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February 2016 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Sangeeta Parikshak, Ph.D.

2015-2016 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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This is my final year as an SRCD fellow. I have had the amazing opportunity to complete the Congressional Fellowship as well as the Executive Branch Policy Fellowship and am now transitioning to a full time federal position within the Office of Head Start in the Administration for Children and Families.

During my fellowship at the Office of Head Start, I have been immersed in a variety of projects spanning across four different divisions in the office: Education and Comprehensive Services, Training and Technical Assistance, Policy and Planning, and Program Operations. Through working in these different divisions, I have been able to become knowledgeable about multiple aspects of Head Start and early childhood development programs and have become the lead for mental health and social-emotional development in the office. Some projects I have worked on include helping to develop, disseminate, and implement the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, develop a mental health workgroup across the National Technical Assistance Centers, respond to comments and help draft the final rule of the Program Performance

Standards for Head Start, and respond to concerns at the local program level related to mental health. My time as a fellow has also given me numerous opportunities to develop my public speaking skills both to the staff in the office as well as to the larger Head Start and early childhood community in the form of webinars and conferences.

When I first came in as a fellow, I knew that I wanted to make change happen at the federal and local level and I wanted to effectively utilize my skills as a clinical child psychologist through policy work. I believe that in my current role I have fulfilled this goal, particularly because Head Start is a federal to local program that requires mental health consultation in each of their programs and program options. I am so grateful to SRCD for not only giving me the opportunity to complete both fellowships, but also for the truly life changing mentorship and leadership that the staff at SRCD provided during my time with them. I have now found a position that suits my skills and aspirations and I am looking forward to continuing my career in this work.