

Policy Fellowship: Notable Alum

We have some pretty impressive alum. With almost 250 and counting, we unfortunately can't feature them all here. Our team has compiled a sample of former fellows whose expertise spans occupations within the federal government, academia, research firms, philanthropic ventures, and beyond. We hope this helps prospective applicants and funders get a potential glimpse into what their own future could look like someday if they join us.



Natasha Cabrera (1996-1997), Professor, University of Maryland

[Natasha Cabrera](#) (1996-1997): SRCD Federal Fellow at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Dr. Cabrera is a Professor of Human Development at the University of Maryland. She conducts research on father involvement and children's social and cognitive development; adaptive and maladaptive factors related to parenting and cultural variation in ethnic minority families; and the mechanisms linking early experiences to children's school readiness. Dr. Cabrera has published in peer-reviewed journals on policy, methodology, theory, and the implications of fathering and mothering behaviors on child development in low-income minority families.



Stephanie Curenton, Professor and Executive Director at CEED (Center on the Ecology of Early Development)

[Stephanie Curenton](#) (2002-2003): SRCD Federal Fellow at the Office of Childcare (OCC). Dr. Stephanie M. Curenton is a professor at Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development and the executive director of the Center on the Ecology of Early Development (CEED). She is a developmental and community psychologist who studies the social, cognitive, language and literacy development of racially marginalized children within various ecological contexts, such as parent-child interactions, early childhood care and education, professional development interventions for the early childhood workforce, and related

state and federal policies designed to promote the positive development and health of young children.



Rachel Katz, Director, Research & Evaluation at Start Early

[Rachel Katz](#) (2018-2019): SRCD State Fellow at the Division of Early Intervention, Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Dr. Katz is an applied developmental scientist working at the nexus of research, policy, and practice and is responsible for providing strategic and thought leadership and engaging in cross-organizational and mission critical research and evaluation initiatives at Start Early including the Educare Learning Network (ELN) and the National Center on Parent, Family, & Community Engagement (NCPFCE). Furthermore, Dr. Katz has an extensive background in research and evaluation, developmental research methods, advanced statistical techniques, foundational theories of child development, and research-practice-policy integration. She conducts research exploring the influence of early experiences on development, including how development can be shaped by factors such as early childhood education, home visiting experiences, caregiver-child relationships, adverse childhood experiences, and sociocultural inequities.



Valerie Maholmes, Chief of the Pediatric Trauma and Critical Illness Branch at the NICHD

[Valerie Maholmes](#) (2003-2005): SRCDFellow at National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Dr. Maholmes is the chief of the Pediatric Trauma and Critical Illness Branch at the NICHD. In this capacity, she supports research and training in trauma, injury, and critical illness across the continuum of care. She serves on numerous NIH and federal interagency working groups to further the mission and goals of the branch. Prior to joining NICHD, she was a faculty member at the Yale School of Medicine in the Child Study Center, where she served in numerous capacities, including director of research and policy for the School Development Program. In this role, she provided an array of educational, clinical, and technical support services to schools in low-income neighborhoods and communities around the country to promote child health and well-being. In 1999, she was named the Irving B. Harris Assistant Professor of Child Psychiatry.



Sarah Oberlander, Social Science Analyst at HHS

[Sarah Oberlander](#) (2009-2011): SRCD Federal Fellow at the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Dr. Oberlander is currently a Social Science Analyst at HHS/ASPE, where her work focuses on interagency coordination, collaboration, and evidence related to youth and young adults, including teen pregnancy prevention.



Sangeeta Parikshak, Senior Social Science Analyst at HHS

[Sangeeta Parikshak](#) (2013-2016): SRCDFellow at the Office of Senator Whitehouse and at ACF in the Office of Head Start. Dr. Parikshak, a licensed clinical-child psychologist, is a Senior Social Science Analyst in the Office of Head Start at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In this position, she serves as the lead for early childhood behavioral health, providing leadership on mental health and substance use issues impacting staff, children and families in Head Start and across early childhood education programs. Prior to coming to ACF, Dr. Parikshak worked as a mental health practitioner and as a staffer for Senator Whitehouse’s behavioral health portfolio. She received her doctorate from the University of Kansas, completed her clinical internship at Children’s Hospital Boston, and her postdoc at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.



Deborah Phillips, Professor Emerita, Georgetown University

[Deborah Phillips](#) (1981-1982): SRCDFederal Fellow at the Office of Representative Miller. Deborah Phillips is Professor of Psychology and Associated Faculty in the Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University. She was the first Executive Director of the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine and served as Study Director for the Board's report: From Neurons to Neighborhoods. The Science of Early Child Development. She also served as President of the Foundation for Child Development, Director of Childcare Information Services at the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and Congressional Science Fellow (Society for Research in Child Development) on the staff of Congressman George Miller. Her research focuses on the developmental effects of early childhood programs for both typically developing children and those with special needs, including research on childcare, Head Start, and pre-Kindergarten programs.



Deborah Stipek, Ph.D., Dean, Stanford University

[Deborah Stipek Ph.D.](#) (1983-1984): is the Judy Koch Emeritus Professor of Education and the former I James Quillen Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. Her doctorate is from Yale University in developmental psychology. Her scholarship concerns instructional effects on children's achievement motivation and early childhood education. In addition to her scholarship, she served for five years on the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the National Academy of Sciences and is a member of the National Academy of Education. She also chaired the MacArthur Foundation Network on Teaching and Learning. She currently chairs the Heising-Simons Development and Research on Early Math Education Network and serves as a senior consultant to California Education Partners, working with districts to improve P-3 math instruction and alignment. Dr. Stipek served 10 of her 23 years at UCLA as Director of the Corinne Seeds University Elementary School and the Urban Education Studies Center. She joined the Stanford Graduate School of Education as Dean and Professor of Education in January 2001.



Jennifer "Jenn" Finders, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Science

[Jennifer "Jenn" Finders](#) (2020-2021): Dr. Finders is an Assistant Professor in Human Development and Family Science, and Policy Chair of the Center for Early Learning at Purdue University. Prior to joining Purdue in 2021, she served as a Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) State Policy Postdoctoral Fellow with the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning in Indiana. Her research focuses on the role of early care and education programs in promoting cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional learning among children from diverse backgrounds. She is particularly interested in evaluating policies and practices that aim to increase access to high-quality early learning experiences and reduce educational disparities. Dr. Finders also examines the extent to which foundational skills, including executive function and self-regulation, support children's school readiness and later academic achievement. She is passionate about bridging the research, practice, and policy gap.



Sara Vecchiotti, Executive Director, Couch Family Foundation

[Sara Vecchiotti](#) (2004-2006): currently Executive Director of the Couch Family Foundation. Previously, she was Vice President at the Foundation for Child Development responsible for program, grants, and communications. As Chief Operating Officer, at Lutheran Social Services of New York, she oversaw programming including early care and education, special education, and foster care services. At NYC's Administration for Children's Services, she held several leadership positions as Associate Commissioner for Child Care Operations, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Planning, and Analysis, and Director of Strategic Planning in the Division of Child Care and Head Start. Sara was a Society for Research in Child Development Congressional Fellow in the Office of Senator Jeff Bingaman and an Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. She was a Putting Children First Fellow at Teachers College, an Urban Education & Child Development Fellow at the Yale Child Study Center, and a Fellow at the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development & Social Policy. Sara has a doctorate in applied developmental psychology from Fordham University, a law degree from New York Law School, and is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College.