



SERC'S 2015-16 ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT



STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

EQUITY | EXCELLENCE | EDUCATION

STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER PROGRAM REPORT 2015-2016

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SERC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2015-2016 marked the second fiscal year for the SERC Board of Directors. The Board was created in a 2014 statute establishing SERC as a quasi-public agency.

The Board held a retreat on February 29, 2016, to discuss potential partners and future goals for SERC. This included the review of a draft Board of Directors Strategic Plan.

Other developments presented to the Board in 2015-2016 included:

- The creation of the SERC Foundation, which received 501(c)(3) status in June 2015, and the appointment of a separate Board of Directors for the Foundation. SERC Board member Jeffrey Leake was appointed chair of the SERC Foundation Board.
- SERC's drafting of an agency sustainability plan, which the Board reviewed in November 2015 and January 2016 with suggestions for further revisions.
- SERC's submitted documents as required by statute, the assistive technology sharing programs study and the P-20 feasibility study. SERC also added to its website the statutorily required calendar of learning and training opportunities.
- SERC meetings with the Commissioner of Education and legislative leaders, including SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady's testimony before the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus.
- SERC's hiring of a fiscal and finance officer administrator, Derek Stubbs, and appointment of a new general counsel, Michelle Weaver, JD.

The year culminated in the process to select a new permanent SERC Executive Director. On April 26, 2016, the Board voted to move forward with a nationwide search. The final decision, appointing Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady, was made effective on October 3, 2016.

On September 30, 2015, SERC Interim Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and SERC Foundation Director Wendy Simmons presented a three-hour diversity training to the CT State Board of Education and the Leadership Cabinet of the CT State Department of Education.

SERC has provided State Board of Education members and the State Department of Education Leadership Team with numerous resources on diversity. SERC will continue to support the State Board of Education with their five-year comprehensive plan: *Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students*.



MESSAGE FROM SERC'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Connecticut colleagues and friends,

As the newly appointed Executive Director of the State Education Resource Center, it is my honor and privilege to present SERC's 2015-2016 annual program report.

When I joined SERC in 2003, the agency was about to embark on a years-long intentional journey of discovery and reflection about the impact of institutionalized racism in education. We examined the implications of racism on the academic, social, and emotional lifelong outcomes of all of our students. As a result of this purposeful endeavor, SERC developed "Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach." I am proud to be a member of the team that contributed to such a thought-provoking and reflective publication, which serves as SERC's blueprint for our equity efforts. SERC's dedication to this work helps support committed educators becoming culturally responsive and skilled in reflective practice, and families and communities being invited as true collaborators.

We have been supporting special education since 1969, when SERC was founded as the Special Education Resource Center. A 2005 statute changed our name to the State Education Resource Center to demonstrate how best practices in special education could apply to general education. Today, SERC remains Connecticut's go-to resource on areas such as specific learning disabilities/dyslexia, access to a Least Restrictive Environment for learning, and teaching and learning strategies for students with disabilities.

SERC continues to evolve after becoming a quasi-public agency under Public Act No. 14-212. Since I accepted the interim executive director position in December 2014, we have streamlined our operations while remaining committed to our leadership in equity and excellence in education. I have been grateful for the opportunity to work in collaboration with our Board of Directors, established as part of SERC's Public Act, toward the same vision for our schools.

As a former early childhood educator, I am also dedicated to enhancing the educational experience for our youngest learners. Our talented SERC staff has integrated culturally relevant practices, language learning, and literacy for early childhood programs to help achieve equity for all children as they enter school.

And finally, as an immigrant Black-Latina woman, I am well aware of the challenges that remain—in our schools, in our communities, and in our nation—to fully achieve equity and realize equal opportunity for all. With partners like you, SERC can help achieve great things for our children in this little corner of the world. Thank you for taking this journey with us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ingrid M. Canady".

Ingrid M. Canady
Executive Director

FOCUS ON EQUITY

Dismantling Systemic Racism Conference

On May 12, 2016, SERC partnered with the SERC Foundation to offer a conference to advance racial equity in education. “Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2016 Conference on Race, Education & Success” was designed to support a transformational approach to equity that ensures all students get what they need to be successful.

Approximately 300 educators, community and business leaders, families, and others throughout the state gathered in New Haven to hear from Glenn Singleton (pictured right) and more than 25 other speakers across 18 breakout sessions focused on this important topic. The day, co-sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the Greater New Haven Community Foundation, the Anti-Defamation League, and CT Parent Power, addressed the multifaceted ways in which race and systemic racism hinder our students’ opportunities for success in academics, social development, health, and family engagement. Participants were able to learn about the work of individuals committed to supporting students of color and engage in activities on transforming systems to support an excellent and equitable education for all.



Glenn Singleton presented the morning keynote, “A Courageous Conversation About Race and Its Impact on Achieving Equity in Schools.” At lunch we heard from Carl Williams, who presented “Criminal Justice and Systems of Social Control.” Breakout sessions included:

A.M. Concurrent Breakouts:

1. Civil Rights and Equal Access to Educational Opportunity – Presenter: Cheryl A. Sharp, J.D.
2. Student Voice for Equity: A Tool for Positive Change and Collaborative School Improvement
Presenter: Nicole M. Vitale
3. Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway: Talking about Race in the Classroom – Presenters: Joan Edwards and Michelle Pincince
4. Culturally Responsive Approaches Along the Talent Development Continuum – Presenters: Kim Audet, Anne McKernan and Charlene Tate Nichols
5. Implicit Bias: A Factor in the School-to-Prison Pipeline Reflected in the Intersection of Race and Juvenile Justice – Presenter: Leon Smith, J.D.
6. They Made It! Now What? Supporting the Success of our African-American and Latino College Students – Presenter: Reginald Simmons, Ph.D.

7. Using the Dual Capacity Building Framework to Engage Culturally Linguistically Diverse Families – Presenters: Judy Carson, Ph.D., and Nitza M. Diaz
8. Healthcare Access and Educational Performance: The Frequently Ignored Connection and Its Impact – Presenters: Darcey Cobbs-Lomax and Collette Fearon
9. Absent in the Classroom: Challenges, Concerns and Solutions for our Native American Students – Presenter: Beth Regan

P.M. Concurrent Breakouts:

10. “I Don’t See Color”: The Subtlety of Racism on College Campuses – Presenter: Enobong Hannah Branch

11. Trump This!: Surfacing and Engaging Multiple Racial Perspectives – Presenters: Beth Brunet, Ivelise Velazquez and Janet N.Y. Zarchen

12. A Facilitated Conversation with Connecticut’s State Board of Education Chair and Vice-Chair
Presenters: Theresa Hopkins-Staten, J.D. and Allan B. Taylor, J.D.

13. Role of the Mentor for Young People in Mitigating the Effects of Racism – Presenter: Robert Felder

14. Discipline and Disproportionality: Suspension and Expulsions in Connecticut - Know the Data
Presenters: Leigh Higgins, Ed.D. and Kim Traverso



15. Proud to be Me! Racial Socialization: A Family Process to Promote Positive Self-Image
Presenter: Paquita Jarman-Smith

16. Setting the Stage for Courageous Action: Where Do I Begin? – Presenter: Ingrid M. Canady

17. Supporting the Black Liberation Movement / New Civil Rights Movement – Presenter: Carl Williams

18. Everyday School Leaders, Leading Courageous Conversations About Race and Equity in Your Schools and Classrooms – Presenter: Glenn E. Singleton



FOCUS ON FAMILIES

Family engagement refers to the ongoing, strengths-based and goal-directed partnerships between staff and families. These partnerships are reciprocal and culturally responsive in nature, and support what is best for children and families both individually and collectively. Family engagement is a shared and continuous process of communication and decision-making focusing on the healthy learning and development of the child both in and out of school. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships is used as a structure for implementing effective, research-based strategies and practices for adult leadership development (CSPD, 2016).

Parent Trust

Research shows that parent engagement has a significant positive impact on child outcomes. The Parent Trust Fund initiative provides the tools for parents to take leadership roles in improving children's health, safety, and learning outcomes. More than 900 Connecticut parents and their children are served annually under the program.

The goals of the 2016-2017 Parent Trust Fund Grant are to:

- promote culturally responsive practices and diverse leadership in communities throughout Connecticut so that it is more representative of the population;
- increase awareness of the issues that matter to families and the important role they can play as advocates and change agents;
- encourage communities to expand the range of parent leadership training opportunities in their continuum of services;
- expand the number of communities offering parent leadership training; and
- enhance collaboration and linkages among parent leadership training sponsors to create an integrated system of sustainable civic involvement within communities and across the state.

SERC and the CT Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC) administer the Parent Trust Fund through their partnership with CSDE and in collaboration with the Parent Trust Fund Collaborative Management Team (CMT). SERC/CT PIRC lead the process to review the proposals and reward grants under the fund.

In 2015-2016, 25 Connecticut organizations were funded and served approximately 65 towns, which provided approximately 41 diverse programs in English and Spanish. Each of these training graduates learn to work with school, community, and state leaders and graduate from the program better prepared to advocate for their children, volunteer in their community, serve on nonprofit boards, lead parent-teacher associations, or run for public office.

The most common programs in Connecticut supported by the Parent Trust Fund include the nationally recognized Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), created by the Commission on Children; the University of Connecticut-sponsored People Empowering People (PEP); and the Center

for School Change's Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE), which provides parents with new skills, supporting both immediate and long-term civic and social outcomes. A program evaluation revealed that 73% of PLTI graduates engaged in advocacy work and 52% in community organizing. Of Parent SEE graduates, more than one-third ended up serving on school, district, regional, or state committees.

The CMT is a public-private partnership that includes representatives from the Connecticut Center for School Change; the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors; the Connecticut State Department of Education; SERC/CT PIRC; the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund; and the University of Connecticut College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, Department of Extension.

Culturally Relevant School-Family-Partnerships

Family and community engagement marks one of the pillars of SERC's efforts to close opportunity gaps as it has a significant positive impact on child outcomes. Ultimately, our goal in supporting schools in this area is not just to increase engagement but also to help build true partnerships in education among schools, families, and communities.

In 2015-2016, SERC continued to support school leaders engaging in courageous conversations that challenge beliefs and assumptions about families. This involves facilitating, increasing, and encouraging dialogue among educators and culturally, linguistically diverse families to help reshape schools' measure of parent involvement—i.e., much more broadly than helping with homework or showing up at a school event. SERC has helped to drive schools to view engagement and partnership through a deeper, culturally competent lens.

Dual Capacity-Building Framework

SERC, along with the CSDE, worked to advance the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships in Connecticut. The framework, developed by Karen Mapp (2013), helps school districts build the capacity of educators and families to work collaboratively to help students succeed. Historically, these partnerships have not been well-formed because of an underlying assumption that educators and families already possess the knowledge, skills, and belief systems to implement successful school-family-community partnerships. Without the necessary training, these partnerships often fail; rather than promoting equal and culturally relevant partnerships, they default to creating family engagement strategies considered a “one-time deal.”



On September 25, 2015, the CSDE collaborated with SERC to hold a major conference, “High-Impact Strategies for Family-School Partnerships: Bringing the Dual Capacity-Building Framework to Connecticut.” The sold-out conference featured nationally recognized leaders in family engagement, including Anne T. Henderson and Dr. Patricia Edwards. CSDE Commissioner Dianna Wentzell used the event to announce the new Commissioner's Roundtable on Family Engagement, now chaired by SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady

A broad swath of education stakeholders attended the conference, including teachers and administrators, families, and community providers. To encourage broad participation, SERC presented prizes, donated by major sponsor Scholastic Inc., to the most active conference Twitter users.

SERC also offered learning offerings for families, including:

- What Is Assistive Technology and How Can it Help My Child? (separate elementary and secondary school sessions)
- Building Individualized Education Programs (IEPs): An Educational Review Process for Parents
- An Introduction to MAPS with Parents: Using Student Hopes and Dreams to Plan for a Bright, Inclusive Future
- Supporting Every Child: How Parents Can Engage in SRBI
- Development of an IEP Rubric for Parents
- Culturally Relevant Family Engagement with Families of Students with Disabilities

SERC's professional learning offerings on family engagement for educators in 2015-2016 included:

- Family literacy sessions from the CT K-3 Literacy Initiative
- Welcoming Walkthrough Overview
- Culturally Responsive Collaboration with Diverse Families
- Let's talk about Special Education in Connecticut: A Community Conversation with Dr. Isabelina Rodriguez
- Implementation of Welcoming Walkthroughs under the State Personnel Development Grant and School Climate Transformation Grant; contracts with districts such as Bolton and Cromwell



Parental Involvement Recognition Awards

SERC presented eight Connecticut parents with Parental Involvement Recognition Awards at the fourth annual ceremony at the State Capitol on November 19, 2015. Schools and program coordinators from across Connecticut were asked to nominate parents who have shown active involvement in their child's or children's school or community; support of their local school and contributions to high-quality education for all children; evidence of their ability to make a difference in their local school or community; and dedication and advocacy to ensure equity for all parents and their children.

SERC Consultant Veronica Marion and Director Dr. Wendy Simmons presented the awards. Participants included: Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director of the then-CT Commission on Children; Theresa Hopkins-Staten, vice chair of the CT State Board of Education; and Andrew Lachman, Executive Director of the CT Center for School Change.

The ceremony coincided with National Parental Involvement Day, launched by St. Louis-based Project Appleseed. SERC and CT PIRC sponsored the Connecticut awards in collaboration with the Commission on Children and with support from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund.



SERC Consultant Veronica Marion and Theresa Hopkins-Staten, vice chair of the CT State Board of Education

SUPPORTING ALL ABILITIES

SLD/Dyslexia Initiative Highlights

SERC expanded its SLD/Dyslexia initiative in 2015-16 following a start-up year of groundwork in 2014-15 in response to PL 14-39, which established SLD/Dyslexia as a primary special education exceptionality in Connecticut. In collaboration with CSDE, SERC created an SLD/Dyslexia survey in August 2015 and disseminated it to local education agencies (LEAs), private approved schools, and the regional educational service centers (RESCs). The survey elicited information about educators' current knowledge base relative to SLD/Dyslexia and their assessment and instructional practices. It also asked special education administrators to share promising practices in their respective schools related to SLD/Dyslexia assessment and/or structured literacy instruction practices.

A total of 102 responses from Connecticut schools identified two areas of priority need. The first was guidance on assessment protocols and procedures for appropriately identifying students with SLD/Dyslexia. The second priority was direction on research-based approaches or programs that encompass the scope of structured reading instruction and that are appropriate for students with SLD/Dyslexia. The survey results also highlighted promising practices in three CT districts.

The priority areas identified in the needs assessment were addressed in a statewide conference, the CT Forum for Promising Practices in SLD/Dyslexia held on December 1, 2015, and attended by a full audience of educators, administrators, and family members. The three LEAs identified in the survey agreed to present their promising practices, which focused on general education and special education collaboration in assessment and instruction, and systems change efforts. Additionally, representatives from the Orton-Gillingham method, the Wilson Reading System, and Lindamood-Bell shared their respective instructional approaches. Individuals participating in the conference were able to compare the approaches presented and determine if any were appropriate for the specialized learning needs of their students with SLD/Dyslexia.

Training materials from the CT Forum were subsequently archived on SERC's SLD/Dyslexia website, which was accessed by 2,311 visitors in 2015-2016. In conference evaluations, 85% of responding individuals rated the content and presentation as good or very good; 82% reported that they had learned new instructional approaches for students with SLD/Dyslexia; and 87% anticipated they would have an opportunity to apply what they had learned in the near future.



SERC leads TFI data collection

Thanks to SERC leadership, Connecticut is on track in its collection of School-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) data.

The TFI is a new self-assessment intended to provide reliable data on a school's implementation of school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. SERC staff have helped schedule and facilitate the TFIs with schools undertaking PBIS through the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG) project.



*Sarah L. Jones
Project Officer*

The five-year SCTG is intended to assist state agencies in developing and expanding their statewide systems of support for schools implementing a multi-tiered behavioral framework, including PBIS. SERC's Sarah L. Jones is the project officer for Connecticut's SCTG in partnership with CSDE and the University of Connecticut's Center for Behavioral Education & Research (CBER).

The goal under the grant is for 100 TFIs to be completed in Connecticut schools during the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years. SERC met that target in 2015-2016 and is on track to do so again in 2016-2017.

The work involves approximately a half-day consultation with each participating school. A SERC consultant meets with school team members and helps walk them through their assessment of 45 indicators.

In 2015-2016, SERC facilitated 77 of the TFIs while consultants from regional educational service centers (RESCs) conducted the rest. SERC issued a follow-up report to each school with commendations and recommendations, and have assisted the schools in developing an action plan to address areas in need of improvement. These areas help inform the planning of SERC's professional learning opportunities for the following year.

For example, one common gap in PBIS implementation found in the 2015-2016 TFIs was a lack of plans to engage other stakeholders, including students, families, and community providers. As a result, SCTG schools were among expected participants in a subsequent full-day session planned in partnership with CSDE called "Building Relationships with Families for Student Success."

Another recommended area of improvement was making behavioral expectations more specific to particular actions. So in 2016-2017, SERC will offer a professional learning opportunity on classroom practices: embedding the language of expectations into praise and correction.

Finally, the TFI results guide the state's overall approach to PBIS. The data are shared with CSDE and CBER for collaborative planning. The training provided to the PBIS trainers is adjusted according to any trends in the data.

Connecticut was one of 12 states awarded the five-year grant under SCTG in October 2014.

TFIs By-the-Numbers, 2015-2016

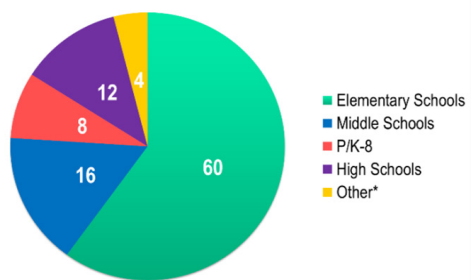
100 SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventories facilitated in Connecticut schools during the 2015-2016 school year

75 Schools were located in a CSDE designated Alliance District

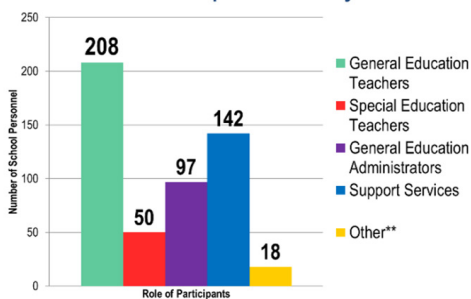
28 Schools are designated as Commissioner's Network, Focus, or Review Schools

515 School personnel received technical assistance through SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory implementation

Schools Conducting SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory by Grade Level 2015-16



Participation in Technical Assistance for SCTG SWPBIS TFI Implementation by Role



By visiting schools that have been trained in PBIS and conducting the School-wide PBIS (SWPBIS) Tiered Fidelity Inventory, SERC assists schools in evaluating their progress, guiding their implementation, and developing action plans for improvement. The SWPBIS TFI is a tool that schools can use to efficiently assess their implementation of PBIS.

By measuring the core functions across all three tiers, schools receive

- *A snapshot of their implementation fidelity; and*
- *An action plan for addressing areas in need of improvement.*

Completion of the TFI provides a series of scores that indicate the extent to which the core structures of each tier are in place.

The goals of the SCTG grant are to:

- Enhance and deliver high-quality professional learning to participating schools around the development of a multi-tiered behavioral framework (MTBF).
- Expand the cadre of trained professionals in Connecticut by building their capacity to deliver effective, meaningful support to schools and districts around the systemic installation of an MTBF.
- Align statewide improvement efforts focusing on school climate.

Leadership

'Enhancing Instructional Programs within Schools: Training in Special Education Administration for Principals or Other Administrators'

This annual series within SERC's Leadership Initiative brings school administrators and leaders together to learn and share their knowledge and expertise. Each of the seven sessions, held throughout the school year, cover a different topic.

The 2015-2016 cohort included participants representing the roles of Assistant Principal, School Psychologist, Special Education Teacher, Department Leader, and CSDE/Bureau of Special Education Consultant. Topics include: Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), Responsible Inclusive Practices, Educational Benefit, Special Education Law, and Differentiation Strategies. The participants used Schoology as their platform to disseminate and maintain resources as well as contribute to discussion threads.

Another seven-day series was scheduled for the 2016-2017 year to continue impacting special education leadership within schools.



SPDG: A Review

2015-2016 marked the final year of Connecticut's initial five-year State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). The project works toward the implementation of Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) to improve student outcomes in both literacy and behavior, using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).



*Michelle LeBrun-Griffin
Consultant*

Through 26.5 days of professional learning and technical assistance, the program supported/assisted:

- 77 schools
- 38 districts represented, 39% of which were alliance districts
- 38,597 students impacted from improved teaching practices and learning environments in participating SPDG schools. Of this total, there were:
 - 13% were students with disabilities
 - 7% were English learners
 - 32% were students of color

Glen Martin Associates (GMA), a research and consulting firm, evaluated Connecticut's SPDG program throughout the five years. In 2015-2016, the data it collected included a technical assistance feedback survey (in spring 2014, 2015, and 2016), professional development evaluation forms (from spring 2012 to spring 2016), and a school administrator feedback survey (each spring from 2013 to 2016).

According to GMA's final evaluation, the first three cohorts showed 35 percent growth toward implementation of SRBI. The schools showed 22 percent overall growth in effective schoolwide behavior support as measured by the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET).

Outcomes showed the three cohorts of schools that had completed training and technical assistance made an average 35% gain on the SRBI Self-Assessment, an average growth in fidelity of 22% as measured by the SET, and an average gain of 10% on the Literacy Evaluation Tool. Cohorts of schools also showed a 15% decline in office discipline referrals (ODRs) and a 27% decline in suspensions/expulsions.

Nearly three-quarters of building leaders reported the CT SPDG was well-aligned with CSDE initiatives, "suggesting the relevance of the work for their schools," GMA determined. The "findings suggest that state-level capacity was built and strengthened during the roll-out of the CT SPDG, and that considerable progress was made over five years."

At least 85 percent of surveyed participants indicated they had their learning needs met during each professional learning session.

SPDG: A Review (continued)

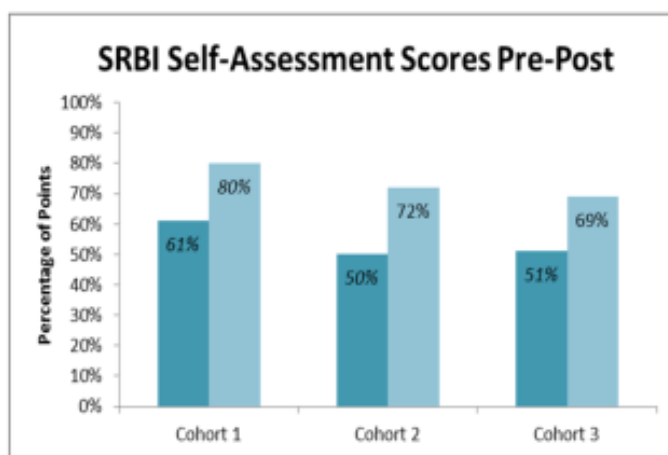
How did SPDG meet its three primary goals?

Goal 1: Increased state-level capacity to provide leadership, professional development, coaching and support to schools

“Over the course of the project, CT SPDG leaders remained agile in their approach to balancing the input of state-level partners... [and] ensuring the readiness of SERC and RESC consultants in working with schools,” GMA wrote.

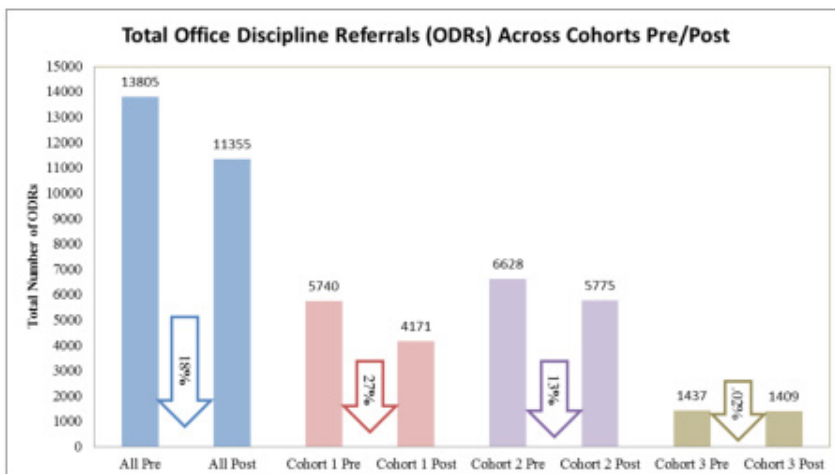
Goal 2: Increased number of schools implementing a scientific research-based core program to support the CT Core Standards and PBIS

Schools used a self-assessment tool to measure their level of implementation, represented by the bars.



Goal 3: Improved academic achievement and behavior

To monitor their behavioral goal, participating schools used the School-wide Information System (SWIS) to monitor behavioral violations that warranted a referral to the office. In cohorts 1-3, referrals were reduced by an average of 18%. The most dramatic drop occurred with the first cohort.



For the academic goal:

- 56% of students who had received targeted Tier II reading progressed to reading level
- 49% of students with intensive Tier III reading intervention progressed to a less intensive level or were on grade level by the end of the school year
- Six schools from cohort 2 met targets for implementation, and at-risk and high-risk students demonstrated reading literacy improvements across the year

Among the targets reached include the percentage of SPDG schools that:

- demonstrated year-over-year improvement in ODRs for major behavioral infractions;
- have major-infraction ODRs per 100 students per school day that are lower than the national median;
- do not have disproportionate representation of students of color with major ODRs;
- have fewer than 5% of students with six or more major and minor referrals per year; and
- demonstrated year-over-year improvement in out-of-school suspensions.

Coaching

The SPDG leadership teams defined a model of “transformational coaching” to be used by the technical assistance providers (TAPs). This model includes approaches for building relationships, observation and analysis, effective communication, facilitating learning activities, and strategic planning. SERC and its partners created an online learning module, “Coaching for Transformational Systems Change in Schools.”

On November 30 and December 1, 2015, SPDG’s TAPs participated in the workshop “The Art of Coaching for Transformational Systems Change” with coaching expert Elena Aguilar. “Coaching works as a vehicle to build equitable schools,” Aguilar told the participants. It “creates space for reflection that assists educators to make decisions that further learning and achievement of every child.”



Technology in Education (TIE) Initiative

The Technology in Education Initiative provides training, technical assistance, and materials on educational technologies and accessible educational materials that facilitate the teaching and learning process and lead to greater student achievement.

The initiative serves general and special education teachers and administrators, student support services professionals, paraeducators, and family members. Programs range from awareness-level introductions of a wide array of learning tools (“low-tech” to “mid-tech” to “high-tech”) and strategies that are applicable in any learning context to ongoing, in-depth professional learning opportunities designed to build capacity within schools.

In 2015-2016, SERC consultants provided training and technical assistance to a number of districts implementing assistive technology (AT) and accessible education materials (AEM). School districts reviewed the practices through a multidisciplinary AT team that was responsible for considering and implementing AT and AEM for students. Teams developed an AT inventory and often discovered they had many more AT resources that were not optimally utilized. Through guided facilitation and review of data, the teams made the connections between AT, AEM, and the new generation assessments (SBAC & the CT Alternate Assessment) and appreciated the significance of documenting AT & AEM in IEPs.



Other 2015-2016 highlights of the Technology in Education Initiative:

- The Assistive Technology Corner in the SERC Library provided information and demonstration on AT devices and software to patrons ranging from educators to family members and young adults.
- Consultants provided information and assisted high school staff in deepening their understanding of AT and how it supports individuals with disabilities to access, participate in, and make progress in education.
- SERC consultants provided demonstration and information on a variety of low- to high-tech AT devices to educators attending the Albertus Magnus reading program who wanted to learn about AT devices, iPad apps, and Google apps to support the literacy needs for students with Dyslexia. After the demonstration, the participating educators stated they would share the information with colleagues and try the apps with their students.

Secondary Transition

SERC's direction in secondary transition during 2015-2016 was outlined by two new transition laws: Connecticut Public Act 15-209 and the federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA).

PA 15-209 states that beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, and each school year thereafter, the CT State Department of Education (CSDE) shall provide the Transition Bill of Rights to boards of education for distribution at a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting to parents of children receiving special education in grades 6 through 12. This Transition Bill of Rights for parents of students receiving special education document helps parents and students understand a student's rights related to getting an education and other important issues regarding the transition to life after high school. All of SERC's secondary transition professional



learning sessions for educators and families were focused on ensuring these rights for students. Both English & Spanish versions of the Bill of Rights can be found on SERC's and CSDE's websites.

WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. A major goal of this act is to improve employment services

for individuals with disabilities. In Connecticut, SERC has been working very closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services/Department of Rehabilitation Services (BRS/DORS) and CSDE to assist districts in embedding pre-employment transition services into transition programs. The pre-employment services may include: job exploration counseling; work-based learning experiences (including internships); career counseling; work readiness; and instruction in self-advocacy/self-determination skills.

SERC provided a number of professional learning sessions during 2015-2016 to inform families and educators about the new legislation and its effect on the education and transition services provided to students with disabilities. In addition, SERC supports and assists in the facilitation of the State Transition Task Force & the CT Transition Community of Practice, two large stakeholder groups that guide, collaborate on, and develop transition-related documents to support successful student outcomes.

In-Person & Online at the SERC Library

The SERC Library offers ways to stay connected and engaged with the latest developments in education through a wide range of resources and services that support teaching and learning.

In 2015-2016, the Library launched the EBSCOhost Discovery software platform. The new online interface provides access to the full complement of educational research database subscriptions available through the Library in addition to many other open source full-text articles. This platform is the one most often employed by colleges and universities, and thus is familiar and relatively easy to use among SERC Library patrons and the education community at large. It includes the most recent research findings in the fields of education and social services.



Other Library Updates

Throughout the year, in-person visitors discovered firsthand a steady growth in new acquisitions across three popular and in-demand areas of the Library's unique and specialized collections—namely Tests, Instructional Materials, and Books on current education-related topics. The Library focused on acquiring resources on core content themes, such as PreK-Grade 3 literacy resources and social-emotional learning, as well as various inventories and assessments addressing key areas such as functional life skills; executive functioning; and receptive, expressive, and social communication skills in children/youth with special needs.

The SERC Library News, sent via email, regularly reached over 1,000 patrons with Library and SERC updates such as new resource acquisitions and upcoming learning opportunities.

Patrons continued to access resource LibGuides through the Library webpage. The LibGuides, prepared by Library staff, are uniquely comprised of focused and researched content on a current topic in education with the purpose of informing and enhancing learning endeavors.

One of the 2015-2016 LibGuides focused on Specific Learning Disabilities/Dyslexia, collaboratively developed with core staff at the CT State Department of Education and SERC. Another covered STEM/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, plus Art). Both provided high-interest, comprehensive resource information. Shortly after their publication, each had an online readership in the hundreds and growing.



SERC IN-DISTRICT

Districts across the state contract with SERC for ongoing support to staff within the school environment.

District-Level Buy-in Highlights Supports for North Haven

2015-2016 marked the fourth year SERC supported North Haven Public Schools in its district-wide implementation of Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI).

The process of implementation began gradually, on the elementary level. As those students entered middle school, and eventually high school, implementation has become aligned across the town's six schools. Each school has participated in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training, and SERC is still providing booster sessions.



Matt Spar, Consultant

"All the schools have come a long way," says SERC Consultant Matthew Spar (pictured right).

Key to the schools' success has been consistent involvement on the district level, Spar says. This is more than providing the funds for professional development and later determining how to continue the effort afterward or whether to implement particular recommendations. In North Haven, district leadership has been available throughout the process.

The North Haven Public Schools superintendent, director of pupil services, and curriculum coordinator attended some of the professional learning opportunities and held quarterly meetings at central office. This not only reflected their support for the process, it made communication easier.

"Everyone's getting that same message that things are going successfully," Spar says.

Professional learning is most effective with time, engagement at all levels, and strong relationships.

Thomaston: Literacy Supports Offer Flexibility for Teachers & Students

In 2015, the Reading & Writing Project at Columbia University's Teachers College released a new unit of study for teaching reading in kindergarten through Grade 5. SERC worked with Thomaston Public Schools over 20 days in 2015-2016 to help the schools implement this reading unit, as well as writing units that Teachers College had released over the previous two years.

SERC's Janet N.Y. Zarchen (pictured right) worked with kindergarten through Grade 3 teachers at Black Rock School and Grades 4-6 at Thomaston Center School. (Seventh and eighth-grade teachers from Thomaston Middle School joined as well.) Zarchen consulted on the reading and writing units with each grade-level team up through fifth grade. Educators for Grades 6-8 met as a group on the writing unit.



*Janet N.Y. Zarchen
Consultant*

Zarchen explains to the teachers why she recommends the Teachers College units.

"It shows a lot of respect for the student," Zarchen says. "It offers them choice, it offers them voice, it's tailored almost to their [individual] needs."

The reading unit offers ways to support inquiry and collaboration in the classroom. The Writing Pathways unit is organized around opinion, information, and narrative writing. Teachers have reported to Zarchen that since implementation, students seem to enjoy writing more.

"That's a wonderful thing for students, but it also respects the teachers," Zarchen says. "It assumes the teachers have a certain level of knowledge and professionalism."

The district's curriculum director, who has since moved to assistant superintendent at New Milford Public Schools, has tapped SERC to support implementation of the units in New Milford.

Implementing Co-teaching in Simsbury

SERC continued to work with districts on implementing co-teaching in the classroom throughout the 2015-2016 school year.

By definition, co-teaching is a service delivery model for including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Along with the general education teacher, a co-teacher may be a special education teacher, reading or math specialist, a teacher of English learners, or a student support services specialist such as a speech and language pathologist.

When implemented with fidelity with a variety of teachers, this model can also be effective in addressing the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of all students. Co-teaching provides a lower student-teacher ratio, which allows for intensified instruction and optimizes student learning. SERC's training and technical assistance focus on six different approaches to co-teaching, from one teacher observing to parallel teaching or team teaching.

In 2015-2016, SERC completed a two-year contract with Simsbury Public Schools to launch co-teaching as an instructional practice on the middle school level. The effort was designed to support a continuum of services for students with disabilities at the Henry James Memorial School.

The work at the Henry James Memorial School included:

- a job-embedded professional learning series in which the co-teaching teams received two full days of training on the co-teaching practices followed by a series of observations and debrief sessions to strengthen the partnerships
- technical assistance sessions with the school principal and Special Education Department leader to plan faculty meeting presentations and identify target areas for the school to address to build sustainability
- a session for district paraeducators to build their knowledge and capacity

A final celebration highlighted the key successes that took place during the two years. SERC has subsequently followed up to support the school's continued use of co-teaching within their continuum of services for students with disabilities.

SERC also had co-teaching contracts in Danbury and Oxford serving dozens of teachers. Partners from both districts later participated in a panel presentation in a SERC statewide professional learning opportunity on co-teaching.

For more information on co-teaching at SERC, go to <http://www.ctserc.org/index.php/co-teaching>.

Student Voice: Giving Students the Last Word

Finally, SERC's efforts recognize the influence of student voice on shaping a more inclusive climate in schools and classrooms. Research shows that when students feel authentically engaged and are heard at school, they are more likely to realize their full academic potential and feel like active members of their school community. By working with SERC, districts/organizations can gain insight about the positive impact that Student Voice has on learning, academic motivation, and the school improvement process. Districts/organizations also learn skills to partner with, listen to, and learn from students in order to enhance their school experience and cultivate an environment of equity. In 2015-2016, SERC worked with a number of school districts to promote student voice through student focus groups. The focus groups represent a diverse range of student perspectives, and they consider such topics as positive aspects of the school community, how teachers build relationships with students, how teachers keep students engaged, how diversity is recognized within the school community, and suggestions for improvement. The data collected is shared with administration to help include student perspective when making future decisions. Additional work in these districts included staff and parent/family focus groups as well.

SERC looks forward to continuing to promote student voice to help ensure an equitable and excellent education for all.



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