



STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

EQUITY | EXCELLENCE | EDUCATION

2016-2017 Annual Program Report



STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER 2016-17 PROGRAM REPORT

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SERC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

SERC's Board of Directors, which was formed in 2014 under a new law that established SERC as a quasi-public agency, conducted a thorough nationwide search for a new executive director following the retirement of Dr. Marianne Kirner in June 2014.

On September 26, 2016, the Board officially selected Ingrid M. Canady to lead the 47-year-old agency, which had last had a new director nearly 30 years earlier. Ingrid had served as interim director for nearly two years.

Ingrid joined SERC in 2003. Prior to her appointment as Interim Executive Director, she served as Associate Director, the Assistant Director for Program Development and Partnerships for Equity, Workforce Development Coordinator, and SERC Education Consultant.

In addition, during the fiscal year, the Board helped oversee the consolidation of SERC offices after the State of Connecticut moved all offices out of 25 Industrial Park Road, where SERC had long housed its Library and professional learning space. This required the moving and temporary closure of the SERC Library.

At the close of the fiscal year, SERC's permanent office and Library space was still under consideration.

Also in September 2016, SERC was acknowledged with two awards at a celebration of the Developing Tomorrow's Professionals program. SERC had provided program assistance, including the creation of a promotional video. The program provides training, assessment, and support services for black and Hispanic male students.



MESSAGE FROM SERC'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Connecticut colleagues and friends,

Thank you for your interest in SERC's 2016-2017 annual program report. The fiscal year was a busy one of important work and unprecedented challenges.

SERC continued its collaborative technical assistance with schools all over the state and beyond. In several Connecticut districts we supported training on Courageous Conversations about Race, the foundation of SERC's equity work, under a grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund.

Equity was also the theme at the annual Together We Will early childhood conference, held jointly with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, SERC, and others. SERC and the SERC Foundation successfully held their second annual Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, which also offered students the opportunity to participate and share their perspectives through networking and poetry. Student voice was front and center at the Secondary Transition Symposium, a collaboration of SERC and other agencies, where young people with disabilities spoke about their experiences and ideas for better serving other students like them.

I was honored to continue facilitating the Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education, which advises the CT State Department of Education. In June, I had the privilege of congratulating the parent graduates under the Parent Leadership Training Grant, which SERC coordinates statewide.

At the same time, fiscal constraints like never before found SERC with sharply limited resources to fulfill our statutory mission on behalf of the state.

A major reduction involved vacating our longtime library and classroom space in one building and consolidating all our functions into another. The SERC Library, which has been in operation since SERC was launched in 1969, was temporarily closed in the final weeks of the fiscal year to pare down its resources and prepare to move into a space that was a third of the Library's original size.

Educators and families across Connecticut have long considered these services and resources essential to ensuring their students have the supports they need for educational success. While we face a daunting fiscal climate, I remain proud of the difference we make every day with partners like you. As always, we look forward to working together to achieve our vision of equity and excellence in education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ingrid M. Canady". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Ingrid M. Canady
Executive Director

FOCUS ON EQUITY

SERC among participants in event featuring former U.S. Secretary of Education

On December 19, 2016, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady was among those participating in the CT Educator Equity Lab at Central Connecticut State University that featured outgoing U.S. Education Secretary John King. Also attending were Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, Connecticut congressional and state lawmakers, CT State Department of Education officials, and others from inside and outside the state. The event focused on building a more diverse teaching workforce as a means to achieve educational equity for all students.

The state's Minority Teacher Recruitment (MTR) Committee was spearheaded by CSDE Chief Talent Officer Dr. Sarah Barzee, who spoke at the event. The committee began meeting in 2014 to explore recruitment and retention strategies for black and Latino educators. The committee's work contributed to the development of a comprehensive framework for increasing the diversity of the educator workforce.

SERC facilitated the MTR Committee and managed a related CSDE grant program to devise action plans based on the framework. The MTR district grant program was a featured strategy in the CSDE's Equitable Access to Excellent Educators Plan.

Study group on culturally responsive teaching

What is culturally responsive teaching, and how can it make a difference in the classroom? On January 23, 2017, SERC began hosting a book study on Zaretta Hammond's "Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students." The small group of educators will explore innovative approaches to designing and implementing brain-compatible culturally responsive instruction that creates inclusive learning for students of all colors, genders, ethnicity, and abilities.

The study group began and concluded with a face-to-face meeting, with an online discussion forum in between for a flexible and engaging way to explore cutting-edge neuroscience research. Participants had the opportunity to apply principles and techniques in their classrooms and share results with this community of fellow practitioners over the course of 12 weeks.

Together We Will conference

The Dismantling Systemic Racism conference was not the only 2017 conference to tackle the topic. The year's theme for Connecticut's Together We Will early childhood conference was "Together We Will Address Racial Equity in Early Childhood."

The 24th annual conference, held April 21 at Goodwin College in East Hartford, was a collaborative effort among the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, the Connecticut Head Start Association, SERC, and other partners. Students from A.I. Prince Technical High School in Hartford set the stage by performing a series of songs and dances from across the globe—in an auditorium in which world flags adorn the walls. One student recited a poem related to the theme of race.



Social justice has always been embedded within early childhood education, said keynoter Walter Killiam, Ph.D., of the Yale Child Study Center and the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy. He described findings related to expulsion from preschool, which occurs at a rate far higher than expulsion from school at other ages, and how expulsion is used disproportionately against black boys. To counter this trend, he suggested focusing on adult biases.



After the keynote, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady facilitated a breakout "open space technology" session to allow participants to share their perspectives on race. In the afternoon, Wendy Waithe Simmons, Ph.D., SERC's Director of Development, Community Affairs, and Equity, facilitated two sessions on personal reflection. Other breakouts featured Michele Stewart-Copes on achieving health equity through the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards; Chin R. Reyes, Ph.D., from the Yale Child Study Center and Zigler Center on the Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning and Development

(CHILD) observation tool; Andrew Grant-Thomas, Ph.D., co-founder of Embrace Race, on children's racial attitudes and how to improve our own; and Caroline Finley and Mary Diamond on Connecticut's Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP).

In a closing panel facilitated by the morning keynote speaker, Andrew, Wendy, Chin, Michele, and Caroline discussed how to support one another in efforts to achieve diversity and racial equity. "Be afraid," Wendy said, "but do it anyway."



Pictured left to right: Michele Copes-Stewart, Linda Goodman, Emile Montgomery, Ingrid M. Canady, Paquita Jarman-Smith, and Walter Killiam, Ph.D.

Session Navigates Transgender Rights

Connecticut has adopted a new guidance for school districts on supporting transgender students. What does this mean in practice? A recent professional learning opportunity helped clarify expectations for some of the everyday scenarios a school may encounter.

SERC held “Transgender Rights, Laws, and Best Practice Approaches” June 6, 2017, in collaboration with True Colors Connecticut. Robin McHaelen, True Colors’ executive director, and attorneys from the CT Commission on Human Rights helped answer questions on supporting students with a range of needs related to gender identity.

Through group discussion and reflection on their own youth, participants recognized the pervasiveness of gender “rules” in virtually everything students encounter in society—books, music, even food. These norms become ingrained from an early age, and those who fit these norms may not understand those who do not. McHaelen’s message to gender-conforming kids: You don’t have to “get” nonconforming preferences, but you must always be kind.

To guide adult educators, the facilitators emphasized inclusiveness:

- Recognize the cross-impact of gender identity and other characteristics, such as race. LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, homelessness, and for other risk factors. Also, gender identity is often only one aspect for special consideration. If a student may be on the autism spectrum but is struggling with gender identity, for example, McHaelen suggests working with gender first.
- Parents may or may not support their child’s gender identity, or may be somewhere in between, but that is irrelevant to schools’ responsibility to provide a safe learning environment for transgender students. If parents are at least ambivalent, that can be enough for schools to work with them on ways to support their child.

If a child asks to be identified as a particular gender, and one or more of the child’s parents objects, the law does not specify that a school take a particular “side,” the facilitators said. However, CHRO Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp suggested that schools support the child. For one, Sharp said, statutes are intentionally broad to favor individual rights.

Second, “sides” change. Sharp offered a scenario in which a child asks to be called by a first name of a different gender, and the parent demands the school use only their child’s given name. The child then become despondent and exhibits self-harming behaviors, and the parent ultimately relents to the child’s wishes. The parent may never acknowledge that they previously did not support the child’s preferred gender; suddenly the school alone is liable. Most administrators would clearly prefer to be on the side of the child.

As one participant put it: Schools should help parents help their children, regardless of gender identity.

Dismantling Systemic Racism conference

More than 350 people packed the Radisson Hotel in Cromwell May 10, 2017, for policy, poetry, and powerful calls for tackling the racist structures that contribute to opportunity gaps in education.

“Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2017 Conference on Race, Education & Success” was the second annual event of its kind from SERC and the SERC Foundation. Participants included educators, community leaders, students, and others from across Connecticut and beyond. They learned about school programs, effective practices and activities, and the ongoing challenges associated with systemic racism and assuring equity in education for all students.

The keynote presentations established an atmosphere that delved into the personal. Morning keynoter Calvin Terrell had all the attendees walk to the front of the ballroom to discuss a question about racism posted on the screen: “If we didn’t create ‘it’ or start ‘it,’ then who keeps ‘it’ going, tries to stop ‘it,’ and/or works to transform its energy?” He told participants to “take the whole story and uncover the truth,” imparting the history of white supremacy and hegemony.

When schools do not allow multiple perspectives, “that’s not education,” Calvin said. “It’s indoctrination.”

Echoing the opening remarks of SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and SERC Foundation Director Wendy Waithe Simmons, Calvin issued a call to action: “Wake up and do the work that is uncomfortable.” He suggested that if people did not work to regularly disrupt systemic racism, they were helping to sustain it.

In the lunch keynote, Aaron Jafferis reflected on “What Is Race, and How Did I Catch It?” Since we see the world through race-colored glasses, he said, we should not try for color-blindness but depth perception—appreciating the depth of other people and their “multiplicity of experiences.”

Aaron delivered his message using hip-hop poetry similar to the musicals he has written. In the middle of his presentation, he invited three high school students to deliver their own race-related poems and raps they had created at his workshop earlier in the day.

One student rap reflected on the dichotomy between his Puerto Rican background and light skin: “Can the lightness of my pigment be the reason I am wrong/When it comes to



Wendy Waithe Simmons, SERC Foundation Director and Morning Keynoter Calvin Terrell.



Aaron Jafferis delivering the lunch keynote.

white oppression, what's the side that I'm on?" Another student poem described being black and bisexual, and a third related the experience of being profiled and harassed by a store owner who was also black.

While Aaron and Calvin facilitated breakout sessions especially for student attendees, students from the #EmbraceTheStruggle group at the TechBoston Academy in Boston helped facilitate their own session. In other breakouts, adult participants underwent the moving experience of creating a "Quilt of Humanity" under the guidance of Deborah Howard and Tony Bennae Richard or an unsettling exercise in stereotyping led by David Luhman. Participants were guided on how they might replicate some of these experiential activities in their own schools and communities.



Students and educators from New London Public Schools.

SERC is following up with several potential partners that want to continue this important and critical work.

Dismantling racism didn't end with the conference

To maintain momentum from the May 10 Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, SERC hosted a June 1, 2017, networking and action meeting for attendees and anyone else interested in joining the movement and establishing a way forward.

Meeting participants, who ranged from educators to advocates, discussed three questions: "How comfortable are you initiating and engaging in conversations about race/racial equity?" "What are your hopes and goals related to racial equity, both personally and/or professionally?" and "What are the barriers in promoting racial equity both personally and/or professionally?" They then identified common themes:

- To most, the comfort level for discussing race depended on the awareness level of oneself and the other individuals who would be part of the discussion.
- Barriers to equity included recruiting teachers of color to a profession that is often undervalued; fear and risk in a politically charged environment; and the challenges of white privilege, including white fragility and the limited meaning and commitment of "white allies."
- Goals included self-reflection and not just trying to "change" others; bringing in other voices into the conversation, particularly students; and leaving with a plan of action based on a question Calvin Terrell posed at the conference's morning keynote: "If we didn't create 'it' or start 'it,' then who keeps 'it' going, tries to stop 'it,' and/or works to transform 'its' energy?"

SERC and the SERC Foundation scheduled additional follow-up meetings and began planning a third annual conference in 2018. To be added to the email list, contact Wendy Waithe Simmons at simmons@ctserc.org.

FOCUS ON FAMILIES

Building parent leadership and family engagement

2016-17 marked another year of the Parent Trust Fund, administered by SERC and its CT Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC) through a partnership with CSDE.

Nicole Vitale of SERC and CT PIRC oversees the process of awarding grants under the Parent Trust Fund to parent leadership training programs across the state. Grant Award winners were announced in the fall. A total of 73 organizations and local education agencies statewide have received funding through the Parent Leadership Training Grant from 2014-2017.

A total of 556 participants registered for Parent Leadership training in the 2016-2017 school year, down from 865 and 728 in the previous two years due to a decrease in funds. After successfully completing their individual programs, parents participate in individual program graduations followed by a statewide graduation ceremony in Hartford in June.



SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady spoke at the June 2017 graduation, which is held at the Legislative Office Building next to the State Capitol and includes elected officials who themselves are graduates of parent leadership programs.

“We need more of you,” Ingrid said. “We need more civic parent leaders who are going to make a difference on behalf of our children and families.”

The Parent Leadership Training/Parent Trust Fund Grant trains parents, grandparents, foster parents, and others to become skilled advocates and strong voices for children at the local, state, or national level. It supports various training models, primarily Parents SEE, the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), People Empowering People (PEP), ASPIRA’s APEX, the Parent Leadership Academy, and Voices for Families.

The Parent Trust Fund Collaborative Management Team includes representatives from SERC/CT PIRC; the CSDE; the CT Center for School Change; the CT Commission on Women, Children & Seniors; the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund; and the University of Connecticut College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, Department of Extension. The grant is funded by the CSDE with additional support from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund.

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady was the guest speaker at the 2016-2017 school year's first Friday CAFÉ, a family and community engagement network that meets monthly under the leadership of CSDE's Judy Carson. The October 14, 2016 Friday CAFÉ was held at the Augusta Curtis Cultural Center in Meriden.

Ingrid discussed family engagement through the lens of equity, which is central to SERC's vision. While we did not create inequity, Ingrid told the gathering of educators and community representatives, all of us have the power to be an agent of change.

SERC's blueprint for educational equity is built around five elements outlined in SERC's document "Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach." For more information, go to <http://www.ctserc.org/equity>.

Friday CAFÉ is a collaboration of CSDE, the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), SERC and the CT Parent Information and Resource Center, and the Friday CAFÉ Advisory Group. For more information, go to <http://fridaycafe.org>.

SERC assisted the CT State Department of Education on "Building Relationships with Families for Student Success," a full-day session at the Radisson Hotel in Cromwell October 25, 2016.

Participants learned about building school-family connections from the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, based in Sacramento, Calif., and strategies for partnering with fathers from Doug Edwards of Real Dads Forever, based in New Haven.

Some of the participants included schools under the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG) and the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant program.



SUPPORTING ALL ABILITIES

Building capacity with education technology

In 2016-2017, SERC continued to support districts' use of technology to meet diverse student needs. It provided technical assistance to district teams on assistive technology (AT) and accessible instructional materials (AIM), and built the teams' capacity to provide AT and AIM services to students in their districts and align it to the curriculum.

Districts also use technology to accommodate students with disabilities and special learning needs when it comes to assessment and delivering the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests. SERC's support helps the teams make the AT link between assessment and instruction. SERC provided this assistance to several districts, including Naugatuck, Norwich, and Tolland.

Supporting co-teaching

During 2016, to plan for 2017 and beyond, SERC conducted a survey of participants who had attended its statewide or in-district trainings on the topic of co-teaching over the last five years. The results were used to obtain feedback on our professional learning opportunities as well as districts' future needs.

Responses were received from 43 districts. SERC discovered what the educators considered the most challenging aspects of implementing co-teaching, including finding time to plan and the sharing of roles and responsibilities; and how administrators have best supported co-teaching, such as maintaining successful partnerships from year to year and providing release time for training.

Math for Everyone conference

SERC brought a national presenter to the Radisson in Cromwell April 26, 2017, to help middle and high school teachers ensure access to the math curriculum for every student.

The conference, "Math for Everyone: Strengthening Tier I Instruction at the Secondary Level," addressed the challenge of managing a math classroom with widely varying skill levels. Keynoter Max Ray-Riek from the Math Forum at the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) kept the teachers engaged by having them examine math tasks and student responses. Teachers collaborated around how to structure effective math discussions among their students.

Katie Laird and Allison DelBene, math teachers from Trumbull High School, got teachers moving around and doing math as they shared several successful group classroom activities. In the afternoon, teachers had the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues from other districts and plan with their own colleagues to improve their math instruction.

For more on the work of Max Ray-Riek, go to <http://mathforum.org/blogs/max>.

Supporting students with reading difficulties

One of the primary goals of education in the early elementary grades is learning to read fluently and with good comprehension. This outcome can be elusive for some students with specific learning disabilities (SLD), especially those with SLD/dyslexia.



When a student is experiencing difficulty acquiring early reading skills, Connecticut educators frequently ask SERC and Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) consultants how to “dig deeper” into reading data. To address this question, SERC and the CSDE designed a webinar that featured a wealth of resources on this topic, including Connecticut’s new SLD/Dyslexia Assessment Resource Guide (2016).

Approximately 300 Connecticut educators joined the live webinar, “Using Literacy Screening Data to Support Students with Reading Difficulties,” hosted by SERC on January 10, 2017. Dr. Donna Merritt, SERC education consultant and lead author of the resource guide, moderated the webinar.

Dr. Margie Gillis, president of Literacy How and research affiliate at Fairfield University and Haskins Labs, was the primary presenter of the content. Dr. Patricia Anderson and Joanne White, CSDE education consultants, assisted in fielding questions throughout the webinar.

Dr. Gillis reviewed CSDE’s approved menu of K-3 universal screening assessments and explained certain patterns of reading difficulties students may encounter. She presented a variety of assessment sources that could provide additional information about each component of reading (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics, etc.), including informal and formal “diagnostic” measures that can be administered by either general or special education professionals.

The resource guide was created in response to requests from educators and administrators seeking appropriate assessments for identifying SLD/Dyslexia and other learning disabilities related to reading. Educators will find it informational about an array of assessment tools for deeper examination of any component reading skill—particularly skills that have been challenging for a student in either general or special education.

Dr. Anderson, Dr. Gillis, Ms. White, and Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling of Southern Connecticut State University all served as consultants for Dr. Merritt in developing the guide. It is available online at <http://www.ct.gov/sde/slddyslexia>.

On March 22, SERC hosted a related webinar, on “Remediating and Accommodating Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)/Dyslexia at the Secondary Level.” For general information on SLD/dyslexia supports at SERC, including future webinar archives, go to <http://www.ctserc.org/index.php/dyslexia>.

In-Person & Online at the SERC Library

The SERC Library has served educators, college and university students, families, and other community members for nearly 50 years. The Library maintains specific collections, aligned with the priorities of the CT State Department of Education (CSDE) and its Bureau of Special Education, for the purpose of supporting those who provide direct services to children and youth with and without disabilities throughout our state in order that they may achieve positive life outcomes.

During 2016-2017, SERC's Library faced immediate and pressing challenges. These challenges resulted in the temporary closing and relocation of the Library on short notice from its long-time location at 25 Industrial Park Road in Middletown, as a consequence of the closing of the Middletown campus of the Connecticut State Department on Education. The Library was relocated to Roscommon Drive, Middletown, where SERC houses its administrative office. The relocation resulted in a significant reduction in space, and the physical collections of the Library had to be reduced by approximately 75%.



While in-person resources and services have been greatly diminished, the provision of online resources has continued to flourish as evidenced by the volume of online patronage. Implementation of the EBSCOhost Discovery platform has made access to educational journal database subscriptions more expansive, user-friendly, and convenient with added access to open source full-text articles. By the close of the third fiscal quarter, use of this online platform had exceeded 225,000 informational searches.

Also of note in 2016-2017 was the collaboration between the Library and SERC IDEA program colleagues to offer professional learning seminars on the use of the Wilson Reading and Orton-Gillingham assessments, which included opportunities to showcase the availability of these and other related assessments and resources through the Library. This collaboration illustrates the connection of the Library's resources to the work of the Department and SERC program with regard to training and technical assistance. These assessments, as well as approximately 450 others, comprise the Library's Tests collection

for which there remains an increasingly high demand and use by school district personnel statewide. This collection supports the ability of school districts to preview a test prior to purchasing. It also provides qualified educators with a means to access a test should the item not be available in the workplace.



The SERC Library's unique offering: Demos and loans of AT

The SERC Library hosted many visits to its "AT Corner," where patrons view and receive demonstrations of various technologies from low- to high-tech. In 2016-2017, patrons included not only educators but also family members with children and students with autism accompanied by teachers. Many educators and families are not aware of what is already readily available, such as apps on Chromebooks they already have, as well as no-cost, no-tech alternatives.

Visiting the AT Corner has empowered parents to talk informatively at their children's Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings about assistive technology options, according to SERC Consultant Smita Worah. For families and schools that do not have access to certain items, the SERC Library will soon extend borrowing privileges to materials in the AT Corner.

Additionally, on February 3, the SERC Library launched a program to make assistive technology (AT) resources and devices available for loan. The Library's AT collection includes more than 75 low-tech to mid-tech resources, as well as the addition of a small number of new iPads and Chromebooks also available for borrowing. Library patrons can now "take out" and "try out" these resources that include various AT apps in areas such as literacy, math skills, and early childhood education. Patrons can also receive an informal preview of AT resources available for loan or schedule a formal demonstration of AT devices with a SERC consultant with specialization in this area. These services and the new loan program are designed to help families, educators, and others determine the potential usefulness of a device for anyone with a disability or a variety of needs.

The process for developing the loan program consisted of creating a patron survey, with input from Arlene Lugo of the CT Tech Act Project; purchasing and configuring the iPads and Chromebooks, and installing the apps; creating catalog records for each new circulating item, including those previously intended only for demonstration and that are now incorporated into the Library's collection; and creating a borrower's agreement and policy for circulating the iPads and Chromebooks. These devices are available for a loan period of two weeks, versus three weeks for other Library resources.

Patrons can receive an informal preview of AT resources available for loan or schedule a formal demonstration of AT devices with SERC Consultant Dr. Smita Worah. These services and the new loan program are designed to help families, educators, and others determine the potential usefulness of a device for anyone with a disability or a variety of needs.

Linda Adorno, project specialist for the SERC Technology in Education Initiative, arranges demonstrations: (860) 632-1485, ext. 241.

For additional information on the work of this initiative, contact Dr. Worah at 860-632-1485 x319, or worah@ctserc.org.

SERC IN-DISTRICT

Fostering student voice in Preston

Building a positive school climate requires leadership from school administration and buy-in from staff. At Preston Plains Middle School in Preston, that leadership also comes from students.

The school's implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports operates in part through a PBIS Youth Leadership Team. In October, SERC's Amanda Pickett held her first consultation session with this group of students to help build their leadership capacity. The ultimate goal is allowing the school to sustain PBIS from year to year with different students.

"I thought [Amanda's] session was very well done — engaging and meaningful for all involved," said Principal Dr. Ivy K. Davis-Tomczuk. Amanda spent another two days with the students during the school year.

The leadership team is composed of 10 students, mostly eighth graders. The principal and school counselor are in the room, but the students are expected to lead the process.

Under Amanda's guidance, the students began learning the structure of a meeting and building on a number of skills, including understanding values, self-awareness, goal-setting, communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and leadership, and civic engagement. Her sessions with the students are focused on activities rather than content delivery and include small-group reflection.

The students are very engaged, Amanda said. They have opted to create a video on PBIS for their fellow students and also must complete a community service project.

"By teaching students about leadership while engaging them in activities that benefit our student body and our school community, we are preparing student leaders for future civic leadership roles," Principal Davis-Tomczuk said.

Students apply to be on the Youth Leadership Team, and representation on the team is intentionally more diverse than just high-achieving students. Team members share the perspectives of other peers and help lend student voice to PBIS implementation school-wide.

Amanda's work with the school's Youth Leadership Team contributes to SERC's growing efforts related to student voice. PBIS, like any structure within a school, is most effective when students feel a sense of ownership in the process.

"We recognize the importance of involving students in PBIS-related decision-making," Principal Davis-Tomczuk said. The students provide feedback and input on the rewards and acknowledgments students receive under PBIS, and more. "Our goal is to ensure that student voices are factored into decisions related to advisory topics as well as earned incentives."

SERC had named Preston Plains a PBIS banner school for the 2015-2016 school year.

Learning restorative practices

SERC Consultants Amanda Pickett and Sarah L. Jones facilitated a popular session on restorative practices on February 24, 2017. They had recently attended an International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) training outside Orlando January 30-February 2, and worked continually throughout the event and the following days to incorporate their learnings from IIRP into the SERC session.

Restorative practices, inspired by the philosophy of restorative justice, are used to build community and respond to challenging behavior through authentic dialogue, coming to understanding, and making things right [IIRP website, 2013]. Schools that use restorative practices have a flexible approach to school policies and practices when managing challenging behavior.

Schools implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a framework for decision making, can use restorative practices as a tool within that framework, Ms. Pickett says.

Ultimately, participants walked away with a better understanding of restorative practices and methods to try with students and staff members alike. Ms. Pickett and Ms. Jones are also using the content of the IIRP conference to further build the capacity of their SERC colleagues. For the next school year, they are planning a professional learning opportunity for schools on aligning restorative practices within a multi- tiered system of support.

From Teachers College to the classroom, with SERC as guide

The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, based out of Columbia University, has created a Unit of Study in opinion, information, and narrative writing. SERC's Literacy Initiative has assisted schools working to implement these units in the classroom.

In Barkhamsted, for example, SERC videotaped demonstration lessons by Kathy Collins, a nationally known author of "Growing Readers" and "Reading for Real" (and past presenter at SERC professional learning sessions). SERC Consultant Janet Zarchen has subsequently provided support on implementing the strategies and scaffolding, so the district can develop this practice more explicitly.

"Learning in the Fast Lane" by Suzy Pepper Rollins (2014) defines scaffolding as "a process used to help learners perform tasks that would be too difficult for them to complete without assistance" (citing Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976). It allows students to access rigorous standards by assisting them with areas that continue to stump them, so they can move on to the next level.

Ms. Zarchen is supporting teachers who must scaffold to move all students to independent writing, without, for example, getting stuck on punctuation. She helps them navigate the rubrics in the writer's workshop so teachers are still following the curriculum, but differentiating for individual student needs.

Ms. Zarchen has also provided these consulting supports in New Milford.

SERC a regional leader on PBIS

A select group of endorsed Northeast trainers of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) now includes five SERC consultants, making SERC the agency with the most endorsed trainers to date.

During the 2016-2017 school year, SERC's Eben McKnight was among the first of just five in Connecticut and Massachusetts to receive the endorsement. Eben, who earned a master's degree in special education from the University of Connecticut last spring, is Connecticut's representative on the Northeast Network Advisory Group.

Once SERC consultants Amanda Pickett, Missy Wrigley, Nikki Hendry, and Matthew Spar were added later, five of the now nine endorsed trainers were from SERC. Additional SERC consultants are expected to receive the endorsement in 2018 and 2019, as the agency continues to build its capacity as a leading PBIS trainer in Southern New England.

The Northeast PBIS Network "Training of Trainers" (TOT) is funded under Connecticut's School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG), which is intended to help Connecticut implement a multi-tiered intervention framework across the state. One of the goals of the grant is developing a network of trainers to provide training, support, and coaching to districts on implementation.

Once their training is completed, participants are endorsed as a Northeast PBIS trainer. Endorsed trainers receive ongoing TOT activities and trainings, have access to a comprehensive support network, including extensive training materials, and build connections with partners locally and nationally.

The Northeast PBIS Network conducts the training through collaboration between the CT State Department of Education and the Center for Behavioral Education and Research (CBER) at the University of Connecticut.

Connecticut was one of 12 states to receive an SCTG. For more information, go to <http://ctserc.org/sctg>.



SERC's Sarah Jones sharing during a Poster Session at the Northeast PBIS Forum.

Connecticut's PBIS work goes international

In addition to receiving ongoing training, SERC's endorsed trainers continue to share with others regionally and nationally.

Connecticut was featured in the 14th International Conference on Positive Behavior Support (APBS), held March 1-4, 2017, in Denver and attended by SERC consultants Sarah L. Jones and Eben McKnight.

SERC had partnered with Minnesota State University (MSU), Mankato, on the use of the PBIS Action and Commitment Tool, or ACT. At the conference, MSU's Kevin J. Filter, Ph.D., presented a 2015-2016 study of the PBIS-ACT at 23 schools in Minnesota and Connecticut. These include three schools under CT's School Climate Transformation Grant (CT SCTG), for which SERC's Sarah Jones serves as statewide Project Officer.

Dr. Filter discussed how PBIS-ACT measures "action and commitment" to certain adult behaviors in PBIS schools—for example, how much teachers are praising students, how much they value it, and how much they are willing to do it. He concluded that most staff are committed to implementing PBIS, though less so on the high school level and from general education teachers and non-licensed staff.

Schools are using PBIS-ACT for training and strategic staff development, to target behaviors that are restricting PBIS implementation.

At the Northeast PBIS Forum in Mystic on May 18, 2017, Eben co-presented on using the "drill-down" feature of the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) to address disproportionality in discipline.

Jones and SERC's Amanda Pickett presented on introducing Tier II interventions into a system of support. SERC and CSDE representatives presented preliminary data on the School-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) that assess PBIS implementation.

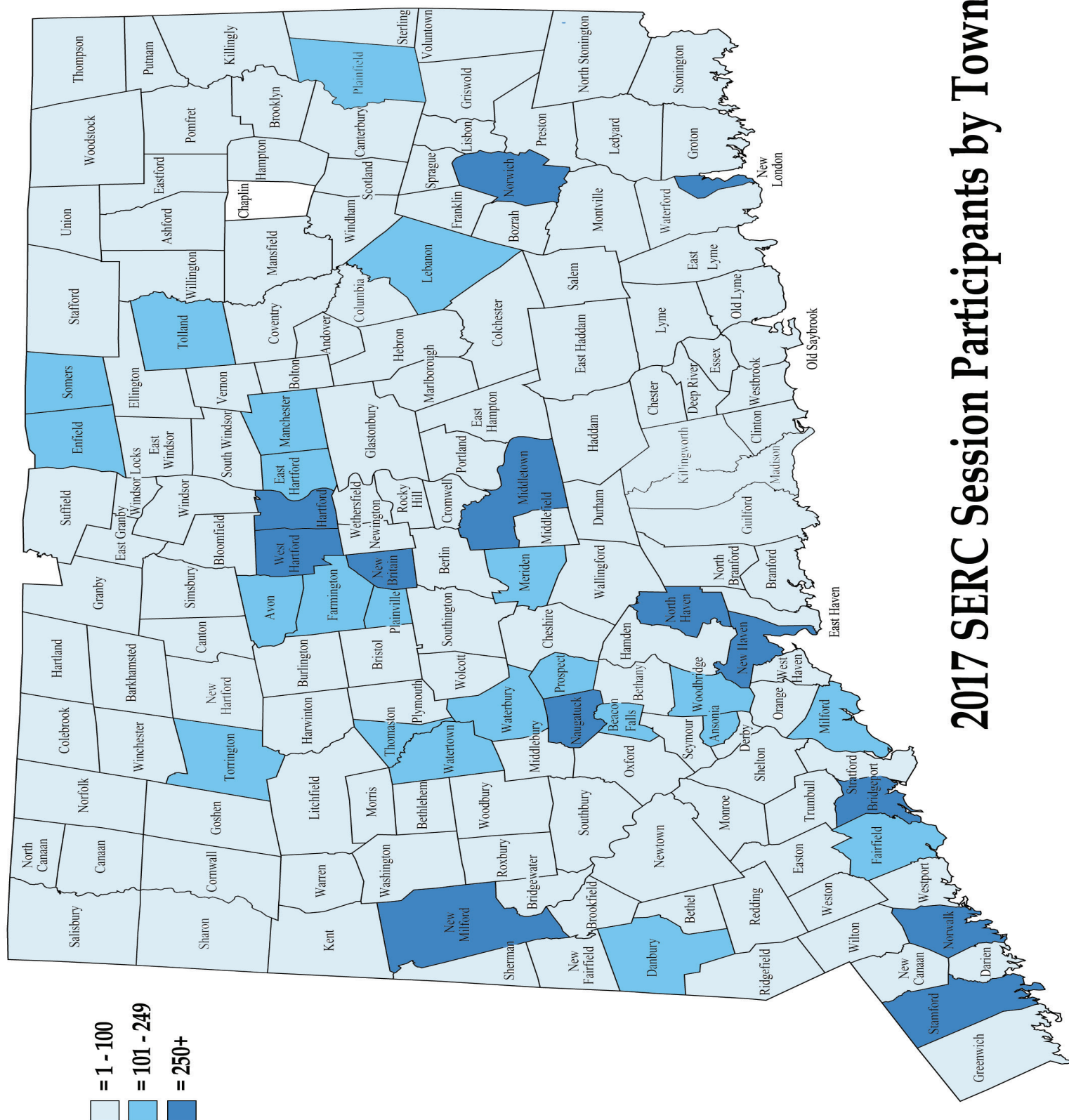
SCTG, PBIS: Regional and national representation

Sarah L. Jones, SERC's project officer for the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG), participated in the SCTG project directors' meeting and National PBIS Leadership Forum in Rosemont, IL., October 26-28. The forum featured a poster from CSDE and SERC on Connecticut's School-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) data.

The TFI is a self-assessment intended to provide reliable data on a school's implementation of school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). SERC staff facilitate the TFIs with the schools.

The goal under the grant is for 100 TFIs completed in Connecticut schools every school year.

SERC AT-A-GLANCE



2017 SERC Session Participants by Town

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