit Foster Care

Project Overview:

Background: Post adoption and guardianship instability is when children who have exited foster care to adoption or guardianship no longer live with their adoptive parent or legal guardian (for example, when a child re-enters foster care or experiences homelessness). The extent to which families experience this kind of instability and the reasons for post adoption and guardianship instability are not well understood. Therefore, the purpose of the PAGI project is to examine the rates of instability, factors associated with instability, and the supports and resources that promote post-permanency stability, by conducting two studies. The Contact after Adoption or Guardianship: Child Welfare Agency and Family Interactions Study collected data on the ways in which child welfare agencies are in contact with or receive information about the well-being (especially the instability) of children and youth who have exited the foster care system. The Survey of National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) Adopted Youth, Young Adults, Adults, and Adoptive Parents collected data on the extent of and factors related to post adoption instability occurring in families who participated in the NSCAW I or II. Information gained from both of these studies is being used to create research reports and other resources to help build the capacity of agencies to systematically track information on instability.

Goal(s): To assist the placement office with the management of the PAGI contract, including ongoing collaboration with the contractor, and to assist with the development of multiple PAGI products to disseminate research findings and knowledge related to tracking post adoption and guardianship instability

Contributions of Fellow:

- Contributed to the development of two research reports sharing research findings and recommendations that emerged from the Contact after Adoption or Guardianship: Child Welfare Agency and Family Interactions Study and the Survey of NSCAW Adopted Youth, Young Adults, Adults, and Adoptive Parents
- Contributed to the conceptualization and development of a Toolkit for tracking post adoption and guardianship instability for use by child welfare agencies and adoption program managers to systematically track instability outcomes
- Attended and contributed to meetings with the contractor, including providing feedback on study methods, plans, and dissemination strategies

Activity Focus Keywords: Disseminate Findings; Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Child Welfare; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice; Effective communication between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers

Portfolio Entry 4: Early Learning and Development (ELD) Research Workgroup

Project Overview:

Background: The Early Learning and Development Research Workgroup consists of federal staff from the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services working on a variety of early childhood programs and initiatives across the federal government. The workgroup convenes on a monthly basis and aims to collaborate across federal agencies to advance the science, policy, and practice of early learning and development through (1) coordinated and collaborative research and evaluation agendas and (2) plans for effective dissemination and adoption of research findings. Part of its mission is to develop a comprehensive, shared understanding among federal partners by continuously disseminating information about ongoing initiatives and projects in order to inform recommendations for the coordination of early learning and development research agendas. The planning committee leads the workgroup and consists of staff from the

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

Goal(s): To support the mission and goals of the Workgroup by serving on the planning committee

Contributions of Fellow:

- Served on the Planning Committee for the ELD Research Workgroup, including organizing and facilitating monthly Workgroup meetings, creating the agendas, and contributing to discussions of Workgroup initiatives and goals
- Oversaw the development of an inter-agency database of projects/programs that gives insight into common research themes across agencies in the Workgroup, including creating a survey and collecting information from all agencies represented in the Workgroup, compiling information obtained from the survey, and helping to develop the database and accompanying resources
- Following the Workgroup's organization/hosting of a federal research briefing series on the impact of COVID-19 on young children, their families, and the early care and education workforce, assisted with the development of a summary report (and accompanying resource packet) to help fulfill a provision of President Biden's Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Early Childhood Education Providers. The provision included a joint report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education on the impact of COVID-19 on educational outcomes; the Workgroup research briefing series summary report contributed to this overall joint report.

Activity Focus Keywords: Cross-Agency Collaboration; Disseminate Findings; Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Center-based Child Care; Child Welfare; Dual Language Learners (DLLs); Early Intervention; Family Child Care; Family Engagement ; Head Start; IDEA Part C Services; Kindergarten Outcomes; Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K); Pre-kindergarten to Kindergarten Transition; School Readiness Workforce; Home visiting
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: What information policymakers need; Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice; Effective communication between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers

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