NEWS | POSTED MAY 3, 2023

2023 SRCD State Policy Fellow Spotlight: Lillie Moffett, Ph.D.

Lillie Moffett is an SRCD State Policy Fellow at the California Department of Education.

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In a few sentences, what is your role at the agency you work for?

At the California Department of Education (CDE) I touch different sectors of the Early Education Division, including systems improvement, training and technical assistance, data, and policy. One major role I play is leading the California Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) Research Design Team, which brings together early childhood education experts from research organizations and universities across the state to share expertise with the CDE and develop research questions and partnerships as UPK is implemented. I am also co-leading updates to California's early learning standards and assessment requirements in preschool, as well advising UPK programs on developmentally appropriate and evidence-based curricula.

What has been the most memorable project you have completed during your time at the agency?

I have had several memorable projects, but one of my favorites from this past year was conducting a statewide Transitional Kindergarten (TK) curriculum survey and receiving a relatively high response rate from school districts in a matter of days (which, as us researchers know, is a miracle!). The results of this survey were then used in an informational agenda item presented to the California State Board of Education on the status of TK implementation.

What has been an interesting professional development opportunity you have completed during the fellowship?

One of my favorite professional development opportunities has been participating in a Certificate in Early Education Leadership course offered through the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

What piqued your interest in working in policy?

When I was conducting my dissertation research in preschool classrooms, I realized that published papers on important research in early childhood education—like early math development, curriculum effectiveness, importance of executive functioning skills, etc.—were not necessarily being translated to teachers, or even appearing robustly in preschool regulations or resources provided by state agencies. I didn't want my or others' research to remain dormant in a journal somewhere, but to actually be used to inform policies that would in turn affect the learning and development of the hundreds of thousands of preschoolers in California.

How do you think the fellowship has helped further your career?

This fellowship has helped solidify and guarantee my career plans to continue working in early childhood education policy. While there are plenty of "me" in academia settings, there are not enough early education and child development researchers "at the table" in state education agencies. Yet, agencies often struggle with successfully hiring academics because of obtuse hiring procedures and limited positions available to people like me that have a Ph.D. in education, but do not have experience supervising a preschool program or being employed by a school district. Having a foot in the door to the CDE through this fellowship, plus the two years of experience working in an education agency, has helped me secure a future position working in policy and public service.

Where are you from?

I am originally from the east coast (Cape Cod, Massachusetts) but I now call Los Angeles, California my home.