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Introducing the 2019-2020 SRCD U.S. Policy Fellows

The Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) is pleased to announce the 2019-2020 SRCD U.S. Policy Fellows.

The SRCD U.S. Policy Fellowship Programs include placement opportunities in federal congressional offices as well as federal and state executive branch agencies. The purpose of the fellowship programs is to provide researchers with immersive opportunities to learn about policy development, implementation, and evaluation, and to use their research skills in child development to inform public policy at the federal or state level.

Learn more about the SRCD U.S. Policy Fellowship Programs

2019 - 2020 SRCD Federal Policy Fellows

SRCD Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellows



Krystal Bichay-Awadalla, Ph.D.

Dr. Krystal Bichay-Awadalla is a SRCD Federal 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 research and evaluation projects in the Head Start and Child Care portfolios at OPRE. Dr. Bichay-Awadalla is a developmental psychologist with a particular interest in the measurement of early care and education (ECE) quality, and understanding how contextual and child-level factors influence the development of social-emotional skills for children from low-income families. Dr. Bichay-Awadalla holds a Ph.D. and M.S. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Miami and a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Virginia. Prior to joining OPRE, Dr. Bichay-Awadalla was a Graduate Research Assistant at the University of Miami, where she was involved in developing and evaluating interventions with teachers regarding effectively managing challenging behaviors in the classroom, as well as improving teacher-child interaction quality. She is committed to using research to inform child and family programs and policies that support the well-being of children and families from low-income backgrounds. Read about Dr. Bichay-Awadalla's fellowship experience.



Ellen Litkowski, Ph.D.

Dr. Ellen Litkowski is a SRCD Federal 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. Litkowski's research investigates the underlying contextual and environmental factors that contribute to the development of children's school readiness skills, including executive function, early mathematics, and early literacy. She is interested in understanding how children's interactions with parents and teachers in their home and school environments can foster early learning and promote positive school transitions. Prior to joining OPRE, Dr. Litkowski was a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Purdue University in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, where she worked with Indiana's Department of Education to evaluate and redevelop Indiana's kindergarten readiness assessment. She also previously served in the Literacy AmeriCorps of Palm Beach County, where she provided reading instruction and teaching assistance in a Head Start center. Dr. Litkowski holds a B.S. in Biology and English from Duke University and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Georgia State University. Read about Dr. Litkowski's fellowship experience.



Emily Ross, Ph.D.

Dr. Emily C. Ross is a second year SRCD Federal 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 scientist whose focus at OPRE includes research and evaluation projects related to early childhood care and education, child care policy, and parenting/parent well-being to inform the work of ACF Offices of Head Start, Child Care, and the Children's Bureau. Dr. Ross holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Human Development and Social Policy from Northwestern University, and a B.Sc. 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 after 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 creation, translation, and communication of research to inform programs and policies that seek to promote the well-being of children and families. Read about Dr. Ross' fellowship experience.



Alayna Schreier, Ph.D.

Dr. Alayna Schreier is a SRCD Federal 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 at ASPE spans the early childhood and youth portfolios and includes work on trauma-informed care, childhood trauma, and child care. Prior to the SRCD Policy Fellowship, Dr. Schreier completed a National Institute on Drug Abuse T32 Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Division of Prevention and Community Research, Department of Psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine. Dr. Schreier's research has centered on at-risk and trauma-exposed children and families, with a specific focus on the contextual and systems-level factors that contribute to service system use, engagement, and mental health outcomes. Her research and evaluation work has been conducted in collaboration with Early Head Start and Head Start, Child Advocacy Centers, and community-based systems of care. As a graduate student, Dr. Schreier was a Doris Duke Fellow for the Promotion of Child Well-Being and a Head Start Scholar with the Administration for Children and Families. Dr. Schreier is a licensed clinical psychologist and received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She also holds a B.A. in Psychology and Women's Studies from the University of Michigan. Read about Dr. Schreier's fellowship experience.

SRCD Federal Congressional Policy Fellow



Parisa Parsafar, Ph.D.

Dr. Parisa Parsafar is a SRCD Federal Congressional Policy Fellow in the Office of Senator Chris Coons where she is currently working on education and health related policy issues. Dr. Parsafar is a developmental psychologist and received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Riverside (UCR). Her dissertation focused on the understanding of emotions in young children. At UCR, through an NSF grant, Dr. Parsafar collaborated with a professor of water economics and policy to investigate the role that children's negative emotions play in shaping their thoughts about water contamination and their tap and bottled water consumption behaviors. She earned her M.A. in Psychology at New York University and earned her B.A. in Psychology at the University of California, Davis. Read about Dr. Parsafar's fellowship experience.

2019 - 2020 SRCD State Policy Fellows

SRCD State Policy Pre-Doctoral Fellows



Kylie Bezdek

Kylie Bezdek is a SRCD State Policy Pre-Doctoral Fellow at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE). At DCDEE, Kylie is involved with strategic planning for projects that center around improving infant-toddler child care quality and social-emotional outcomes for children in the state of North Carolina. Kylie is a doctoral student in the Developmental Psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the mentorship of Dr. Margaret Burchinal. Her research primarily focuses on applying longitudinal methods to study the school-entry skills and teacher practices that predict optimal academic and social skill trajectories. Kylie has been involved with an evaluation of a local initiative to enhance the lives of children and families in the county, and a state-wide project examining program effects of state-funded preschool programs in rural counties in North Carolina. Prior to entering her doctoral program, Kylie received a B.S. in Psychology from the University of Louisiana and spent some time as a teaching assistant in a child care center. Through the SRCD Policy Fellowship, she hopes to learn how to communicate and apply her research findings to create sustainable programs that improve the lives of young children, especially those growing up in rural, low-income regions. Read about Kylie's fellowship experience.



Claudia Kruzik

Claudia Kruzik serves as a SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow in the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care where she is involved with efforts to support improved early education access and quality in the state. She is currently in working on a project related to revising the Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) curriculum quality standards as well as a project aimed at supporting early education and care (EEC) providers involved in the Community Preschool Partnership Initiative to increase pre-k access and quality within their communities. Meanwhile, Claudia is pursuing her doctorate in Applied Developmental and Educational Psychology at Boston College's Lynch School of Education and Human Development. Her interests lie at the intersection of neighborhood contexts, early educational experiences, and early social-emotional development. Read about Claudia's fellowship experience.



Ann Partee, Ed.M.

Ann Partee is a SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Office of Early Childhood. In this role, she works with VDOE staff and partners throughout the state to advance Virginia's system of early childhood care and education. Her current work is centered on supporting the planning and delivery of effective professional development for preschool teachers. Ann is also an Institute of Education Sciences pre-doctoral fellow at the Curry School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia (UVa). At UVa, Ann works with Dr. Amanda Williford and has been involved in various early childhood initiatives at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), including piloting a birth-5 comprehensive curriculum in Virginia. Prior to the doctoral program, Ann worked as a Research Assistant in the Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) lab under the direction of Dr. Stephanie Jones and as a first grade teacher. She earned an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a B.A. from the University of Texas at Austin. Read about Ann's fellowship experience.



Callie Silver, M.A.

Callie Silver is a SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow at the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD). At the GOECD, Callie is working on a roadmap/guide around the state's Pyramid Model implementation efforts. She is also working on data collection efforts around Illinois' response to legislation intended to curtail suspension and expulsion rates. Callie is a Ph.D. candidate in Community and Prevention Research in the University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC) Department of Psychology, working with Dr. Kate Zinsser. Her primary research interests within early childhood education include social-emotional learning, exclusionary discipline, and teacher mental health. In addition to her research at the Social-Emotional Teaching and Learning Lab at UIC, she has worked as an evaluation intern at a local nonprofit, Illinois Action for Children, and a summer research associate at the RAND Corporation. Prior to graduate school, Callie received a B.S. in Human Development with minors in Inequality Studies, Law & Society, and Policy Analysis & Management from Cornell University. Read about Callie's fellowship experience.

SRCD State Policy Post-Doctoral Fellows



Christina Padilla, Ph.D., M.P.P.

Dr. Christina Padilla is a SRCD State Policy Post-doctoral Fellow in the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Division of Learning. She completed a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology and a Master's in Public Policy at Georgetown, where her research focused on parenting, family engagement, early care and education, school readiness, and program evaluation. As a graduate student, Dr. Padilla was a Doris Duke Fellow for the Promotion of Child Well-being and completed a fellowship with the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families. In her dissertation studies, she evaluated whether and how Head Start could serve as a naturally-occurring parenting intervention as well as the conditions under which Head Start is most successful in doing so. Dr. Padilla has long been interested in learning about how research can be used to inform policy in order to improve the lives of children and families. She is very excited to learn about this on the ground at the state level in the District of Columbia, where she will be working on projects related to evaluating the effectiveness of the District's programming for families with young children, increasing parents' knowledge of programs and services, and improving early care and education access and quality. Prior to her graduate studies, Dr. Padilla worked at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development as a Post-bac Research Fellow, where she did research on topics related to children and families. She received a Bachelor's in Psychological and Brain Sciences from Johns Hopkins University. Read about Dr. Padilla's fellowship experience.



Sarah Prendergast, Ph.D.

Dr. Sarah Prendergast is a SRCD State Policy Post-doctoral Fellow in the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood (OEC). She received her Ph.D. in Applied Developmental Science at Colorado State University. Dr. Prendergast's expertise is in risk and resilience, school readiness, family functioning, prevention and implementation science, and program evaluation. At Colorado State University, Dr. Prendergast's research explored factors related to school readiness among children in Early Head Start and Head Start. Supported by a Doris Duke Fellowship for the Promotion of Child Well-Being, her dissertation research focused on the impacts of family income, parent educational attainment, and neighborhood characteristics in promoting school readiness and preventing child maltreatment. Throughout her doctoral studies, Dr. Prendergast also worked on several evaluation studies related to subsidized child care and a statewide community-planning effort for the primary prevention of child maltreatment. Her work at the OEC currently focuses on activities related to maltreatment prevention, promotion of school readiness, program evaluation, and data analysis projects. Dr. Prendergast is committed to conducting research on policies and programs that will ultimately improve the lives of children and families. Read about Dr. Prendergast's fellowship experience.