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November 2008 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Sara Vecchiotti, Ph.D.

2007-2008 Federal Congressional Policy Fellow

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Currently, I am the Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Planning, and Analysis at New York City's Administration of Children's Services (ACS), Division of Child Care and Head Start (CCHS), in which I oversee and link policy development with data analysis. Previously, as a Congressional and Executive Branch Fellow (2004-2006), I learned about the interplay of politics, developmental research knowledge, and budget in the formation of public policy. Post-fellowship, at the local level I am continuing to ensure that child development knowledge informs public policy while balancing political and budgetary considerations.

My responsibility is to implement ACS' 2005 Strategic Plan, "Rethinking Child Care," which outlines goals to improve subsidized early care and education (ECE) services for low-income families within the City's overall ECE system. The Plan enhances, maximizes, and leverages resources to promote the positive development of young children and to better meet the community need for these services. My work to achieve the strategic goals, involves designing and managing policy initiatives and coordinating work across departments both

within CCHS and outside with other city agencies. Below are some examples of the work:

Prior to arriving at ACS, a community need analysis was underway to compare the concentration of young children eligible for subsidized care to the availability of all the City's ECE resources. After data refining, adding enrollment trends, writing, and editing, a report, "Charting the Course for Child Care and Head Start," was released. These results will be used in planning for how to better align services with community need in our next procurement for ECE services.

A strategic goal is to integrate the City's ECE services. This initiative involves working with the Office of the Mayor and the Department of Education (DOE) to design policies whereby four -year olds in ACS contracted centers also receive universal prekindergarten services. Through consensus-building, we identified duplicative practices and streamlined administrative procedures while balancing the feasibility of implementation within agency resources.

Another goal is to provide high-quality ECE services to lead to long-term positive child outcomes. ACS and DOE are implementing a unified performance measurement system to assess quality across ECE settings. Currently, we are working with local researchers to answer questions about how to design a coordinated quality performance rating system, as well as to determine how rating results can inform technical assistance we provide. Also, in partnership with researchers, we have designed a study at ACS to examine parental preferences, choices, and experience in utilizing child care subsidies in NYC. A federal grant supports our current data collection and results will inform our subsidy administration practice.

Finally, my work entails planning and enacting a policy change in which ACS will only reimburse providers for children enrolled and no longer pay for vacant seats. The purpose of this change is to ensure an efficient use of resources and a high utilization of services. Through management of a cross-divisional team, we are revising current policies, developing new policies, and identifying the necessary administrative infrastructure to support the policy change.