



STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

EQUITY | EXCELLENCE | EDUCATION



2017-2018

ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

2017-2018 PROGRAM REPORT

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SERC's LEGISLATION

Since our founding in 1969 as the Special Education Resource Center, and growing into the State Education Resource Center, our work has always been built around ensuring an equitable educational opportunity for all. According to our latest statute, CT Gen Stat § 10-37a (2015), section 10-357b:

“The purposes of the State Education Resource Center, established pursuant to section 10-357a, shall be to assist the State Board of Education in the provision of programs and activities that will promote educational equity and excellence. Such activities shall be limited to: Training, technical assistance and professional development for local and regional boards of education, school leaders, teachers, families and community partners in the form of seminars, publications, site visits, on-line content and other appropriate means; maintaining a state education resource center library; publication of technical materials; research and evaluation; writing, managing, administering and coordinating grants for the purposes described in this subsection; and any other related activities directly related to the purposes described in this subsection. The center may support programs and activities concerning early childhood education, in collaboration with the Office of Early Childhood, improving school and district academic performance, and closing academic achievement gaps between socio-economic subgroups, and other related programs and activities.”

SERC GOVERNANCE

Ingrid M. Canady has served as SERC Executive Director since October 2016, following a two-year period as interim director. In SERC's most recent fiscal years, its directors' team was comprised of the Executive Director and five assistant directors, covering program development, community affairs and equity, technology and support services, and library and community programs. In the face of a budget shortfall, the assistant director positions were eliminated by the end of the fiscal year in June 2018, primarily through attrition.

The Board of Directors was formed in 2014 under the new legislation that established SERC as a quasi-public agency. As of June 2018, George E. Coleman was serving as Interim Board Chair.

SERC is primarily funded by the CT State Department of Education (CSDE), at its discretion, and also operates through contracts and grants. In the 2018 state legislative session, the Education Committee introduced and held a hearing on a bill that would establish a line item for SERC in the CSDE budget. Raised Bill No. 5336 received testimony from dozens of supporters, and many also spoke before the State Board of Education on the need to ensure funding for SERC's continued operation and the SERC Library. The bill did not come up for a vote in the CT House of Representatives. Unfortunately, the SERC Library ceased operations as of June 2018.



MESSAGE FROM SERC'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Welcome to our annual program report. The 2017-2018 fiscal year may have been our most challenging yet, but with the support of our partners like you we emerged leaner but stronger for 2019 and beyond.

SERC has made some difficult decisions over the last fiscal year to address a reduced operating budget. We had to implement a reduction of our workforce and sadly, without funding for the ongoing operation of our Library, it closed to the public at the end of the fiscal year. I truly miss our colleagues and library patrons who have contribute to SERC's community of service. But SERC remains funded in part through the advocacy of individuals and organizations who spoke passionately about our unique role in the state. Today, with the unceasing dedication of our staff, we are looking forward to reaching our 50th anniversary year with a steadfast commitment to the schools and communities we serve; and we are looking forward to SERC's next 50 years.

SERC continues to be a leading voice on educational equity in Connecticut and supporting schools' efforts to achieve it. We also continue to lead statewide efforts to establish lasting multi-tiered systems of support to serve all students, through the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG) and implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

This work is built on our ongoing partnership with the CT State Department of Education (CSDE). SERC collaborates with the CSDE's Bureau of Special Education (BSE) on its annual Back to School meeting each year, and in 2017 we were honored to support new BSE Chief Bryan Klimkiewicz on his first convening.

This annual report covers only some highlights, but we have much to be proud of. SERC has the most endorsed PBIS trainers in the Northeast. Our work in equity and special education and IEP support has expanded to other states. We continue to "go deep" when working with districts from Stamford to New London, whether they are implementing Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) or facilitating the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP).

Finally, we are proud of our families. I was moved while honoring, Connecticut parents at the State Capitol at our Parental Involvement Recognition Awards ceremony. Their contributions, engagement, and commitment to not only their own children's success, but the success of all children in their communities can't go unrecognized. We have long supported families as partners in creating the best educational experience for their children; this award emphasis our support.

We welcome your questions, concerns, and insights as we enter our next phase and a new half-century. So reach out to us any time! And thank you for your interest in our work and for your mutual commitment to equitable and excellent education.

Sincerely,

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FOCUS ON EQUITY

SERC releases new equity document

For more than a decade, SERC has focused on racial equity in education by examining the intersectionality between race and academic achievement. The agency previously released “Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach,” which offered five critical elements to address systemic inequities: Leadership, Professional Capacity, School Climate, School-Family-Community Partnerships, and Teaching and Learning. In September 2017, SERC released a follow-up document to focus on one of the elements: [“A Transformational Approach to Teaching and Learning.”](#)

As the preface states, “The approach and vision of this document is in the creation of an educational environment that is culturally responsive, relevant, and respectful. When teachers are highly aware of their own beliefs, attitudes, and biases and how these influence what and how they teach in their classrooms, the learning environments that they create empower students to succeed using their own cultural experiences and perspectives.”

The new document outlines the essence of culturally relevant teaching, including relationships, racial consciousness, and instructional practices. It provides a framework for “what schools and classrooms should look, sound, and feel like,” examines Connecticut’s data, and describes how SERC is addressing inequity in the state.

SERC will explore the other critical elements in subsequent documents.

Racial Equity and Social Justice

SERC has continued to lead in professional learning specific to racial educational equity. SERC education consultants are well-grounded in the Courageous Conversations protocol, and several are certified affiliate trainers through the Pacific Educational Group (PEG).

During training, we find educators on different levels of understanding about the intersection of race in education. SERC works to establish a foundation and use the protocol to help everyone use common language. Participants determine where they are on the compass regarding particular aspects of race—believing, thinking, feeling, or acting—to explain how they are entering the conversation. Everyone’s experience and perspective is valued and necessary.

In 2017-2018, under a grant funded by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, SERC conducted and facilitated training based on PEG’s Courageous Conversations protocol. Participating districts included Middletown, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury.

This work also crossed state borders. The Paulo Freire Social Justice School in Holyoke, Mass., turned to SERC to build its capacity toward its mission of social justice awareness. SERC’s Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and Assistant Director Alice Henley provided training to the full staff, while Ingrid and

Wendy Waithe Simmons, SERC's director of development, community affairs, and equity, led training to the school's Board of Directors. SERC helped guide the school in examining how it can look at its strategic plan through an equity lens, lead transformational change, and create Courageous Conversations about equity and social justice. In this case, participants examined the intersectionality of gender identity, sexual orientation, and race.

On May 10, 2018, in Hartford, PEG Founder Glenn Singleton led a symposium on "Courageous Conversation & Courageous Leadership: Moving the Racial Equity Dialogue to Systemic Racial Equity Transformation," sponsored by SERC and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Representatives from the schools that participated in the in-school equity training presented their strategic plans. This was followed the next day by SERC's Dismantling Systemic Racism conference.

Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2018 Conference on Race, Education & Success

Our third annual "Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2018 Conference on Race, Education & Success" was hosted by the Hartford Hilton on May 11, 2018. The conference, held by SERC and the SERC Foundation, aims to promote the success of all students by addressing the barriers to racial equity. Nearly 450 adults and students were in attendance, an increase by about 100 participants every year from its first three years.

Sponsors included the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, All Our Kin and CT Parent Power. The keynote speaker, Gyasi Ross of the Blackfeet Nation, encouraged all participants by stating that that what they were doing to advance equity and justice was making a difference, even if they don't see the results themselves.

"The great heroes of humanity have a different view of time," he said. "They can't be concerned about their own [lifetime]. They're laying an infrastructure for change."



At the conference, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady presented two George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Awards, named after the former CT State Department of Education Commissioner, SERC Board member and longtime SERC friend. SERC created the award to honor and highlight those who have ensured all students, particularly students of color and culturally and linguistically diverse students are valued and respected in their school experience.



The first award went to Anthony Brisson, a former SERC consultant who became a senior program/policy analyst for the National Education Association in Washington, D.C. Anthony has led social justice training across the country, including a safety, bias and LGBTQ issues training program. On receiving the surprise award, Anthony acknowledged SERC for helping him prepare for the work he does today.

The second award went to Glenn Singleton, who has helped guide

SERC for years on its own journey of racial equity. The foundation of SERC's equity work is built on Glenn's Courageous Conversations framework.

Conference breakout sessions focused on ways race and systemic racism impede students' outcomes and limit opportunities for success in everything from academics to health and mental health. Presenters and facilitators included experts and educators from Connecticut and across the country, SERC consultants, and students themselves.

Members of a student voice committee at Platt High School in Meriden described how students addressed safety after the shooting at the Marjory Stoneman High School in Parkland, Fla. Middletown High School students facilitated discussions among adults and acted out real-life scenarios in which students of color encounter barriers in access to honors-level classes.

Traveling for more Courageous Conversation

Three individuals from SERC were among nearly 1,000 attending the Pacific Educational Group's (PEG's) 2017 National Summit for Courageous Conversation in Detroit October 14-18.

SERC has a long history with PEG and its founder Glenn Singleton, who has helped guide SERC's journey in racial equity, facilitated SERC's "Beyond Diversity" sessions, and served as a keynote speaker at SERC and the SERC Foundation's Dismantling Systemic Racism conference. PEG's annual summit is an opportunity to delve deeper and meet other equity leaders from across the country and the globe.

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and SERC Consultants Janet Zarchen and Kc Nelson-Oliveria attended the 2017 summit.

Summer Symposium

SERC was a sponsor of a July 27, 2017, symposium at the State Capitol led by the CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO). In "Transgender and Genderqueer Public School Students: School Safety in an Era of Uncertainty," CHRO outlined legal rights affecting LGBTQ students and bullying issues. Other participants included True Colors and the CT Association of School Psychologists (CASP).

CHRO's Cheryl Sharp and Alex Simonetti set the stage, covering legal rights affecting LGBTQ students and bullying issues. CHRO's Michael Roberts surveyed the legal landscape and noted that protections for transgender students apply in Connecticut schools, but there is still legal uncertainty about religious exemptions.

Other speakers included Karla Vazquez of CASP, Robin McHaelen of CHRO, and Dustin Rader, a Canton High School teacher and advocate.

FOCUS ON YOUTH & FAMILIES

SERC leads development of Youth Advisory Council

In 2018, a new opportunity opened for Connecticut middle and high school students with disabilities to build leadership skills and their voice in the special education process.

The Special Education Youth Advisory Council is a collaboration between SERC and the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education (BSE). The council is designed as a venue for students with disabilities, in middle and high school, to share their special education experiences and enhance their capacity to give informed input on their education. Their diverse experiences and perspectives help the BSE bureau chief and other stakeholders understand issues and decisions that impact them.

The students think, “Now I can really voice my opinion,” says SERC Consultant Nicole M. Vitale, who coordinates the council alongside BSE Chief Bryan Klimkiewicz.

SERC invited school districts to apply for their students to participate and held an informational webinar on the council on February 9. Following the application process, seven districts were chosen: Bloomfield, Hebron, Milford, Simsbury, Somers, Suffield, and West Hartford.



To begin, schools from these districts recruited up to two dozen students to participate in focus groups led by SERC consultants. The students were asked about their school experience, what they knew about special education and IEPs, their relationships with teachers and other adults in the building, and other areas. SERC then facilitated a two-hour leadership training session, covering how the students’ IEPs were ideally designed to ensure them an equitable—as opposed to equal—education. The training helped the students not only build their leadership capacity but also to identify their existing leadership skills, both individually and collectively.



The students then attended a special session at SERC’s Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, where facilitator Calvin Terrell guided them in additional team-building exercises and understanding others’ stories. The students worked together to design their ideal “dream” school that would meet everybody’s needs.

SERC has previously run Youth Advisory Councils to increase public awareness of the valuable influence of student voice and greater student independence in the lives of students, families, and communities. This new council is specifically geared for students in special education, reaching students who may not typically have an opportunity to share their points of view and to build the confidence to take leadership roles.

Empowering new parent leadership

The Parent Trust Fund, administered by SERC through a partnership with CSDE, funded additional parent leadership training programs in 2018. SERC Consultant Nicole Vitale coordinates this efforts in collaboration with the Parent Trust Collaborative Team. 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. After successfully completing their individual programs, parents participate in individual program graduations followed by a statewide graduation ceremony in Hartford in June.

The Parent Trust Fund Collaborative Management Team includes representatives from SERC; 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.

Honoring existing parent leaders



Each year, SERC seeks nominations for its Parental Involvement Recognition Awards. In 2017, SERC honored nine Connecticut parents November 16, 2017, at a ceremony at the State Capitol.

The setting demonstrates the importance of family engagement to schools and communities across Connecticut. SERC and the CT Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC), operated by SERC for several years, have issued parent awards nearly every year since 2012 in collaboration with the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS).

The 2017 awards went to Nasreen Al Omari of East Hartford; Rachel Chaleski of Danbury, who had recently won a seat on the Danbury Board of Education; Jean Kovitch of Bristol; Marie Moorning of New Haven; Tatiana Ponder of Bloomfield; Erica Poplawski of Thompson, Veronica Rosario of East Hartford, Kristine SanGiovanni of East Haven, and M. Jeffrey Spahr, Esq., of Norwalk.

SERC calls on Connecticut schools, program coordinators, and others 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. Most of the awardees were introduced at the ceremony by an individual who had nominated them, such as a school or district administrator.



Speakers at the Connecticut ceremony included Wendy Waithe Simmons, SERC's director of development, community affairs, and equity; Ingrid M. Canady, SERC executive director; Steven Hernandez, CWCS executive director; and Nancy Leonard, senior program officer with the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, who issued a call to action to speak openly about issues of equity and to tackle them directly. SERC Project Assistant Lauren Johns presented each awardee with their certificate and small glass plaque.

SERC holds the award ceremony on National Parental Involvement Day, created by the St.Louis-based organization Project Appleseed.

Facilitating commissioner's roundtable

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady facilitated the Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education. The purpose of the roundtable is to advise the Commissioner of Education regarding policy and programmatic priorities in family and community engagement, contributing to improved outcomes for all students and advancing the State Board of Education's Comprehensive plan for equity and excellence in Connecticut schools. Membership in the roundtable is intended to reflect a balanced representation of three major constituencies – school/district staff, parents (or guardians) and community members – as well as students.

Family engagement framework

A group working in 2017 to develop a Connecticut framework for family engagement in education included SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady.

CSDE, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), and the Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative led an effort to create a common definition and framework for family engagement. A design team with representatives from the agencies as well as higher education, school districts, and parent organizations presented their ideas to the Commissioner's Roundtable on Family and Community Engagement, which Ingrid facilitates on behalf of CSDE Commissioner Dianna Wentzell.

From August through October 2017, the design team held five focus groups online and across the state to gather ideas from parents and families. On December 13, the partners held a Symposium on Family and Community Engagement at Gateway Community College in New Haven. About 100 participants, including members of the roundtable and design team, parent and community organizations, state agency staff, school district officials, teacher organizations, and advocacy groups were invited to provide their input.

The symposium featured Anne T. Henderson, a senior consultant and prominent authority from the National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement; Marisa Gerstein Pineau of the Frameworks Institute in Washington, D.C.; and local voices on family engagement. Ingrid facilitated the participants' discussion on a definition of family engagement, which included suggestions that engagement should mean "partnerships" and that it must include student voice. Symposium participants also cited the importance of trusting relationships and transferring power to parents.

Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement" was released in summer 2018. The definition of family engagement was published as "a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children's

SUPPORTING ALL ABILITIES

Nationally recognized presenters

Dr. Marilyn Friend, an international presenter and leader in the field of co-teaching based in Washington, D.C., came to Connecticut to facilitate two sessions for SERC in October 2017. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on their own experience and practice related to co-teaching.

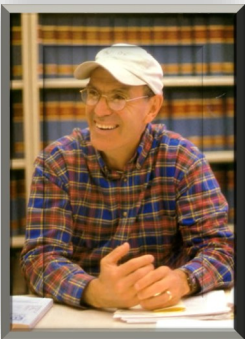
In the first session, geared for teachers, Dr. Friend presented on the various approaches to co-teaching and the integration of specially designed instruction. She focused on the station teaching approach, in which two teachers present different content and take turns instructing separate groups of students. Sometimes students work independently in a third station.



Regardless of approach, the nature of co-teaching is collaboration with another professional. While special education teachers are formally trained in how to work with other adults, Dr. Friend suggested that all educators would benefit from professional learning in this area. The session was open to general and special educators with different roles, including teachers of English learners, reading or math consultants and teachers, and speech and language pathologists.

The second session, the first of a series for administrators in collaboration with the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), focused on how schools can set up a co-teaching model and partnerships. Dr. Friend covered how to evaluate their effectiveness, particularly for students with IEPs.

In April 2018, SERC hosted Dr. Perry Zirkel to present on “504, the ADA, and Public School Students: The Latest Lessons for General and Special Educators.”



Dr. Zirkel hails from Connecticut, receiving a Ph.D. and J.D. from the University of Connecticut and a Master of Laws degree from Yale University. He is now the University Professor Emeritus of Education and Law at Lehigh University, where he formerly was dean of the College of Education, and is a past president of the Education Law Association. He has written more than 1,500 publications on school law and has presented in every U.S. state, and the SERC session attracted 70 educators.

The session was designed to clarify the distinctions between Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Dr. Zirkel described what an effective school program looks like that complies with all. He covered the latest legal developments and particular issues related to both Section 504 and “double-covered” students, with IDEA IEPs.

Stamford Prioritizes SRBI in School Improvement Effort

SERC is supporting Stamford Public Schools in its district-wide implementation of Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), a key element in the district's strategic improvement plan.

Stamford had implemented SRBI in its elementary schools and sought to expand it to the secondary level when it tapped SERC for technical assistance. SERC Consultant Michelle LeBrun-Griffin is working with the district to guide its development of a framework, strategy, and process for implementation.

In this endeavor, district leadership has been particularly engaged, Michelle says. She has worked closely with Dr. Michael Fernandes, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools, who has helped ensure district communications reflect the training and messaging from the SRBI implementation effort. The district has infused this effort in its overall strategic plan, ensuring synergy between the implementation of SRBI and other school improvement goals.

SRBI is a critical piece of the improvement process both at the district level and school level; the Academy of Information Technology & Engineering (AITE) High School has been the pilot school for the secondary-level SRBI implementation. The chance to serve in this role, AITE Principal Tina Rivera says, has helped building leaders connect the dots: how the school goals and data teams in progress are aligned with the district goals and the strategic school improvement plan.

"I thought that was an amazing opportunity because it would allow us to focus on the work we'd already begun," she says.

Collecting data can be cumbersome, so the school is providing additional professional learning, peer coaching, and meeting time, Tina adds. The teachers use the information gleaned from this process to determine what students need.

"That's [been] really kind of powerful," she explains. "All these teams have pieces of information that inform or should inform the decisions we're making around SRBI."

She noted one challenge for the high school: The SRBI process has been more naturally collaborative for elementary schools, which have built-in specialists such as reading intervention teachers, and for middle schools that have grade-level teams. However, she notes that secondary schools can help students with significant gaps in learning with good instruction, scaffolding, and differentiation.

Ultimately, students may need targeted intervention, and the effort at AITE involves a building-level SRBI core team. Michelle helps facilitate the work of each team, which includes administration, a literacy expert, special education teachers, a behavioral specialist, and two to three other teachers in different subjects to lead change.

"Work cannot be done in isolation," says Rebecca Wilson, the SRBI District Coordinator. "It touches everything and everyone." Any adult in a school building, from office secretary on, may play a role in this

work and sometimes in the provision of intervention.

The team is not just associated with a system of interventions for struggling learners. The common messaging from both the school and district emphasizes equity and the improvement of teaching and learning for all, Michelle says. In the process, the district evaluates what curriculum and instructional areas need enhancement to increase access to learning—from organized social-emotional supports to coordinated individualized education programs (IEPs).

“I haven’t been jazzed about something like I am about this, because I see the end piece,” Tina says—how beneficial it will be for all students and staff.

Guiding New Milford

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)

When working with schools on-site, SERC consultants offer a range of expertise from content to process. They also recognize that school leadership and staff hold the expertise on the school itself. In New Milford, where SERC supported three schools in building up their multi-tiered system of support, SERC Consultants Michelle Weaver and Christine Kuehlewind approached this work with a partnership mindset.

“Letting schools be the experts and drive their own process is about slowing down, at the pace that makes sense for them,” Michelle says.

SERC was contracted to work with four schools. Christine and SERC’s Sarah L. Jones began by conducting a Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) at each school on their progress establishing PBIS and identified three that had little in place at Tier 1. SERC conducted joint training sessions on Tier 1 for teams from these schools as well as on-site technical assistance throughout the year, while the fourth school had training all on site. SERC worked with the behavior leadership team at each school, helping the teams establish how they would operate. Over the course of the year, the school teams learned to develop data-driven decision making processes, products, and systems to improve responses to challenging behaviors.

“This work is important to the school and they want to see it a part of the system,” Michelle says.

With the New Milford contract, as with others involving multiple schools, the support of the district central office was critical for coordinating logistics. Working with just three schools provided the opportunity for SERC to be on site multiple days, allowing for more ongoing conversation.

With this type of partnership, SERC shows the school what needs to happen and works with the school teams to help them figure out a path. The SERC consultants do not dictate how the school moves forward; they offer evidence-based strategies and the school team puts it in the context of its school, determining how and whether those approaches would work as well as individual preference.

For example, Tier 1 involves teaching school-wide expectations for behavior and systematically acknowledging positive behavior. Some schools may choose positive reinforcements while others would find ways to remind the teachers and other adults to praise kids about their actions. Both may involve handing something to the student that suggests a commendation, such as a “ticket.” But the teacher may tell the students that it is intended as their own personal reminder so it’s not interpreted as a reward for good behavior, which is not the purpose of PBIS. Rather, the goals, regardless of the specific means to reach them,

include teaching students what demonstrates positive behavior and ensuring the *adults* act with fidelity.

New Milford's schools determined the paths that worked for them. When Christine returned at the end of the year to conduct a TFI at Schaghticoke Middle School, she noted several key accomplishments, including:

- During the walkthrough, 80% of students that were surveyed knew all five of the school's behavior expectations: Strive, Unite, Respect, Grow, and Encourage.
- Through the use of a School-wide Information System (SWIS), the PBIS Team has instantaneous access to graphed reports that summarize discipline data. The data is organized by the frequency of problem behavior, events by behavior, location, time of day, and by individual student.
- The school has clear definitions for behaviors that interfere with academic and social success and clear policies and procedures for addressing office-managed versus staff-managed problems. A flow chart has been created and is in the handbook.
- Stakeholders—students, families, and community members—provide input on universal foundations on an annual basis through parent surveys and other forms of feedback.

This progress is more sustainable when the schools guide the process. The consultants know what to prioritize and when to hold back on a goal, when a school will get there in time, Michelle says. She has learned to meet the schools where they are, or let them come to their own understanding of what their needs are and what will best meet their needs.

"It's nice to see the team took ownership of the process in their building," she says. "All the schools are working really hard for their students."

Literacy & Curriculum

New Milford's Schaghticoke Middle School was new to implementing the Columbia Teachers' College Reading and Writing Units of Study, and SERC's Janet N.Y. Zarchen was there to help.

The program, designed by the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project, is an approach in which all students are introduced to the same concepts then practice their literacy skills at a level that is individually appropriate to them. Janet's assistance helped guide grade-level teams from Schaghticoke and the two elementary schools, Northville and Hill and Plain, in understanding and scheduling their units of study, selecting materials, examining writing rubrics, and developing their pacing guides based on the workshop model.

Janet and colleague Nikki Hendry also provided the district with training in curriculum writing using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework. The teachers, ranging in subjects from history to health to physical education, learned the UbD process of designing curriculum "backward" that considers the goals of learning first, not starting with how to teach the content. Over the course of three days, sometimes spread over various time periods, the participants had the opportunity to begin writing their curriculum under UbD with Janet and Nikki providing guidance.

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Participant feedback from Janet's work in New Milford:

"Always great meeting with you. You listen to our concerns and truly help explain or find a solution."

"As always, I love that you listen to us! I always leave feeling better."

"I feel so much better about the rest of the year."

Approach targets English Learners' early science learning

SERC consultants coached Hartford Public Schools on an approach to science in early elementary school classrooms that helps teachers engage with English learners and their progress in literacy.

Consultants Paquita Jarman-Smith and Janet N. Y. Zarchen had received training on The Education Development Center (EDC)'s LASerS project, or Literacy and Academic Success for English Learners through Science. Following the LASerS training at the Connecticut Science Center, which includes educators from several Hartford elementary schools, Paquita and Janet then went into the schools to provide coaching to help the teachers apply what they have learned.

Like all early learners from the youngest ages, EL students understand more than they can express. Science involves observation, making predictions, and reflecting on what they have seen—and teachers learn how students are doing that mostly through verbal and written communication. The LASerS approach uses science inquiry and investigations as a guide for teachers to promote language development.

“As the curriculum says, ‘Science is a new language for all young children,’” Paquita says. “LASerS is a perfect match for all students.”

Family engagement is a key component. The LASerS approach encourages teachers to inquire about family experiences and knowledge. For example, when teaching about the natural world, they would find out how often the children's families spend time in nature, whether they take care of plants at home, and some of the words in their home language they use to describe certain elements of nature that they can then use in the classroom.

The LASerS grant to the district also included materials for use in the classroom and at home, such as seeds. The program included family events so families can see for themselves what their children are learning and extend it into their homes. The events also allow teachers to observe students and their families engaging with the science in their home language, and some of the parents at the events are even more engaged than the kids, Paquita says. At the end of the year, families in participating Hartford classrooms had a free day at the Connecticut Science Center.

Under LASerS, Paquita, whose work at SERC focuses on early childhood, and Janet, whose focus is literacy, coach the teachers on their learning plans. Sometimes the consultants serve as a co-teacher and other times observe and provide feedback and opportunities for reflection on instructional strategies specific to English learners.

Supporting Hartford schools with implementing LASerS allowed Paquita and Janet to see immediate results with students. They have directly observed the children's enthusiasm about the hands-on science lessons.

When it's a LASerS investigation, Paquita says, the kids “know it's going to be a fun day.”

Additional support for Hartford

2017-2018 marked SERC's second yearlong Special Education Contract with Hartford Public Schools. Since the beginning of our work together, the goal was to build educator and paraeducator capacity in providing classroom management strategies for educating students with disabilities, including applied behavior analysis. The varied support was designed to meet the needs of educators with varying years of experience in the field. The evaluations have helped SERC trainers to assess levels of understanding, driving future planning and instruction and make decisions regarding content.

Driving the quality of early childhood education

During 2017-2018, SERC oversaw and delivered technical assistance and training to early childhood educators to improve the quality of programs statewide under a grant it won from the United Way of Connecticut.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) launched the Accreditation Quality Recognition and Improvement System (AQIS) of professional development for child care providers to improve the quality of early childhood programs. The United Way of Connecticut, which administers the program, chose SERC through a request for proposals to deliver the services.

SERC Consultant Paquita Jarman-Smith served as the Director of Program Development, coordinating, managing, and facilitating the quality improvement services. Consultant Christine Kuehlewind provided other supports as needed.

The services provided included technical assistance to 15 programs enrolled in the Quality Improvement Recognition System Pilot (QRIS) and Consultative Support to programs identified by the Office of Early Childhood.

Additionally, SERC provided professional development around the state that included:

- Pyramid Model for Social Emotional Development: 7 full days
- CT Early Learning and Development Standards: 5 full days
- Trauma Informed Care: 4½ days; and
- Nutrition and Physical Activity in Childcare: to five programs.

Other SERC consultants provided additional training, coaching and technical assistance.

The QRIS pilot involved visiting 15 programs in 14 towns across the state, including licensed family child care providers; child care programs, both private and state-funded; and school-age providers. The visits included a pre-assessment, focusing on the QRIS three pillars of health and safety, quality of workforce, and the learning environment. The programs chose two pillars on which to focus improvement activities.

Paquita says she has loved the opportunity to work with adults to help improve their practices. This work, she says, will “ultimately benefit the youngest and give them better opportunities for learning.”

Support with approaches to technology

In a number of districts in 2017-18, SERC assisted schools in reviewing their infrastructure around assistive technology (AT) and accessible educational materials (AEM) and how to determine what a student with disabilities needs. SERC provided four days of training and technical assistance to districts and school-based teams to support them in including AT and AEM in their policies and practices.

Planning and Placement Teams (PPTs) must consider AT and services in developing and revising IEPs for students with disabilities. SERC’s in-district support in this area is customized depending on the school’s needs.

In some cases, the schools created an AT team to facilitate the AT cycle (consideration, assessment, documentation, implementation, and evaluation). The teams evaluate their AT inventory and decide how existing technologies can be used to support access, participation, and progress. The teams include a general and special education administrator, a speech-language pathologist or occupational therapist, a school or district information technology coordinator, and a paraeducator.

In other cases, schools were focused on learning how to provide equitable access to educational materials through the use of AEM and on developing an action plan to implement it.

Culturally responsive practices

Among those receiving training from SERC on culturally responsive practices were adult education teachers and staff in Middletown November 4, 2017. It's not often that teachers get the time to reflect and engage with one another about their practices, and even less often about their beliefs behind their practice. This particular training afforded participants to do just that.

Staff members were initially provided with content about culture, equity and the importance of being culturally responsive to the students they encounter on a daily basis. They were then provided with a tool and protocol to help engage in “courageous conversations” with one another and then led through a set of self-reflective exercises to examine their beliefs and implicit biases they may hold. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to practice and utilize the protocol to engage in courageous dialogue.

SERC supports New London school improvement

Before the 2017-2018 school year began, leadership teams from each of New London's public schools met to develop and refine their school improvement plans (SIPs). Consultants from SERC and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) facilitated the process by building on the protocol the schools used earlier in the year to create drafts of their SIPs. The day was designed to provide opportunities for the schools to use the collective knowledge and expertise of all the people in the room in order to create highly impactful SIPs.

New London Public Schools is putting into practice the research that shows collaboration helps to improve student outcomes.

SERC heads north, supporting Vermont

In 2017-2018, SERC began providing training and support for the State of Vermont under a contract with the state's Agency of Education.

The goal of the contract was to build the state's capacity to facilitate the Educational (Ed) Benefit process and to improve the educational outcomes for students with disabilities. SERC Consultant Nikki Hendry facilitated the development of the contract for SERC, as part of a federal grant Vermont has with the Office of Special Education Programs.

The Ed Benefit Process helps educators assess whether an IEP provides the student with adequate

educational benefit. During summer 2017, Nikki provided training on the Ed Benefit process for Vermont Agency of Education staff, other state agencies, and other education personnel. Participants undergoing the training then train others on the process.

SERC returned to Vermont for site visits between December and May of the 2017-2018 school year. Nikki traveled to Vermont six times, joined twice each by SERC colleagues Stephen Proffitt and Missy Wrigley. Together, they visited 10 of Vermont's supervisory unions (school districts) and co-facilitated the on-site training alongside the new Vermont trainers.

The districts participated by providing their own IEPs to do their own Ed Benefit process. Teams composed of administrators, general and special education teachers, and student support services professionals (SSSPs) went through each step of the process, generating a list of IEP practices to keep and change and drafting a mini-action plan.

Once the teams submitted their action plans, the SERC consultants went back and wrote a summary report on each visit for the Agency of Education. When the agency has enough of a sample statewide, it can see trends and determine areas of need for its own action plan, Nikki says.

Later, as part of the process, school personnel may conduct random audits on IEPs and revisit the process.

"It's really about their own self-reflection," Nikki says. "It's not about the state coming in and saying, 'That's wrong.'"

The opportunity to employ our expertise beyond Connecticut has been exciting for SERC. Nikki noted that some of the participants in Vermont were from Connecticut and appreciated the opportunity to work with SERC outside the state.



SUPPORTING THE STATE

SERC leads on School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG)

SERC continues to be a leader in the implementation of tiered systems of support in schools through its oversight of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in the state and its coordination of the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG).

In 2017-2018, SERC provided ongoing support to six SCTG schools participating in intensive on-site job-embedded PBIS training. Each school had goals related to their implementation of a multi-tier behavioral framework. All three of the Cohort A schools—those that began participating in the SCTG program in the 2015-2016 school year—met their family engagement targets over the three years of their participation. Cohort B schools met their student behavior goal indicators.

The first cohort completed its three-year cycle in 2017-2018. The three schools in Cohort B were scheduled to complete their cycle at the end of the 2018-2019 school year.

As of June 2018, SERC had the largest number of endorsed PBIS trainers in the Northeast—six out of nine. SERC’s Eben McKnight was among the first in Connecticut and Massachusetts to receive the endorsement, followed by Sarah L. Jones, who coordinates CT’s SCTG; Nikki Hendry; Amanda Pickett; Michelle Weaver; and Missy Wrigley.

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 a collaboration between the CT State Department of Education and Center for Behavioral Education and Research (CBER) at the University of Connecticut.



In the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 fiscal years combined, 159 State-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventories (TFIs) were conducted to assess schools’ implementation of PBIS. A total of 878 school personnel received technical assistance through SWBPIS TFI implementation, and 106 schools were located in a CSDE Alliance District.

In addition to receiving ongoing training, SERC's endorsed trainers continue to share with others statewide and nationally, including at the Northeast PBIS Forum in Mystic and the New England PBIS Forum, hosted by the May Institute, in Norwood, Mass. At the SCTG Project Directors Meeting in Chicago, Sarah presented a revised poster on Connecticut's SCTG and Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) data to examine Connecticut's needs in tiers 2 and 3.

Participating in the PBIS conferences help guide the consultants the next time they work with districts that are seeking the best way to approach implementation. SERC's Michelle Weaver says she gets important updates and reminders on what strategies work, what elements to include, and how to talk schools through the implementation process to ensure they aren't missing those critical features.

A survey of schools participating in SCTG during the 2017-2018 school year, conducted by an external evaluator, revealed a high degree of satisfaction with SERC's support throughout the year. All respondents said the on-site support had a positive impact on the school's ability to implement PBIS school-wide, with half reporting a "strong" positive impact.

Some responses included:

"Every visit brought new skills and ideas on how to improve our framework"

"Although I have extensive [experience] in the PBIS framework, it has been very helpful to hear various perspectives and ideas about options for PBIS implementation at our school.... Having the designated time to work as a team to create the structures and resources for our school has been the most helpful part of this experience."

"Not every school has the same challenges, so it is vital that what we use is flexible and not simple 'one size fits all.' The trainers are incredibly patient within the learning process to help us break out of the boxes we appear to be stuck in."

"I was extremely impressed by the positive impact it had on student climate but even more so by its impact on staff morale!"

SERC posts updates on the SCTG at <http://ctserc.org/sctg>

North Haven partnership continues

SERC has supported North Haven Public Schools for many years on implementing multi-tiered systems of support, and PBIS booster sessions in 2017-2018 provided SERC consultants the opportunity to share what they had learned from the Northeast PBIS Forum.

The schools had participated in PBIS training previously. For these PBIS booster sessions, the schools worked with our rotating set of technical assistance providers.

“It really gives you the chance to get to know staff really well and build relationships,” says SERC Consultant Nikki Hendry. “I feel like I’m having an impact, and they feel like they’re having an impact on their students.”

SERC worked with the PBIS coaches from each school to give them new content. The consultants shared the scholarship of Anne Todd of the University of Oregon, whose influence has contributed to schools’ approach to the School-wide Information System (SWIS) and the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET).

In the room are school-based teams composed of administrators, general and special education teachers, and sometimes student support services professionals (SSSPs). Usually the teams include 4-5 people, occasionally more (sometimes there is turnover). Ideally, the high school teams include students.

Someone can volunteer to serve as the PBIS coach regardless of role. A coach is part of the team, but also assists with implementation.

SERC worked one day with the elementary school teams, another day with the middle and high school, and then a third day when they all came together. This gave the teams the opportunity to share with one another, including successes with implementation and tools and ideas.

Easing suspension rates

Under the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG), the Connecticut State Department of Education Turnaround Office had SERC facilitate a convening of state charter schools to work on reducing their suspension rates. Through data it review it was determined that 14 schools had met the threshold of suspension rates that were more than two times the state average of 6.7% of the student population. Ten schools identified by the state participated in the June 8, 2018, convening.

SERC consultants led teams from each charter school through a protocol of examining their suspension data, making an action plan based on the data, and conducting an afternoon gallery walk to see what other schools and teams had worked on. As part of a goal to create a 3-tiered behavioral model, for example, a school would determine what it already has in place at different tiers and what it needs to keep or change. Some of the participating schools were scheduled to receive follow-up technical assistance.

SUPPORTING PARTNERS

Behavioral systems of support

SERC joined with CSDE, the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (CT DMHAS) and Safe/Schools Healthy Students (SS/HS) to hold a Behavioral Systems of Support conference on May 21, 2018. The event was funded by a grant under SS/HS, of which SERC is one of the partners.

The conference provided a broad overview of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for students' behavioral and mental health, including strategies and practices to foster students' social-emotional development. SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady noted the timeliness of the subject: three days earlier, a shooting at the Santa Fe High School in Texas had left 10 students dead.

The keynote speaker, from Texas, was a native of Connecticut: Diane Myers, Ph.D., associate professor and chair of the Department of Teacher Education and Program Coordinator for Special Education at Texas Women's University. She spoke of the challenges of classroom management and the need to help guide students toward positive behavior.

For example, when teachers tell students "You need to stop talking," they are not giving them an incentive to change behavior or guiding them on what to do instead (keeping quiet is not an active behavior). Dr. Myers also encouraged asking the question of whether changing behavior actually results in better things for the learner.

She emphasized the need for schools to follow through on a tiered system of behavioral support, since students need guidance on learning social-emotional skills just as much as learning academics. Effective tier 1 supports do not wag fingers, they teach: Signs in hallways and classrooms that tell students what *not* to do, which cannot possibly include everything, are a lot less effective than signs that guide students in what *to* do and how to act, she said.

She offered a response to the argument that students should not reward students for what they should be doing anyway: (1) Everyone likes to be told they're doing a good job; (2) Most of what we have learned is due to reinforcement; and (3) Would *you* teach for free?

Breakout presentations were from:

- SERC's Nicole Vitale and Amanda Pickett, discussing cultural responsiveness in behavioral interventions: e.g., understanding cultural differences to avoid false assumptions.
- SERC's Michelle LeBrun-Griffin and representatives from SS/HS on data collection to improve student behavioral health outcomes, including a student support page for recording school-based mental health services, visits, and referrals.
- SERC's Nitza Diaz and FAVOR's Beresford Wilson and Denetra McBride on engaging families in MTSS.
- Bridgeport Public Schools, which presented on the alignment between PBIS, restorative practice, and the RULER approach, and its use of the Boys Town model.

- New Britain Public Schools, which presented on purposeful play in early learning environments and the value of building executive functioning skills, and on building a social-emotional learning framework through partnerships with Boys Town and the Ana Grace Project.
- Enfield Public Schools and the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) in Farmington on the School Health Assessment & Performance Evaluation (“SHAPE”) system and the use of psychoeducation to help kids navigate feelings and situations.

‘Transition’ into Leadership

SERC was proud to highlight student voice at the latest Connecticut Secondary Transition Symposium, held June 26 and 27 at the University of Connecticut main campus.

Students with disabilities have had the opportunity to speak at the event over the years, but the theme of the 2018 symposium was explicitly “Enhancing Student Voice.” The opening message was “YOUth Leading the Way.”

The symposium focuses on how students with disabilities can plan for and navigate life after high school. In addition to SERC, sponsors of the event include CSDE, the CT Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), the CT Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)/Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, and UConn’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). SERC Consultant Missy Wrigley helps lead the planning with SERC’s Project Support Specialists overseeing that day’s event..

Bryan Klimkiewicz, chief of the CSDE Bureau of Special Education, spoke about Connecticut’s Youth Advisory Group and Community of Practice, in which students with disabilities literally have a seat at the table to shape school and transition services for students like them. He stressed that there can never be too much student support and voice, suggesting that Secondary Transition and student-friendly language should be infused throughout students’ IEPs.

The symposium included panels of young adults with disabilities speaking about their recent transition experience. One, Christopher McCray, has served on the advisory group and is now a paraeducator for Branford Public Schools. He told the audience, “I know how it feels to be ‘that kid.’”

Jake Shumbo, who had presented at the previous symposium as well as the BSE Back to School conference, had advice for other students with disabilities. “You must be an advocate for yourself.... Keep that relationship with yourself healthy and keep it positive. You have to know your capabilities.... It is part of who you are and why you’re here.”

“How are you bettering your community? If you’re not, why is that? Because we’re all here for a reason.... It may take a while for a reason to be shown.”

A panel of parents shared their own experiences, including pushing for their child to be included on the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) and finding the right balance of support from their child’s paraeducator. An IEP clinic gave parents the opportunity to discuss their child’s IEP.



Other highlights of the symposium:

- SERC Consultant Amanda Pickett facilitated a session for families on ensuring their children are emotionally ready for college. She emphasized that all students, with and without disabilities, need supports, and that every students should connect with at least one adult. Parents should ask schools about their Tier 1 (universal) social-emotional learning practices, including their individualized supports.
- SERC Consultant Missy Wrigley covered the person-centered planning process beyond high school and Secondary Transition assessments. She noted that educators do not need parental permission before conducting a transition assessment, but should keep them in the loop when using a Transition Planning Inventory and Transition Skills Inventory. Missy suggested making intent clear: “Independence” may mean one thing to families that intend to have their grown children actually live independently, compared to others whose children will continue living with them.
- Jennifer Sullivan of LEARN and Rob Samul of Mitchell College’s Thames Academy covered executive functioning skills, which continue evolving into adulthood, how to tell whether the pace of development is unusual, and what skills are needed for college.
- UConn UCEDD covered self-advocacy for college students with disabilities and the Think College initiative on higher education options for those with intellectual disabilities.
- CT DMHAS’s Dana Begin described services for young adults, including those transitioning out of the Department of Children and Families.
- Katie Hanley of Oak Hill spoke about sexuality education, especially when physiological changes happen before reaching a particular social-emotional age.
- DORS/BRS covered the regional American Job Center offices and the disability resource coordinator in each of the five Connecticut regions, and eligibility-based programs for students with disabilities completing their secondary education.
- The American School for the Deaf described its self-advocacy/self-determination courses.

Building capacity in all school roles

Education support professionals (ESPs), who provide schools with a variety of services from clerical to transportation, got a new set of standards to assist them in their professional growth—in part through SERC’s support.

SERC consultants worked with the National Education Association (NEA) to finalize the standards outlined in the report “Education Support Professionals: Professional Growth Continuum,” which NEA released in fall 2017. The report outlines indicators of what ESPs should know and be able to do at each of three levels of practice: foundational, proficient, and advanced/mastery.

SERC helped NEA fine-tune and professionalize the standards at the three levels. The standards are divided into nine career families: clerical services, custodial and maintenance services, food services, health and student services, paraeducators, security services, skilled trades, technical services, and transportation services.

The standards are intended for professional growth, not as a means of evaluating ESPs' performance, says Kc Nelson-Oliveria, a SERC consultant who helped support the NEA's efforts. The report gives ESPs added recognition and a tool to advocate for their professional development.

School resource officers, for example, can refer to the standards and identify specific areas of proficiency they may need to build. (Likewise, administrators seeking professional development for certain roles, such as paraeducators, can better identify what they should look for or ask for.) For ESPs seeking alternative future employment, the standards provide a means to demonstrate evidence to another school district on how they have gone beyond their foundational knowledge, Kc says.

The nine career families share eight universal standards: communication, cultural competence, organization, reporting, ethics, health and safety, technology, and professionalism. A proficient communication standard of "manage information important to creating a safe learning environment," or an advanced organization standard of "analyze systems and procedures for efficiency and effectiveness, and suggest or implement improvements," applies to any ESP across the career families, from a data processing specialist to a playground monitor.

The cultural competence standards reflect a deep understanding of the identity of self and others. At the advanced/mastery level, ESPs would be able to identify and address the consequences of inequity and use one's own cultural background to mentor or coach students and other staff in racial justice—the type of leadership in equity that SERC is well-steeped in.

Anthony Brisson, a former SERC consultant who joined the NEA as a senior program/policy analyst, saw SERC's expertise as a natural fit for finalizing the standards. SERC has worked with a variety of support services professionals, from paraeducators to school nurses. In addition, regardless of role, including those outside SERC's typical audience such as custodians, SERC applied its experience bringing working groups together to sift through raw data and develop clear objectives. In the end, trades with different or non-specific standards had similar language and a self-assessment tool to better establish themselves within a larger professional learning community.

"Through the support of the State Education Resource Center (SERC) located in Middletown, Connecticut," the NEA report reads, "the Universal Standards for the nine ESP Career Families were brought to life."

For more information, go to www.nea.org/esppgc.

New SERC site goes live

SERC launched a redesigned website featuring many new professional learning opportunities heading into 2018.

The new site describes SERC's services aligned with the three elements of the agency's vision: Equity, Excellence, and Education. The Services tab includes comprehensive lists of everything SERC offers in several areas, from support for students with disabilities to early childhood care and education.

Resources are now in one location, searchable by keyword, topic, and type (article, video, etc.), and can be listed in a chosen order (most recent, popularity, etc.).

SERC posts the professional learning opportunities under the Events tab, added as the year progresses. Instead of listing all events in chronological order, the page lists a few highlights and lets users choose what they want to display. Users can now search the events by keyword, topic, the type of event (online or in-person on one or more days), and month, for those who do want to see all events for a particular month.



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