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March 2012 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Kelly R. Fisher, Ph.D.

2011-2012 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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I am a first year Executive Branch Fellow placed in the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), which is situated in the Administration for Children and Families. OPRE is responsible for advising the Assistant Secretary on ways to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of programs aimed at improving the economic and social well-being of children and families. To accomplish its mission, OPRE conducts research and policy analyses, develops and oversees research and evaluation projects, and disseminates research findings.

The past six months at OPRE has been a fascinating voyage of discovery in how science is used in policy construction, implementation, and evaluation, particularly as it relates to early childhood education. For instance, I am currently working with the Secretary's Advisory Committee (SAC) on Head Start Research and Evaluation, which is charged with reviewing the progress of research and providing recommendations on the impact of Head Start programs. Since 2011, the Committee has convened in Washington, D.C. five times and is currently preparing a final report that will be submitted to the Secretary, the Committee on Education and Workforce of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate. During this project, I have drawn upon my own expertise as well as developed newfound knowledge in areas I have had little experience in prior to coming to OPRE. In addition to the SAC, I work on several contracts that evaluate early childhood education programs and practices, participate in planning committees for workshops and conferences, and aid dissemination efforts to reach researchers, policymakers, and program administrators.

One of the most intriguing and challenging aspects of the fellowship is becoming an "interdisciplinary scientist" – one whose expertise continuously and synergistically expands across domains and/or disciplines. Echoed in Greg Duncan's (2012) article "Give Us This Day Our Daily Breadth" in Child Development, I find myself cutting across research silos to inform my work, combining insight from different topical domains, disciplines, and methodologies (e.g., developmental science, education, industrial/organizational psychology, policy analysis, neuroscience, healthcare, economics). I have found different disciplines can provide invaluable insight into 'missing elements' in theories or fresh views that fall outside the canon of a particular field. In a few short months, I have not only gained a deeper understanding of the policy world, but I have also developed a more interdisciplinary perspective of science—one that I will continue to cultivate throughout my career.

I am deeply grateful to SRCD for providing such an amazing fellowship program. I have had the pleasure of working alongside OPRE scientists, policymakers, program administrators, and leading researchers in the field to explore the intersection between the science and policy worlds. I have gained a deep appreciation for the complexity of creating and evaluating policy as well bridging these two worlds through a variety of dissemination practices.