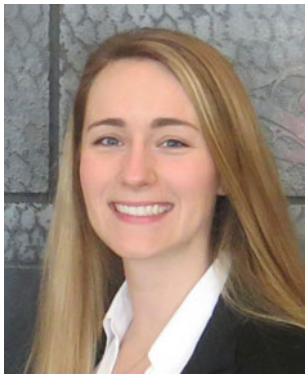
NEWS | POSTED NOVEMBER 27, 2018

Introducing the 2018-2019 SRCD Policy Fellows

2018 - 2019 SRCD Federal Policy Fellows



Sarah Blankenship, Ph.D.

Dr. Sarah Blankenship is a second year SRCD Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She is currently working on early care and education projects in the Head Start and Child Care portfolios at OPRE. Dr. Blankenship is a developmental cognitive neuroscientist with an interest in the mechanisms through which early experiences shape long-term outcomes. Dr. Blankenship completed her Ph.D. and M.S. in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science and her B.S. in Psychology at the University of Maryland. Her graduate research investigated the neural correlates of episodic memory, emotion regulation, and reward processing, and explored how the function and structure of these brain networks are shaped by maternal depression, parenting, and child stress reactivity. Prior to the SRCD Fellowship, Dr. Blankenship completed the Christine Mirzayan Science and Technology Policy Fellowship with the Board on Children, Youth, and Families at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and a post-doc exploring preschool special education service delivery in the state of Maryland. Dr. Blankenship is committed to leveraging developmental science to improve the health and well-being of high-risk and underserved children and families. Read Sarah Blankenship's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Erin Cannon, Ph.D.

Dr. Erin N. Cannon is a second year Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She received her B.A. in Psychology from the University of California, Irvine, and M.S. and Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research expertise includes infant and toddler development, classroom quality in early childhood, program evaluation, and effects of early adversity. Prior to joining OPRE, Dr. Cannon held research faculty positions at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she led studies on behavioral and neural correlates of infant social cognition. She also served in a research-to-practice role as an in-house implementation evaluator of an Early Head Start/Head Start program in Washington, D.C. At OPRE, Dr. Cannon focuses on the Child Care and Head Start portfolios. She serves as a Program Specialist for the Head Start Scholars grants. She also contributes to contracted work, such as the "National Survey of Early Care and Education" (NSECE), "Leadership in Early Care and Education," and is excited to be leading a new contract investigating "Human-centered-Design for Human Services," which will investigate the feasibility and evaluability of implementing a human-centered design approach to improve service delivery across many of ACF's programs. Read Erin Cannon's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Paula Daneri, Ph.D.

Dr. Paula Daneri is a SRCD Congressional Fellow in the House Committee on Education and Labor. Her work in the Committee focuses on early childhood and higher education issues. Dr. Daneri completed her doctoral studies in Developmental Psychology at New York University. Her dissertation, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences and the Administration for Children and Families, examined the development of self-regulation in early childhood, with a particular focus on Latino and low-income families. During her time at NYU she also worked on the New York City Department of Education's effort to implement universal pre-K for all four-year-olds. Prior to graduate school, Dr. Daneri was as a research assistant at Child Trends, a nonpartisan research organization, where she worked on an evaluation of a preschool curriculum in DC Title I schools and conducted literature reviews related to the development of dual language learners as well as the use of child care subsidies within low-income families. Dr. Daneri completed her B.A. in psychology at Duke University. Read Paula Daneri's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Amanda Gatewood, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Dr. Amanda K. Gatewood is a SRCD Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Gatewood is currently working on the Child Care and Head Start portfolios of research at OPRE. Dr. Gatewood is a public health epidemiologist with particular interest in implementation research, poverty reduction, and evaluation of social services programs that aim to improve early childhood development. Prior to joining OPRE, she was an epidemiologist in the Early Childhood Development Branch of the Kentucky Department for Public Health, a Fulbright Scholar to the Kyrgyz Republic, and a HRSA Trainee Fellow in the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Maryland Department of Health. Dr. Gatewood holds a BA in English from the University of Kentucky, an MPH from the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health, and a PhD from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Read Amanda Gatewood's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Anne Day Leong, Ph.D., M.S.W.

Dr. Anne Day Leong is a second year SRCD Executive Branch Fellow at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). While working at the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Leong is also completing details with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH). While working with NIH, Dr. Leong has lent her expertise to a range of projects including strategic planning at both NICHD and ORWH, policy analysis and technical assistance at NICHD, and examining the impact of opioids on adolescents and children at NIDA. Her earlier research includes topics such as early childhood education, services for immigrant and refugee families, domestic violence, and child maltreatment. Dr. Leong currently holds a BA in Psychology and Women's Studies from Penn State University, a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania, and a PhD in Social Work from Boston College. Read Anne Day Leong's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Francesca Longo, Ph.D.

Dr. Francesca Longo is an applied developmental psychologist with expertise in early developmental contexts and interest in policy and its implications for child and family wellbeing. Prior to earning her Ph.D. at Boston College, Francesca evaluated scale, early childhood education interventions and welfare-to-work demonstrations at MDRC, a non-profit dedicated to improving the knowledge base to influence social policy. Francesca also worked with the Development and Research in Early Mathematics Education (DREME) network participating in efforts to improve caregiver-child interactions involving math and developing benchmarks for executive functioning to create a curriculum integrating these skills with math learning. She is passionate about improving life experiences for children in poverty, and her current research focuses on integrating classroom and parent interventions for enhancing executive functions in preschool children. Last year she was a SRCD Congressional Fellow in Senator Gillibrand's office working on Defense, Nutrition, Immigration, Health, and Education portfolios. This year as a SRCD Executive Branch Fellow, Francesca is working in the Office of Child Care (OCC) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, on understanding state child care quality initiatives. Read Francesca Longo's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Kelly Jedd McKenzie, Ph.D.

Dr. Kelly Jedd McKenzie is a second year SRCD Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Her work in ASPE focuses on early childhood, childhood trauma, and trauma-informed care. Dr. McKenzie collaborates across agencies to improve coordination of the federal response to child trauma and leads a project on trauma-informed approaches to building resilience in children and families. Dr. McKenzie earned her doctorate from the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota in Child Psychology with an emphasis in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience. Her research focused on the impact of early life stress on brain development and function. As a graduate student, Dr. McKenzie was a Doris Duke Fellow for the Promotion of Child Well-Being and a National Institute of Mental Health predoctoral fellow. Prior to graduate school, Dr. McKenzie graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in psychology from Whitman College, where she researched the impact of poverty on infant development and worked within the community to raise awareness of childhood trauma. Dr. McKenzie is dedicated to serving children and families by using research to inform policies that promote resilience and child well-being. Read Kelly Jedd McKenzie's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Rachel McKinnon, Ph.D.

Dr. Rachel McKinnon is a SRCD Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Child Care in the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. In the year prior to her current fellowship, she served as a SRCD Congressional Fellow in the office of Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr., (PA) working on policy issues in the areas of education, LBGTQ, and immigration. Dr. McKinnon completed her graduate studies in the Developmental Psychology program at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University (NYU). While at NYU, Dr. McKinnon examined young children's self-regulation as an important school readiness skill for preschoolers and kindergarten, particularly among children from low-income families. Her dissertation work focused on the complex associations between children's individual self-regulation and the quality of relationships they develop with their teachers. During graduate school, Dr. McKinnon worked in the Neuroscience and Education Lab on several projects including the Family Life Project and the Chicago School Readiness Project. Dr. McKinnon completed her M.A. in Developmental Psychology at Teachers College Columbia University and her B.S. in Family and Human Studies at Arizona State University. She is committed to improving the opportunities available to young children living in poverty through evidence-based family- and school-based interventions in an effort to reduce achievement gaps. Read Rachel McKinnon's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Marisa Morin, Ph.D.

Dr. Marisa Morin is a SRCD Congressional Fellow in the Senate Finance Committee and Ranking Member Ron Wyden's office. She works on the human services portfolio which includes child welfare, TANF, higher education, and workforce issues. Dr. Morin is a developmental psychologist with research expertise in family contexts, parenting, and parent-based interventions. As part of the National Center for Children and Families and in partnership with MDRC, she evaluated the quality of parent-child play interactions for a national evaluation of home visiting programs (MIECHV) and an evaluation of responsible fatherhood programs (Building Bridges and Bonds). Dr. Morin also worked on an evaluation of STEM focused summer programs for minority high schoolers and consulted with the Burke Foundation for their early childhood field scan. Dr. Morin earned her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology and M.S. in Applied Statistics at Teachers College, Columbia University and her B.A. in Psychology and English with a minor in Education, Inquiry, and Justice at Georgetown University.

Read Marisa Morin's Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.



Emily Ross, Ph.D.

Dr. Emily C. Ross is a SRCD Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Ross is an applied developmental psychologist whose focus at OPRE includes research and evaluation projects related to early childhood care and education, child welfare, parenting, and parent well-being that inform the work of ACF Offices of Head Start, Child Care, and the Children's Bureau. Dr. Ross holds a PhD and MA in Human Development and Social Policy from Northwestern University, and a BSc in Psychology from McGill University. Her graduate work focused on understanding the relationships between maternal education, parenting, preschool, and young children's development among those growing up in economically disadvantaged communities. During this time, Dr. Ross was a Graduate Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at Northwestern University, working with the Two-Generation Research Initiative team to evaluate family and child outcomes of participation in a sectoral workforce and education program for parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start preschool in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Dr. Ross is committed to the production, utilization, and communication of research to inform programs and policies that seek to reduce socioeconomic inequality and promote the well-being of children and families. Read Emily Ross' Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow.

2018 - 2019 SRCD State Policy Fellows

Post-Doctoral Fellows



Rachel Katz, Ph.D.

Dr. Rachel Katz is a SRCD Post-Doctoral State Policy Fellow at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in the Division of Early Intervention. She is using her research and early childhood expertise to inform practice and policy initiatives at the state level and to support and develop the agency's research activities, data collection methods, data analysis, and evaluation processes. Dr. Katz received her Ph.D. in Child Study and Human Development from Tufts University. She served as a doctoral research assistant for the Massachusetts Healthy Families Evaluation, a randomized controlled trial of an intervention for young parents. At Tufts, Dr. Katz studied the influence of children's early experiences on developmental functioning, including how development can be modified by environmental influences such as child care and early education, caregiver-child relationships, and adversity. Supported by a Doris Duke Dissertation Fellowship for the Promotion of Child Well-Being, her dissertation investigated patterns of child care use over time, associations between early child care participation and child outcomes in early childhood, and the mechanisms by which child care fosters positive development in a sample of adolescent mothers and their children. Prior to entering Tufts, she worked as a research assistant in the Laboratory for Developmental Studies at Harvard University where she studied cognitive development in infants. Dr. Katz received a B.A. in Psychology from Bates College.



Alicia Miao, Ph.D.

Dr. Alicia J. Miao is a SRCD Post-doctoral State Policy Fellow in the Early Learning Division (ELD) of the Oregon Department of Education. Her work at ELD currently focuses on activities related to kindergarten readiness, preschool program evaluation and improvement, child care quality, and infant-toddler program implementation. Dr. Miao completed her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State University. Her dissertation work focused on the development and measurement of children's self-regulation across the transition to school. Research during her doctoral studies also included associations between mathematics and self-regulation, the measurement of self-regulation for dual language learners, and statistical modeling. A collaborative line of research she is pursuing is focused on community environments that reduce disparities and promote equity in kindergarten readiness and later achievement and adjustment. Prior to her doctoral studies, Dr. Miao worked at the Oregon Social Learning Center on several longitudinal projects, including the Oregon Youth Study, Couples Study, and Three Generation Study. Dr. Miao holds a B.S. and M.S. in Psychology from the University of Oregon. She is committed to leveraging research to inform policies and programs that improve the well-being of children and families.

Pre-Doctoral Fellows



Nneka Ibekwe, M.S.W., Ed.M.

Nneka Ibekwe is a PhD candidate in the Human Development and Quantitative Methods division at the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education (GSE). She is also a graduate research assistant at the Field Center for Children's Policy Practice and Research. Her research focuses on identifying pathways towards optimal social-emotional and academic development for children from disadvantaged populations. In her current research, Nneka is applying quantitative methodology to assess the risk and protective factors that children experience across two ecological levels to understand what contributes to school readiness outcomes. As a SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellow in the Office of Early Learning in the Delaware Department of Education, Nneka is designing evaluation plans, child assessments, and survey tools for the state's early learning programs. Prior to Penn GSE, Nneka worked as a manager for the Center for Education Policy Research and as a graduate teaching fellow for Harvard University. As a social worker in east Los Angeles and New York City, Nneka worked with children and families involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. She holds an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Prevention Science Research and an M.S.W. from Columbia University School of Social Work. Nneka received a B.A. from the University of California, Davis, where she was also an NCAA Division I volleyball player.



Caroline Martin

Caroline Martin is a SRCD Pre-Doctoral State Policy Fellow at the Vermont Agency of Education (VT-AOE). At the VT-AOE, Caroline collaborates with the Data Analysis and Early Learning teams on projects related to pre-kindergarten programming for the state of Vermont. She is currently analyzing and assembling state-wide data on the school readiness of children receiving public pre-kindergarten funding. Caroline also works on projects broadly related to the social-emotional functioning of young children in the state. Caroline is a PhD candidate in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Vermont, working under the mentorship of Dr. Betsy Hoza. Her primary research interests include factors that promote early childhood psychological adjustment and behavioral health, and the development of interventions to promote behavioral, cognitive, and social adjustment among at-risk children. Caroline holds a B.A. in Psychology from Oberlin College and previously worked at the University of Massachusetts - Boston's Center for Social Development and Education prior to pursuing her doctorate degree.



Meghan McDoniel, Ed.M.

Meghan McDoniel is a pre-doctoral fellow for the SRCD State Policy Fellowship Program at the Bureau of Early Learning Services in the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). Her work at OCDEL focuses on integrating data systems across the Bureau and state agencies to improve reach and risk reporting for child care and early learning service providers statewide. Ms. McDoniel is currently in the Developmental Psychology program at Pennsylvania State University. Her research examines child, family, and neighborhood characteristics that influence young children's social and emotional development, specifically with regards to school readiness in early childhood. Prior to graduate school, Ms. McDoniel received her B.A. in Psychology with a Neuroscience concentration from Grinnell College, after which she taught preschool in St. Louis, MO with Teach For America. She received her M.Ed. in Elementary Education with an Early Childhood emphasis from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Ms. McDoniel is dedicated to improving early childhood services for children and families through evidence- and community-based approaches.



Elizabeth Tremaine, M.S.

Elizabeth (Lizzy) Tremaine is a SRCD Pre-Doctoral State Policy Fellow placed at Oregon's Early Learning Division. In this placement, she works on a breadth of projects, such as supporting the Division's grant applications, program piloting and evaluation plans, data analysis, and stakeholder engagement efforts. Lizzy is a doctoral candidate at Portland State University in the Applied Developmental Psychology program, working with Dr. Andrew Mashburn. Her work as a graduate student has involved taking a holistic, child-centered approach to describing, predicting, and exploring the outcomes of children's school readiness and their transition into kindergarten. She works hard to acknowledge and reflect the perspectives of early childhood stakeholders (practitioners, parents, researchers, policy makers) in her research by applying creative methodologies to real-world phenomena. Lizzy earned her B.S. with highest honors in Psychology from the University of California, Davis, and her M.S. in Psychology at Portland State University. By participating in the SRCD State Policy Fellowship Program, Lizzy plans to learn the role of research in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of early learning policy designed to improve the lives of children.