

Clark Paolini '25

Internship at the U.S. Department of Education Spring 2023

With the help of Byrne funds, I was able to spend this spring in Washington, DC interning for the Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) discretionary grant program within the U.S. Department of Education. This program provides support for implementing community schools in high-poverty areas, including my school district back home! Community schools provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students and their families in order to improve educational outcomes. The community schools movement emphasizes research-based interventions that are driven by students, families, and other members of the local community.

FSCS is preparing to conduct a national evaluation to determine the efficacy of their program. They are working with the Institute of Education Sciences and the policy research firm Mathematica to develop an econometric methodology which may include a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT). An RCT is a rigorous form of scientific experiment that randomly assigns participating subjects to the treatment or control groups in order to measure the effectiveness of a new intervention in a way that reduces the bias of confounding factors. During my time at FSCS, I assisted with providing technical assistance to grantees which will prepare the program for the national evaluation. This included communicating data collection and reporting requirements for 14 implementation indicators. This also included extensive work on developing logic models. Logic models are a visual representation of the theory of action of a long-term project. Research has shown that developing high-quality logic models that describe 1) The resources available to a community 2) The activities and strategies supported by funding and 3) Short and long-term indicators for success improves the overall cohesion of these essential components and ensures that project evaluation accurately reflects the goals and desired outcomes of the project. Developing logic models and incorporating them into the grant monitoring process is an important early step in evaluating the efficacy of the FSCS grant program.

At the end of the internship I was able to attend the 2023 National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference hosted by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to preparing materials for and speaking during several presentations by the U.S. Department of Education, I was able to meet school staff, nonprofit workers, and other local leaders who are driving the community schools movement on the ground.

During my time at the Department of Education, I was able to learn about quantitative and qualitative measures of success, speak and work directly with grantees, host a series of logic model technical assistance workshops, and present original findings to Deputy Assistant Secretaries on the strategies employed by FSCS FY22 grantees. The experience improved my communication and professional skills and taught me about the roles that research and evaluation play in policy implementation. It also gave me key insights into the role that the government is

playing in a social movement that directly benefited my high school experience! Thank you so much to the Byrne family for giving me the opportunity to use my applied mathematics skills to contribute to my community.