NEWS | POSTED APRIL 9, 2026

Fellowship Spotlight: Dr. Lily Steyer

AUTHOR

Lily Steyer

State Policy Fellow, California Department of Education

SRCD Policy Fellow 2025-2026 Cohort

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

A: I play a few different roles within the Early Education Division of the California Department of Education (CDE). I co-lead the California Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) Research Design Team, which brings together early childhood experts from research organizations and universities across the state to share expertise with CDE policymakers. I also help lead the CDE's System of Support, a division-wide effort to use data to provide timely, targeted training and resources to preschool providers throughout California. Lastly, I am helping the CDE think about equitable social-emotional learning and mental health interventions for young children to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions, expulsions).

Q: What has been a memorable project you have completed during your time at the agency?

A: I'm leading the design and implementation of one of the division's first-ever surveys seeking direct input from families. It's meaningful to solicit and incorporate feedback from hundreds of thousands of families with preschoolers across California. It's also quite the challenge — there are literally hundreds of questions we'd like to ask, but for multiple reasons (including minimizing the burden on families), we're limiting the survey to

10 questions max.

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

A: The fellowship has given me an invaluable front-row seat to the complexities of state policymaking in the very moment that California rolls out the nation's largest publicly funded universal preschool system. It's a daily master class in the implementation challenges that come with rolling out an entire new grade of public education for all four–year–olds.

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

A: If I had to choose one, it would be my awesome colleagues in CDE's Early Education Division—all amazing public servants who have dedicated their careers to serving our state's littlest learners.

Q: What piqued your interest in working in policy?

A: To quote one of my child policy heroes, Marian Wright Edelman, public service is the rent we pay for being. Policy is a critical tool to design systems, grounded in developmental science, that promote equitable opportunities for all children to thrive.

Q: Where are you from?

A: I was born, raised, and currently live in San Francisco. Go SF Giants!