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February 2008 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Kathleen Dwyer, Ph.D.

2007-2008 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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Unbelievably, I am at the halfway mark of my first fellowship year at the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). OPRE develops and oversees research and evaluation projects to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of ACF programs and inform policy and practice. I work primarily on child care policy research, although I have had opportunities to work on projects in other areas, such as Head Start. The child care research team is responsible for projects that add to our knowledge about the efficacy of child care subsidy policies and programs.

It has been exciting to see the research team's work, and my contribution to it, influence both science policy and social policy. Currently, my main projects involve the development, review, and administration of grants and contracted projects. In addition, I am assisting in the follow-up activities for the meeting "Measuring Quality in Early Childhood and School-Age Settings: At the Junction of Research, Policy, and Practice." This meeting was organized to address states' needs for guidance regarding how best to measure child care

quality, particularly in increasingly common high-stakes environments. It is exciting to know that we will be incorporating research into products that will guide states in their decisions regarding the measurement of quality. Finally, outside the area of child care, I have investigated models of collaboration between Head Start and state-funded pre-kindergarten programs and any connections between the various models and quality of services. With the information available, we will be able to provide some answers to the Office of Head Start (OHS) regarding promising models and formulate the additional questions that need to be addressed.

Within my first six months, I have also had amazing opportunities to network and make contacts within ACF, within other government agencies, and outside the government. On my first day at OPRE, I attended the meeting “Intervening Early: Progress and Opportunities in Child Service Settings,” which assembled federal representatives and leading experts in the area of early childhood intervention to review prevention programs designed to improve child, parent and family outcomes in a variety of domains. On a more regular basis, I attend technical working group meetings for a variety of contracted projects. I also regularly attend the meetings of the Good Start, Grow Smart (GSGS) Interagency Workgroup, which brings together representatives from nine divisions of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that support research in early childhood education.

It is remarkable how much I have already learned about the intersection of research, policy, and practice. In addition to a whirlwind orientation to the federal government in general and OPRE in particular, I have had invaluable experiences, increased my knowledge base, and developed new skills. At the moment, I feel that I can see how the different universes come together; over the course of the remainder of my fellowship, I look forward to the challenges of navigating that intersection.