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SRCD State Policy Fellow Spotlight: Jess Sullivan, PhD

AUTHOR

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SRCD State Policy Fellow Spotlight:
State Policy Fellow at the New York Office of Children and Family Services Division of Child Care Services, Professor of Psychology at Skidmore College, and Associate Editor of Child Development

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

My role has involved contributing to – and sometimes leading – several initiatives for the NYS OCFS Division of Child Care Services. For example, I have worked alongside parents, child care providers, and stakeholders to begin to develop a statewide definition of 'high quality' child care. I have also worked on a study and report assessing the financial and logistical feasibility of a hypothetical universal afterschool system. In addition to these larger projects, I have provided analytical assistance on others' projects, I have used my academic training to develop slides and messaging to communicate about policy to a broader audience, and

I have used my expertise in child development to help select children's books for an exciting new literacy initiative!

What interested you in becoming an SRCD Policy Fellow?

As a mid-career psychology faculty member, I had become increasingly interested in developing a research program and teaching portfolio that could support positive change in the world. My students were hungry to find ways to use their skills to improve child care, education, and child-facing policy, but I had limited experience in doing these things myself. I realized that if I wanted to help my students change the world, I needed new tools and experiences myself. The SRCD Policy Fellowship allows me to receive substantial training at the intersection between research and policymaking, while my placement has allowed me on-the-ground experience working with policymakers.

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

The fellowship has given me professional experiences and skills that I don't think I could have gotten in any other way. My plan is to take the skills and connections that I have gained during the fellowship and bring them back to my position as a professor. This experience feels monumentally impactful, and I am excited to see how it will transform my career.

What has been your favorite aspect of SRCD's fellowship?

I've loved getting to work with and know the amazing people doing child care policy work in Upstate NY. I've been blown away by how welcomed I've felt, and by how fun it has been to talk about child-facing policy with so many people. I've learned more about how the child care system in my state works (and changes!) in the last year than I did in over a decade of being a parent and professor of child development. And, even better, I've gotten to know the humans behind those systems in a way that I never would have outside the fellowship.

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

There is an annual educational conference just a few hours from where I live. I had never previously attended, despite being curious. As part of my professional development plan, I attended this conference, and was able to not only give a talk, but meet with dozens of child care professionals. I attended a range of

events outside of my area of expertise, and doing this has caused me to reimagine where I might present my work in the future.

What do you like to do in your free time?

When I’m not playing with my kids, I’m planting my giant garden, rock climbing, or hiking the Catskills and Adirondacks!