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2024 SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Spotlight: Tanya Tavassolie, Ph.D.

Dr. Tanya Tavassolie is a second-year SRCD Federal Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Head Start (OHS) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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

I helped OHS with the recently published Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM). It was a huge effort and I really enjoyed working collaboratively with others at OHS, including other current and former SRCD fellows, to publish this together. This NPRM proposes a number of changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards that aim to support the Head Start workforce and improve program quality. This was such a memorable project because of the direct way that research was used to inform policy development. As you can read in the NPRM that is published on the Federal Register website, our team used published research as

well as internal data analyses to inform our proposed policies. I am so incredibly proud of these proposals, and I learned so much about evidence-informed policy making along the way.

What has been your favorite aspect of SRCD's fellowship? Please explain why.

My favorite aspect of the SRCD fellowship has been learning about how the Congressional and Executive branches work together. Since I was fortunate enough to be both a Congressional and Executive Branch fellow, it has been fascinating to see the notable differences between the two, but also how the two work together. The job of each branch is very different, but in many ways they are complimentary. It has been very interesting to learn how to interpret our law and draft regulatory language that aligns with the law, and then to see how our training and technical assistance division takes the regulatory language and puts it into practice by providing guidance for the field for how to implement the policies.

What is something you learned in the last month outside of your field?

I have learned a lot recently about how to communicate complex policies to the public. We have been working hard as a team to distill down our proposed policies into easy-to-understand language and make sure it is clear to the field what we mean. This can be really challenging but it is worthwhile to spend the time thinking about how to communicate challenging topics in a comprehensible way.

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

The APPAM conference in Atlanta, GA – Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management – is an annual public policy conference. This year, I was able to attend using professional development funds provided by the fellowship. It was such a wonderful experience. This conference is mostly attended by economists in the policy field, but I learned how incredibly relevant our work is to this conference. I wish I had attended while I was in graduate school! I would encourage all graduate students and individuals in the child development, applied development psychology, and human development fields to attend this conference. It's completely relevant and incredibly interesting.

Where are you from?

I was born and raised in Baltimore County, MD. But my family is from Iran. Both of my parents immigrated to the US in the 1980s and built a life here for my sisters and me. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to be

raised here and for the incredible sacrifice my parents made to make this possible.

More about the 2023-2024 Cohort