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SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Neda Senehi, Ph.D.

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Introduction: As I approach the end of my first fellowship year, I am grateful for the diverse training, mentorship, and impactful opportunities that my placement at OPRE has afforded me within the science policy community at the federal level. As part of my fellowship at OPRE I gained new skills in supporting evidence-based policy making at the federal level. I have gained unique insights in incorporating an equity lens in federal policy-making and elevating voices of populations that experience adversity. My work has supported (a) dissemination of project findings to stakeholders, (b) strategic planning to support federal capacity-building efforts for evidence-based policy making, (c) data collection and project management efforts, (d) cross-divisional development of research leaning agendas, and (e) aligning program goals with

funding availability and ACF's evaluation policy. These experiences enabled me to hone my science communication and leadership skills and expand my professional networks. The gains I have received as a fellow and the goals I have achieved will serve my long-term career goals of using an equity lens to understand stress-related outcomes in populations that experience adversity and informing policies and programming to promote well-being and reduce health disparities in children, families, educators, and communities.

Portfolio Entry 1: Head Start REACH: Strengthening, Recruitment, Enrollment, and Engagement Approaches with Families (HS REACH)

Project Overview:

Background: This project aims to better understand the characteristics and experiences of Head Start eligible families experiencing adversity and the eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA) and retention practices Head Start programs use to engage families facing adversity (e.g., homelessness, substance use, foster care). The adversities that some Head Start eligible families may face are often intertwined with poverty. Focusing on families facing adversity and ERSEA approaches can help support efforts to ensure Head Start is reaching and serving the families who can potentially benefit from Head Start's comprehensive approach.

Goal(s): (a) To review existing literature about the population of families that are eligible for Head Start and the programs' approaches to recruiting, selecting, enrolling, and retaining families experiencing adversity (broadly defined as homelessness, substance use, foster care, etc.); (b) To develop a conceptual framework that describes the role system-level and contextual factors play in shaping ERSEA approaches for families in Head Start; and (c) To design studies to understand program ERSEA and strengthen research base on ERSEA approaches in Head Start.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Utilized quantitative and qualitative methods expertise to inform the projects' proposed analytical approaches.
- Utilized content expertise to inform project's proposed literature review
- Supported management of ongoing project activities including reviewing project deliverables and supporting the attainment of dissemination goals

- Facilitated OPRE leadership review process and OPRE publication of HS REACH's Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Retention Strategies with Head Start-Eligible Families Experiencing Adversity: A Review of the Literature

Activity Focus Keywords: Disseminate Findings; Literature Review; Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Head Start; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Processes to connect research to policy and practice; Science communication; Project management

Portfolio Entry 2: Early Care and Education Research Scholars: Head Start Dissertation Grants

Project Overview:

Background: The Early Care and Education Research Scholars: Head Start Dissertation Grant program is designed to build the capacity in the field for effective research that will inform early care and education policy and practice for low-income children and families. The grant program provides support for dissertation research conducted by graduate students working in partnership with a university mentor and local Head Start or Early Head Start programs.

Goal(s): (a) To conduct rigorous research that has the capacity to inform Head Start/Early Head Start policies and practices; (b) To build capacity in the early care and education field by supporting high-quality dissertation research and student-faculty collaboration and mentorship; (c) To support active communication, collaboration and a dynamic partnership between early career researchers and Head Start/Early Head Start programs; and (d) To foster the exchange of current research, ideas, and information among research scholars, policymakers and practitioners.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Supported the Federal Project Officer in grant management including reviewing and processing grant-related progress reports, deliverables, and amendments.
- Developed professional development activities to support scholars' science communication and networking skills
- Consulted with program office partners including the Office of Head Start to identify research priorities and evaluation criteria for a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

- Collaborated with the Federal Project Officer in drafting, review, forecasting, publication, and advertisement of NOFO
- Supported management of ongoing project activities including project deliverables and dissemination goals
- Facilitated review process of submitted applications and managed grant review panels
- Supported award recommendation and ACF grant review processing in collaboration with the Federal Project Officer

Activity Focus Keywords: Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA); Grant Application Development; Grant Review ; Professional Development
Policy Area Keywords: Head Start; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE); Early Head Start
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Evidence-based policymaking at the federal level; Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice; Grant proposal development; Evidence-based policy making

Portfolio Entry 3: OPRE's Self-Regulation Learning Agenda Team

Project Overview:

Background: This cross-divisional collaboration is focused on translating self-regulation science into evidence-based and strength-based strategies that mitigate the impact of early adversity and chronic stress on long-term health. Co-regulation is the interactive process by which caring adults (1) provide warm, supportive relationships, (2) promote self-regulation through coaching, modeling, and feedback, and (3) structure supportive environments. Additionally, the learning agenda is focused on supporting the application of translated co-regulation science to different human service programs across ACF. The goal is to answer common questions about the measurement of self-regulation and how co-regulation relates to ACF's efforts to take a preventative and proactive approach to promote the wellbeing of children and families.

Goal(s): To incorporate self-regulation science and co-regulation principles and strategies into human services programs and supports.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Supported the development of a self-regulation learning agenda

- Participated in discussions focused on understanding, translating, and applying co-regulation science into human services across different program areas and populations served
- Applied my content expertise on measurement and development of self-regulation and co-regulation in relational and biological contexts
- Drafted blogs focused on translation of co-regulation science within biological contexts into human services
- In collaboration with other team members, reviewed and contributed to publication of three OPRE Insights Blogs including, (1) Co-Regulation and Connection in Human Services: Developing a Learning Agenda, (2) Co-Regulation and Connection in Human Services: Ongoing OPRE Projects, and (3) Co-regulation and Strengths-based Approaches to Human Service Delivery.

Activity Focus Keywords: Data Visualization; Framework Development; Written Report; Cross-divisional collaboration
Policy Area Keywords: Early Intervention; Head Start; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Effective communication between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; Translational science approaches to translate self-regulation science into human services

Portfolio Entry 4: American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (AIAN FACES)

Project Overview:

Background: The American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey 2019 (AIAN FACES 2019) continues the efforts of AIAN FACES 2015, which provided the first national descriptive study of children and families participating in Head Start programs operated by federally recognized tribes or Region XI AIAN Head Start. Region XI programs incorporate their unique history, community traditions, and beliefs into their operations and integrate language and culture into the delivery of services to children and families. AIAN FACES 2019 is the second cohort of AIAN FACES.

Goal(s): To provide information about Region XI children and families and their programs and classrooms—with a particular focus on children's school readiness skills to inform the national picture of Head Start, and for use in Head Start policy and practice decisions.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Supported ongoing dissemination activities in collaboration with federal project officers
- Participated in review committees to review applications for restricted-use dataset
- Drafted one-page briefs summarizing project overview to share with program partners
- Worked with federal project officers to support publication of American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey 2019 (AIAN FACES 2019): Key Indicators Findings from Fall 2019
- Participated in discussion with (1) Head Start directors from Region XI programs, (2) early childhood university researchers who work with AIAN communities, (3) Mathematica Policy Research staff who conducted the study to discuss project goals, findings, and activities

Activity Focus Keywords: Data Visualization; Presentation; Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Head Start; Region XI Head Start; Tribal
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice; Incorporating a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens

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