



# 2018-2019 State Education Resource Center Annual Program Report





# STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER 2018-2019 PROGRAM REPORT

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# WELCOME FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am pleased to present SERC's annual program report.

FY2018-2019 was a pivotal year. We began the fiscal year leaner and ended stronger, with new partnerships reinforcing our efforts across the state and influencing practices well beyond Connecticut. We are grateful for the CT State Department of Education (CSDE)'s commitment to our work and to all who help support our vision: Equity. Excellence. Education.



As we celebrate our 50th year, we are reminded that Connecticut was a leader in serving students with disabilities. When SERC began as a small library in 1969, special education was hardly universal; there was no federal law mandating education for all. Yet Connecticut explicitly established SERC as “a potential new source of help and energy for special education in Connecticut,” as described in a 1969 newsletter of CSDE's then-Bureau of Pupil Personnel/Special Educational Services. It is humbling to be a part of this history.

SERC continues to play a crucial role in the state's commitment to serving all children. Connecticut Public Act 19-12, signed into law in June 2019, requires SERC to develop a high school course in Black and Latino Studies. We are excited to lead this effort in alignment with our longstanding work on tackling racial equity in education at the school, district, and statewide levels. Our 2019 Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, our fourth, ballooned to more than 750 participants.

We could not have persevered in this work without the ongoing support of our partners and to everyone who shares our vision. On behalf of our Board of directors, our staff, and of the educators, families, and children of Connecticut—thank you for your advocacy and dedication.

Sincerely,  
Ingrid M. Canady  
Executive Director  
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# EQUITY, EXCELLENCE, EDUCATION: SERC'S ROLE AND INFLUENCE IN CONNECTICUT

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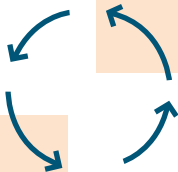
Connecticut public schools have a huge task. They must meet federal, state, and district mandates while building the capacity of their administrators and educators to identify and provide effective instruction and supports for students with special education needs, students of color, and students acquiring English (i.e., Connecticut’s lowest performing subgroups). SERC not only supports individual schools and districts in creating more equitable learning environments for all students, it coordinates this effort on a statewide level—transforming systems in a way that helps ensure an excellent education for Connecticut students. This statewide role makes SERC’s involvement essential when Connecticut policy makers pursue equitable outcomes and develop and implement any future consequential changes in the delivery of special education services.

## INCLUSION

SERC was explicitly created in 1969 as the entity that helps the state meet its responsibilities to students with disabilities. As it evolved, SERC led the integration of special and general education, historically divided systems, into a unified approach to education that promotes equitable policies, culturally relevant practices, and accessible structures that develop achieving learning communities within schools.

## COLLABORATION

SERC recognizes that to be effective in facilitating change that is systemic, effective, and enduring, all stakeholders must be included in the change process. Through collaborative partnerships with SERC, education systems shape their own transformation while SERC guides the process and customizes application of research and new thinking. SERC maintains ongoing relationships built among partners and offers continued support to foster and sustain systemic change.



## EQUITY

SERC’s longstanding commitment to equity has provided a unique perspective on addressing the current opportunity gaps. Its blueprint, outlined in “Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach” and demonstrated in work with schools and districts, reflects five critical elements to transformational change and capacity building in education. SERC and its partners work to ensure that equity and excellence are at the forefront of decisions made on behalf of all children.

## SCOPE

SERC services a broad range of constituents, including state-level policy makers, educators, families, and community members through a variety of venues and mediums. SERC’s three major functions—creation and provision of resources, operation of a centralized library, and facilitation of professional learning experiences and programming—are organized across several units and job positions covering a wide range of supports and services for the state.

# SERC AT 50

## *The last 50 years in special education*

**1969** – Some states still have education laws excluding children with disabilities; just one in five children with disabilities nationwide was provided an education in public schools. Connecticut establishes the Special Education Resource Center as a small library on the campus of St. Joseph’s College in West Hartford (now the University of St. Joseph). SERC promises “greater opportunities for special educators from throughout the state to become directly involved in producing and introducing innovative ideas.” <sup>1</sup>

**1975** – The Education for All Handicapped children Act (Public Law 94-142) guarantees a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to every child with a disability in every state and locality across the country. Connecticut establishes SERC in statute.

**1970s - 1990s** – SERC professional development and services encompass annual resource fairs, workshops, and eventually in-district supports. New federal laws strengthen the role of parents and other aspects of individualized education programs (IEPs). Students with disabilities spend increased school time with nondisabled peers. <sup>2</sup>

**1990s - 2000s** – In 1997, the Education for all Handicapped Children’s Act becomes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA is changed again in 2004 to ensure education meets children’s unique needs and prepares them for future goals, and to protect the rights of both children with disabilities and their parents. <sup>3</sup>

**2005** – By this time, many best practices in special education are replicated similarly in general education. The Connecticut General Assembly amends the SERC statute to rename it the State Education Resource Center, signifying a meaningful integration of special education and general education into a single system.

**2000s** – The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 reveals significant disparities between students of color and their white peers. SERC launches an exploration into the role of race and racism in Connecticut and the entire education system, culminating in a 2011 report “Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach.”

**2014** – SERC becomes a quasi-public agency under Public Act 14-212. P. A. 14-212 requires that SERC be governed by a Board of Directors, with seats appointed by the Governor and other elected officials.

**2015** – The SERC Foundation, Inc., is established as a 501(c)3 organization to seek alternative sources of funding to support SERC’s mission and vision. It establishes its own Board of Directors.

**2016** – SERC and the SERC Foundation launch the Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, with participation growing exponentially each year.

1 Connecticut State Department of Education: Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services. (1969). SERC starts work as new ‘nerve center’ for special education research, development. Dialogue, 1(1). Hartford, CT.

2 <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history.html>

3 <https://www.wrightslaw.com/law/art/history.spec.ed.law.htm>

# DIALOGUE

VOL. 1 NO. 1



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION

OCT. 1969



Ready to Serve: Office Manager Marge Diaz, Coordinator Gabriel Simches and Media Specialist Don Berg shown reviewing plans for the new SERC library facility.

## SERC Starts Work as New 'Nerve Center' For Special Education Research, Development

SERC is the name of a potential new source of help and energy for special education in Connecticut.

SERC — The Special Education Resource Center — opened this month on the campus of St. Joseph College in West Hartford. Established under a contract between the college and the Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services, State Department of Education, the center is designed as a focal point of action and communication for special education personnel from throughout the state.

SERC's planned functions are vast and ambitious: acquisition, evaluation, development, demonstration, dissemination,

and research — all geared to the best available new techniques and materials in special education.

SERC is best described in terms of questions rather than answers. It will offer no prescriptions and no instant cures. Its effectiveness will depend on two factors: first, the talents and skills of the SERC staff to stimulate the clients' interest; and second — perhaps even more important — the creative demands of the clients to stimulate the staff and direct the efforts of SERC. It is hoped that all personnel in Connecticut working directly with exceptional children — in public and private

(continued on page 2)

## Discussion Scheduled On Dispersal Theory For 'Special' Classes

Some 70 years ago, the "dumb room" in many public schools — a place of crude manual arts training or simple custodial care — began to give way to specialized classes led by professionals skilled in the diagnosis and instruction of retardates. Since then, Connecticut has ranked among the national leaders in providing special classes for the mentally retarded. Approximately 7,500 children are now enrolled in about 600 special classes for the mentally retarded in 105 school districts in the state.

On October 31, state elementary school principals will hear a striking proposal for reorganizing many special classes and bringing educable mentally retarded children, particularly "functional" educables in large urban areas, more fully into the flow of school life.

The theme of the day-long meeting, scheduled for the Clintonville School in North Haven on teachers' convention day, is "A Modified or 'New' Approach in the Education of Children Classified as Educable Mentally Retarded in the Elementary School."

Dr. Joseph Lavender, Bureau Consultant for Education for Mentally Retarded Children, allows that some principals may be confused by what appears to be a reversal of policy: "I've been personally involved in helping to increase the number of special classes for the educable mentally retarded from 100 to 375 in recent years. The

(continued on page 7)

## SERC'S 50<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

Although the original intent of SERC continues to form the core of the agency's activities, the interrelationship between special education and all other educational improvement efforts is vital, growing in significance, and inextricable. Efforts involving early childhood education, family engagement, English learners, assessment, positive behavior supports, and other areas have a direct relationship with outcomes for students with disabilities. As a result, SERC plays an enhanced role in these and other related areas as it continues to seamlessly integrate general and special education programs and services with the support and expertise of SERC professionals and partners. All of the agency's efforts are designed to address Connecticut's opportunity gaps by building the capacity of educators, service providers, and families to meet the diverse needs of our student population.

Changes at SERC have focused on the need for the integration of all education services; these changes are directly reflected in SERC's professional development offerings. Even though SERC continues to have special education as its foundation, SERC's initiatives and programs have expanded from being a leading resource for special educators and families to serving all Connecticut educators, human services professionals, families, and community members. In recent years, SERC's district, school, and program-based activities have been strengthened, providing more and more on-site training, technical assistance, consultation, and group facilitation to school and program personnel working diligently to provide a quality education for Connecticut's children and youth. These professional development partnerships best reflect SERC's evolution of service and its integral role in Connecticut's educational community.



# EQUITY IN EDUCATION

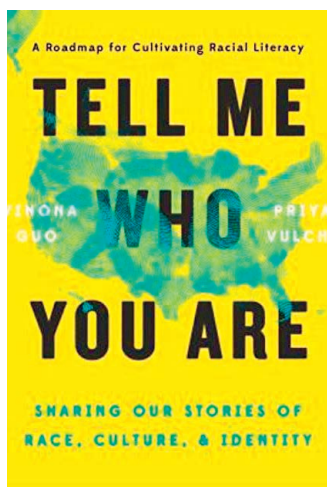


#RaceinEd2019

The annual Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, sponsored by SERC in collaboration with the SERC Foundation, focuses on ways to support, promote, and develop racial equity in education. The full-day conference supports educators, families, and community leaders who seek to confront racist structures and practices to better serve Connecticut's students and their families, through advocacy and the development, implementation, and sustainability of innovative, culturally relevant programming.

The fourth annual conference on April 26, 2019, had nearly 750 participants, more than double the number from the first conference, and included more than 120 youth. It was the first to be held at the Connecticut Convention Center.

The conference featured a keynote address by Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo, the college-age founders of choose.org and authors of "Tell Me Who You Are," chronicling their travels to all 50 states to facilitate conversations about race, released just weeks after the conference.



*"In the 21st century, racial and cultural literacy is as important as technology and math literacy."*

– Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo, in their keynote at SERC's Dismantling Systemic Racism conference

At the start of the conference, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady had a message to the students: *“Use today’s venue as an opportunity to celebrate... your heritage, your individuality, your power as members of a transformational generation. Allow your voice to be amplified today.”*



As high school students, Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo questioned why racial equity was not included as a 21st-century skill. In their keynote, they identified a “heart gap”—a lack of understanding and compassion—and the “mind gap,” how racism operates structurally. They cited “racial and cultural intimacy,” recalling how in speaking about race with strangers, they realized they had not had similar conversations with those they knew.

The conference sessions included even younger voices, with presenters as young as sixth graders.

Students from Miss Porter’s School in Farmington presented on their two-year Youth Participatory Action Research project to explore the questions: *How do our students’ experiences with teacher support, their response to feedback, or their help-seeking behavior vary depending on their race? Could teacher feedback itself vary based on the race of the student? How do our student’s experiences with the classroom environment vary?*



The Miss Porter’s students who presented at the conference were asked how to help students engage in the dialogue. Their answer: *“Make the conversation normal.... No one should have the option to opt out of the discomfort.”*



Mary Nelson’s sixth grade student poets from Spring Glen School in Hamden, in their session *“SLAMming Racism: Breaking Racial Barriers through Spoken Word Poetry.”*





All conference participants heard powerful lunchtime performances from PaperVoices, a youth-led poetry squad from Manchester. *"We think it's our job to give students a voice, but we actually need to give them a platform to use the voice they already have."*



One student dismantled the dominant narrative about the heroism of Christopher Columbus, concluding, *"Tell my people's stories, and tell their truths. Help us get our voices back."*

The squad's final words: *"I love you, and there's nothing you can do about it."*

# EXCELLENCE IN EQUITY AWARD

## #RaceinEd2019

The conference also features the presentation of our George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Award. This award honors someone who demonstrates extraordinary acts of commitment and courage to ensure equity for all students, especially students of color and culturally and linguistically diverse students—and that they are valued and respected in their school experience. SERC seeks nominations from across Connecticut and beyond.

Recipients are selected based on their steadfast and unwavering action in:

- Advocating for children and families of color;
- Galvanizing individuals and coalitions toward equitable action;
- Taking risks in conversation and action regarding issues of equity for racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse groups;
- Engaging the diverse needs of members of an education community and reconciling them toward a shared vision; and
- Furthering the exchange of information that affects thinking and effects conviction on matters of equity.

We honored two winners in 2019:

“We always have to talk about race,” said award recipient **Diane Clare-Kearney, Ed.D.**, an educator in Manchester Public Schools for more than three decades. “You’re going to have some battle scars.” Dr. Clare-Kearney played a key role in spearheading programs and initiatives to foster inclusion and strengthen relationships among Manchester’s diverse population, including G.R.A.D.S., a program to empower and

### About George A. Coleman

George A. Coleman has infused his values of equity and opportunity within all of his roles in Connecticut education. As an administrator at the CT State Department of Education, including two appointments as Acting Commissioner, Mr. Coleman continuously advanced the truth that all children can learn. He has refused to accept educational disparities and has made the most of his positions to advocate for the highest opportunities for all students. Mr. Coleman has also been a critical partner with SERC in advancing an educational system that confronts the impact of racism among children of color and their families. In addition to Acting Commissioner, Mr. Coleman’s other roles during his 24-year career at CSDE were Deputy Commissioner, Associate Commissioner, Chief of the Bureau of Curriculum and Teaching, and Chief of the Bureau of Early Childhood Education. Mr. Coleman retired from CSDE in October 2011 and has since joined the Boards of SERC and the SERC Foundation.



support marginalized students. She has served as director of equity programming and director of Manchester Adult and Continuing Education as well as leadership roles in the community to tackle racial issues. She was chairman of the board of RE-Center, a Manchester nonprofit agency that worked with Manchester Schools to develop an Equity School Climate Assessment, which was released the week of the SERC conference.

The Journal-Inquirer newspaper profiled Dr. Clare Kearney in announcing the SERC award:  
<https://bit.ly/3cMOJNp>

“Equity is about access, opportunity, and outcomes,” said the second awardee, **Patricia Garcia, Ph.D.** It’s “about providing every student what they need.” And as superintendent of Windham Public Schools, equity “is my responsibility.” Dr. Garcia implemented the Windham Early College Opportunity program, which has received national distinction, and oversaw the removal of all Windham schools from Connecticut’s list of turnaround schools. She previously led school districts in New York and Virginia and joined leaders from across the U.S. on the Executive Committee of the District Administration Leadership Institute.

The Telemundo New England television station covered our conference and interviewed Dr. Garcia:  
<https://bit.ly/2KEICzD> (en español)



*“I finally see people around me taking risks and the comfortable getting uncomfortable. I finally feel that I will see, in my lifetime, us eradicate the opportunity gap and achievement gap for our youth as a result.”*

**- Diane Clare-Kearney, Excellence in Equity Award winner**

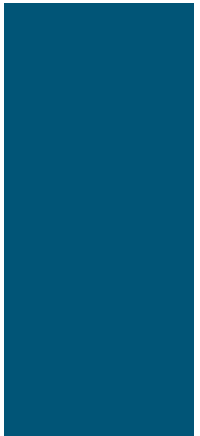


Telemundo’s Miguel Santiesteban interviews SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady at our Dismantling Systemic Racism conference April 26, 2019, at the Connecticut Convention Center, Hartford





SERC's Janet N. Y. Zarchen, conference organizer



*"As a woman of color, Latina, immigrant, English learner, parent, and educator, I know what it means to advocate for social justice for our students of color."*

**-Patricia Garcia, Excellence in Equity Award winner**



*"The public school has been the democratizing institution" to help us find "what it is to be an American,"* SERC Acting Board Chair George A. Coleman told the conference participants. *"Don't look for the simple answers. Think about the generations to come."*



SERC pushed the state to consider what equity means, said Connecticut Education Commissioner Dianna Wentzell, Ed.D. She added, *"We wouldn't be able to engage in a comprehensive plan" in this area without SERC's leadership.*



**SERC Foundation Chair & SERC Board Member Jeff Leake**



We also presented SERC Recognition Awards to districts and organizations that have partnered with SERC to support their efforts to promote social justice and racial equity: Avon Public Schools, Connecticut Voices for Children, Montessori Training Center, Oxford Public Schools, Regional School District 13, Regional School District 15, Southington Public Schools, Stamford Public Schools, Thomaston Public Schools, and Waterbury Public Schools

At the conclusion of the conference, when participants were asked “What about the conference makes you want to return?,” some of the answers included:

- *Learning from other practitioners across the state, excellent presentations and presenters as well as powerful keynote speeches, thoughts and inspiration. It’s good to be in [a] community and learn and grow together.*
- *The depth of information that can be used immediately, national research, and new trends and strategies.*
- *I am always looking to learn about how we can change the public education system, which operates through a racist system. I also like to be with like-minded people who are trying to disrupt the status quo.*
- *Frank, candid discussion of the impact of race on the important work that we do with children and with one another.*



## PUBLIC ACT NO. 19-12

In May 2019, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation calling for SERC to lead the development of a new high school course on African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino studies. The Governor signed Public Act 19-12 into law on June 21, 2019.

Under the law, SERC must work with stakeholders to complete a draft curriculum and present a completed draft for public comment by September 2020. P.A. 19-12 requires the State Board of Education to approve the course by January 1, 2021, for submission to the General Assembly Education Committee, and make the course curriculum available to school districts beginning in the 2021-2022 school year. All Connecticut school districts must offer the course, an elective, by the 2022-2023 school year.

Dozens of high school students from across Connecticut had testified in favor of the bill, H.B. 7082, in March. Lead sponsors were Senator Douglas McCrory, Senate chair of the Education Committee, and Representatives Bobby Gibson and Bobby Sanchez. The bill passed 122-24 in the House and unanimously in the Senate.

Coverage from the Hartford Courant: <https://bit.ly/2YdvIQ9>

Coverage from CT Latino News: <https://bit.ly/3aFXo2x>

*SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady was one of 12 voices on community, racism, justice, and education featured in*

*[www.thetableunderground.com](http://www.thetableunderground.com)*

*to mark the 25th anniversary of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, a financial supporter of SERC's equity work*

The podcast: <https://thetableunderground.com/the-table-underground/2019/1/8/storyscape>

### WOMAN OF INSPIRATION



Ingrid M. Canady

In March 2019, Ingrid was chosen as a “Woman of Inspiration” by the Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund. In its announcement, CWEALF said: “Ingrid has been steadfast in her commitment to continuing to support schools and districts to make necessary changes so they can do their best work on behalf of children and families across Connecticut. As SERC celebrates its 50th anniversary, Ingrid Canady has repeatedly demonstrated a personal commitment to equity and excellence in education, a commitment she shares as a model across the state.”



# YOUTH AND FAMILIES

#SEYACLeaders

## EMPOWERING STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

SERC's Nicole M. Vitale continued to coordinate the Special Education Youth Advisory Council (SEYAC), designed to reach students who may not typically have an opportunity to share their voice.

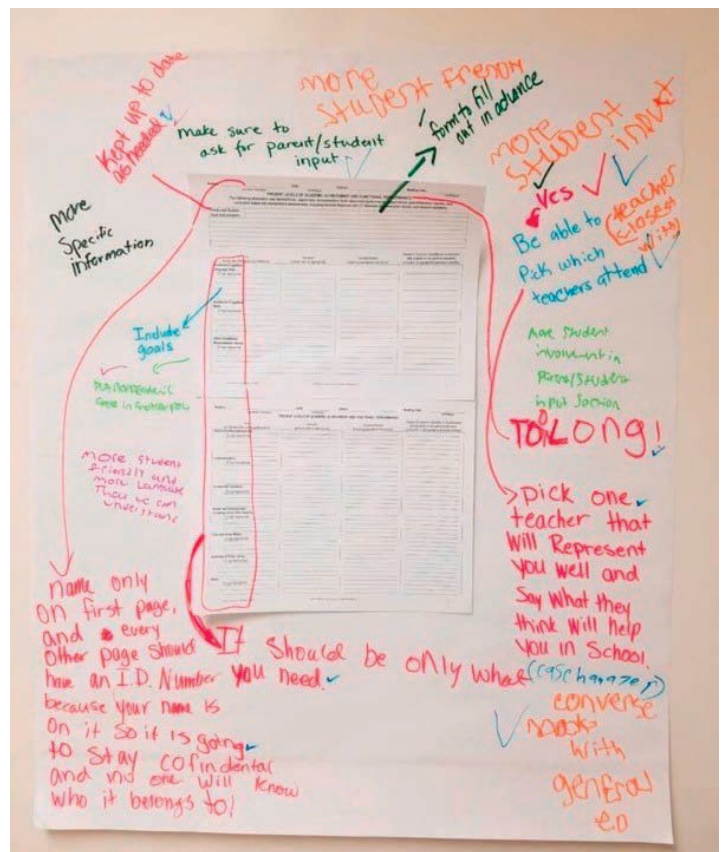
The purpose of the Council is to:

1. Create a structure in which students with disabilities (middle and high school) can share their special education experiences and increase their capacity to make informed decisions regarding their educational programming;
2. Increase public awareness about the valuable role that student voice and increased student independence can play in the lives of students, families, and communities; and
3. Inform the Special Education Division Director on issues that are important to special education students.

In November 2018, 20 school districts were chosen to participate in the Council for the school year. Nicole was quoted in an Hour newspaper story on Wilton's participation:

<https://bit.ly/2WipMmu>

Some students were involved in providing suggestions on the state's revision of the IEP document. SERC worked with the Youth Advisory Council to get student feedback on every page of the IEP. It's part of the effort of the CSDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE), led by Bureau Chief Bryan Klimkiewicz, to gather feedback from stakeholders across the state, including meetings with school staff and regional forums for parents. At a February 2019 session with SERC consultants, students from Bloomfield and Simsbury offered suggestions on how to make the IEP more student-friendly, highlighting everything from the document's formatting to what is and isn't easy to understand.



## A DAY TO SHINE

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On May 16, 2019, SERC hosted a daylong Youth Advisory Council Symposium at Central Connecticut State University. The approximately 175 students from more than a dozen districts, accompanied by about 50 adult chaperones, had the opportunity to continue building their leadership, self-advocacy and teambuilding skills. They also worked with students from around the state on creating an “ideal school.”

Nicole M. Vitale coordinated the event, and Calvin Terrell, a SERC partner, served as the primary facilitator of the day. He prompted the students to discuss: What is it like to feel invisible in special education? The participants described hurtful judgments people make about students with disabilities, including good intentions such as assuming they need help.

Some students created and presented mini-TED Talks. One said: “Imagine facing challenges every day that no one else understands.”

The symposium also featured a panel from the CT Parent Advocacy Center’s Youth Advisory Board, including frequent presenters Jake Shumbo (who told the students, “Now I’m captain of my own ship”) and Denver Jones (“Your disability isn’t a disability in my eye. It’s a gift... a different perspective.”)

Students shared afterward that the Youth Advisory Council helped them feel more confident and more comfortable advocating for themselves. Some had decided to continue participating because it allowed them to connect with other students and gave them a voice. A student shared that, after attending the symposium, “I will be speaking up for those with mental or physical disabilities who may not have a voice or is afraid to speak up. I want to serve as a voice for all students.”

“Your disability isn’t a disability in my eye. It’s a gift... a different perspective.”

-Denver Jones

One student would go on to participate over the summer on a panel during a Planning and Placement Team Leadership Institute series, sharing her perspective on the PPT process and how to improve it.



Denver Jones, left, with Jake Shumbo and Beth Reel of the CT Parent Advocacy Center, coordinator of the Youth Advisory Board





SERC's Janet N. Y. Zarchen, Lauren D. Johns, Nitza M. Diaz, Nicole M. Vitale, and Heather Dawes with facilitator Calvin Terrell



Some of the many students to take the floor at the Youth Advisory Council Symposium



SERC's Steve Proffitt with young participants



# YOUTH IN TRANSITION

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SERC's Missy Wrigley supports the state in leading secondary transition efforts for students with disabilities preparing for life after high school. Missy is a co-leader, along with CSDE's Alycia Trakas, of the CT State Planning Team. Within this role, SERC assists and facilitates the development of the Statewide Secondary Transition Goals.

They also help coordinate the CT Secondary Transition Youth Advisory Board, supporting Beth Reel of the CT Parent Advocacy Center. The Board, within the CT Secondary Transition Community of Practice (CoP), provides a place for students with disabilities to have their voices heard by the people who plan for and serve students, including school districts, agencies, organizations, and providers. The Board works to improve services and ensure they truly meet the needs of youth with disabilities. Members of the Board include Connecticut youth with disabilities age 14 to 26 and older mentors.

The Translating Evidence to Support Transitions (TEST) Connecticut Pilot program works toward student-led PPT meetings and IEPs. This effort continued in 2018-2019 with coaching conference calls, data collection and evaluation. Student feedback from one district included:

*"I feel like I want to participate in my PPT more because I understand the process better and what an IEP is for."*

*"I was involved in my meeting way more than ever before."*

Event highlights include the Secondary Transition Symposium (held late in the 2017-2018 fiscal year and early in the 2019-2020 fiscal year) and the annual National Technical Assistance Center on Transition Capacity Building Institute (CBI). In 2019, this was held May 7-9.

## *YAB Student Voice and Youth Leadership*

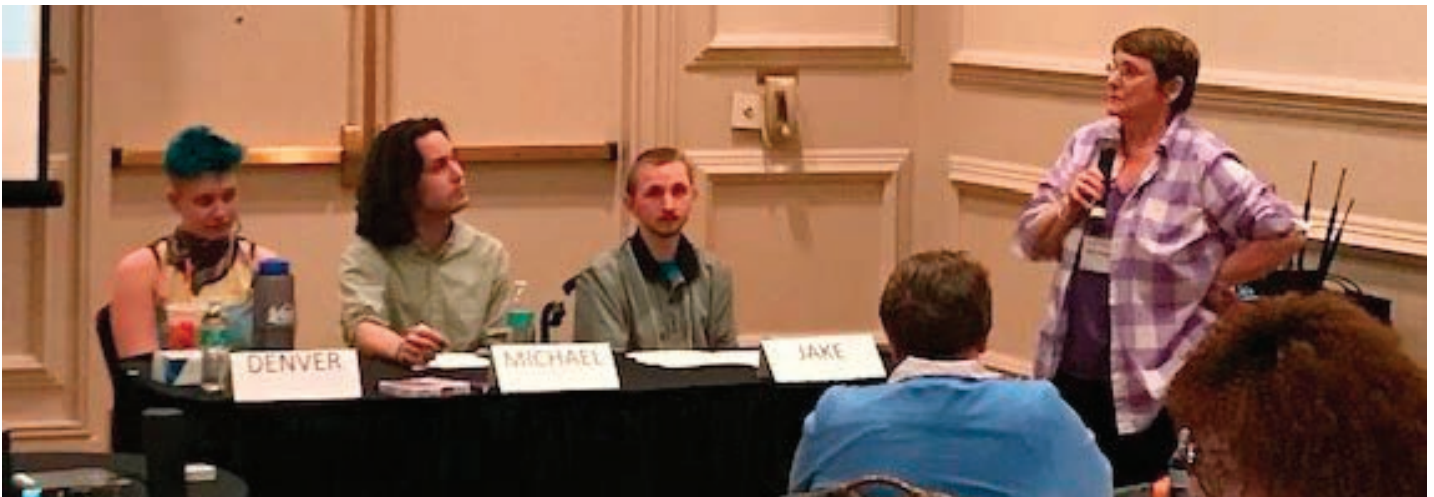
- CT Community of Practice (CoP)
- CT CoP CORE Team
- CT Secondary Transition Symposium Planning Committee
- National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) State Leadership Team
- CT Secondary Transition Task Force (TTF)
- CT State Advisory Council on Special Education (SAC)
- Feedback on IEP revision and state department guidance documents

At the CBI, interdisciplinary state team members gain knowledge and skills to implement effective practices in Student Focused Planning, Student Development (academic, employment, and life skills), Interagency Collaboration, Family Engagement, and Program Structures. Teams build capacity to improve practices and programs in their states through data-driven decision making, planning and providing quality professional learning opportunities, conducting policy analysis, and using effective technical assistance systems. Team members participate in facilitated state team planning to target improved transition services, high school completion and dropout prevention strategies, and postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities.

In 2019, Missy Wrigley and Alycia Trakas presented on the Connecticut pilot. Members from the Secondary Transition Youth Advisory Board presented not only a working session but also a keynote address.

“I have attended the CBI for a number of years. This was by far the most monumental experience,” Missy says. “To see our Connecticut youth present their stories was truly AWESOME. They stole the show!” As a result, the students were asked to present in Delaware and work with a team of youth from Maine.

The planning team has begun to collaborate with other states across the country, including Arizona, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, on the development of a National Collaborative Youth Advisory Board.



SERC’s Missy Wrigley facilitating the Youth Advisory Board panel

## RECOGNIZING PARENTS

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Eman Beshtawii of Danbury (center), with SERC's Lauren D. Johns and Nicole M. Vitale, was a special guest who received a surprise award at SERC's 2018 Parental Involvement Recognition Award ceremony.



SERC awarded nine Connecticut citizens with its annual Parental Involvement Recognition Awards at a State Capitol ceremony November 15, 2018, to honor their contributions to their schools and communities.

The event is held on National Parental Involvement Day, launched by St. Louis-based Project Appleseed. SERC sponsored the Connecticut awards in collaboration with the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS).

School leaders, program coordinators and others from across Connecticut were invited to nominate parents and guardians who have shown active involvement and ability to make a difference in their children's school or community; support of their local school and contributions to high-quality education for all children; and dedication and advocacy to ensure equity for all parents and their children. One of the 2018 Parental Involvement Recognition Award winners was nominated by a winner from the previous year.



The 2018 winners of the Parental Involvement Recognition Awards were: Patricia Davis of Bloomfield, nominated by 2017 award recipient Tatiana Ponder; Carrie Foligno of Southington; Leoan Haynes of Hartford; Nathan Nunez of Newington; Emanuela Palmeres of Danbury; Jackie Pioli of Stamford; Kimberly Radachy of Colchester; Stewart Semeraro of Cromwell; and Camille Smith of Middletown. Eman Beshtawii of Danbury, a special guest, received a surprise award.

## PARTNERING ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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SERC was among several agencies included in a \$4.9 million winning grant submitted by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) to design a Statewide Family Engagement Center for Connecticut. The center will provide resources, services, training, and support for families, community agencies, and school districts on effective family engagement practices.

In a statement, SERC said: “As CREC’s partner on this grant, SERC is excited about the announcement of the award to CREC for funding a new CT Statewide Family Engagement Center. We have long approached family engagement as a pillar of our work on behalf of Connecticut’s students and families, including as operators of the CT Parent Information and Resource Center. The \$4.9 million toward the new center over the next five years demonstrates Connecticut’s commitment to family engagement, and we look forward to working with our friends at CREC, African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP), CPAC, and the CT State Department of Education to further our vision of an excellent and equitable education for all students.”

The grant was awarded in early fall 2018. The first design meeting seeking input was held in January 2019, featuring Anne T. Henderson from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. The meetings seek feedback from families, school administrators, school personnel, CSDE staff, foundations, and community providers.

### *Hearing from Parents*

SERC held parent focus groups in fall 2018 in each regional educational service center (RESC) region of the state. The effort was intended to ensure parent voices are heard in shaping special education funding and programming. The forums offered stipends for child care and transportation.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Across the nation and in Connecticut, districts and schools are finding success in reducing chronic absence both at the district and school levels. In addition, progress is being made in reducing chronic absence for particular groups of students, including students with disabilities and English learners. However, in 2017-2018, 10.7 percent of Connecticut's public school student population, over 50,000 students, were still chronically absent—i.e., with absences equal to or greater than 10 percent of the total number of days a student is enrolled in school in a year.

On March 27, 2019, CSDE, in collaboration with SERC, hosted a new symposium to spotlight evidence-based and promising practices and other key strategies in raising student attendance and achievement from across the nation and in the state. The “Connecticut Student Attendance Symposium: A Showcase of Promising Practices, Strategies and Successes in Reducing Chronic Absence” was part of an ongoing state partnership with Attendance Works, a national and state initiative based in San Francisco.

The symposium had about 300 participants—a fittingly large number for an event about attendance, as our Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady noted in her welcome. Participants included district and school administrators and teachers,

student support services professionals, family engagement and attendance specialists, and community partners working to reduce chronic absence.

Participants learned from two leading national experts about reducing chronic absence: Hedy Chang of Attendance Works and Todd Rogers of Harvard's Kennedy School, who both delivered keynote addresses and sat for an afternoon panel discussion. In addition, districts and schools demonstrated what is working in their districts in a “showcase setting of promising practices.” SERC consultants led two breakout sessions we well.

The following day, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady joined CSDE partners in Denver for the “Improving Conditions for Learning: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism” meeting, led by CCSSO – The Council of Chief State School Officers and Attendance Works.



CSDE COO Charlene Russell-Tucker introduces hundreds of participants to the first Connecticut Student Attendance Symposium

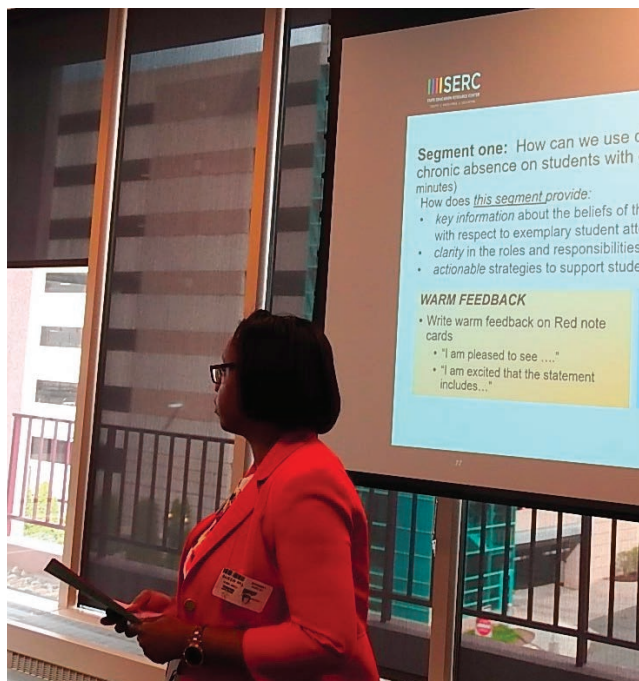


SERC's LèTanya Lawrence has led the project coordination of the symposium and other related attendance activities in support of CSDE. SERC consultants provided support at meetings of the state's Chronic Absence Peer Learning Network.

On April 23, 2019, the Chronic Absence Strategic Action Group reviewed and provided input on a draft guidance document on reducing chronic absence among students with disabilities in Connecticut. Small groups, facilitated by LèTanya and including colleagues Amanda Pickett and Paquita Jarman-Smith, provided feedback on how districts might use data to determine the impact of chronic absence on students with disabilities, and what districts can do to improve those students' attendance.

On May 21, the last group session of the school year, CSDE hosted Attendance Works' Laura Downs and SERC's Vernée Butterfield helped facilitate the discussion of solutions. In June, SERC and CSDE collaborated on a training with Hedy Chang.

With the success of the symposium, the sponsor, the School Discipline Collaborative, called for a second event in fall 2019.



SERC's LèTanya Lawrence facilitates small group discussions at the Chronic Absence Strategic Action Group meeting at CSDE headquarters in Hartford. SERC colleague Paquita Jarman-Smith is among the participants.

## SCHOOL CLIMATE

The 2018-2019 fiscal year marked the last full school year of Connecticut's five-year federal School Climate Transformation Grant (CT SCTG), a collaborative effort led by CSDE along with SERC and the Center for Behavioral Education and Research at the University of Connecticut. SERC Consultant Sarah L. Jones has served as coordinator. The state requested and received a nine-month no-cost extension for activities through June 30, 2020.

The grant aimed to build capacity to implement a multi-tiered behavioral framework, School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), through a Training of Trainers (TOT) program; a statewide SWPBIS needs assessment, which ultimately included more than 175 schools; coordination through a CT SCTG Management Team, including consultants from CSDE and SERC; and support with implementation of the multi-tiered behavioral framework (MTBF) specifically with six cohort schools. To build on the progress, sustain practices, and enhance outcomes beyond the grant, several project activities received continued funding under Indicator 4 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Under the grant, SERC consultants worked with CSDE to more effectively align their CT SCTG support with other initiatives occurring in the CT SCTG districts. SERC provided most of the support to the six schools divided into two separate cohorts, through on-site training and technical assistance to school-based behavior leadership teams. 2018-2019 marked Year 3, the final year, for Cohort B: John C. Mead School in Ansonia, Franklin H. Mayberry School in East Hartford, and Westside Middle School in Danbury. Year 3 work includes ongoing data review and planning for tier 1 and 2 systems and practices, team training on tier 3 systems and practices, implementation of a post-welcoming walkthrough (a self-assessment by staff, families, and the community of how inviting a school is), and post-administration of a Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) to examine implementation.

The LEARN regional educational service center, the project evaluator for the final year of the grant, cited feedback from both cohorts in its 2019 summative report. "The professional development and technical assistance provided by SERC was well-received by school leadership teams, with team members indicating that they appreciated the opportunity to learn PBIS systems and practices from SERC's experienced technical assistance providers," the report said. The teams praised the on-site support and "consistently reported that training sessions were well connected and logically sequenced, individualized to meet the needs of the school, and increased their knowledge and understanding of the implementation of a PBIS framework."



### ***Feedback from participants:***

*“Not every school has the same challenges, so it is vital that what we use is flexible and not a simple one size fits all approach. The trainers are incredibly patient with the learning process.”*

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

As of summer 2019, 16 of the 24 endorsed Northeast PBIS trainers were from Connecticut—including six from SERC, the most of any agency—with additional Connecticut and out-of-state endorsed trainers expected in fall 2019. As LEARN indicated, Connecticut has had the opportunity to “take on a leadership role in the northeast region, perhaps serving as a model for other regions who are seeking to develop high-quality MTBF trainers.”

In a fall 2018 LEARN survey, 63% said the TOT program had a strong positive impact on their knowledge of PBIS content and confidence in training on it; the rest were split evenly between a “moderate” and “slight” positive impact, with none reporting “no” impact. Also, 63% reported providing formal PBIS training more frequently, and 87% said the TOT had a strong or moderate impact on their own professional practice. On a scale of 1 to 10, about two-thirds selected a 7 or above when asked about the impact of the TOT program in the next three to five years in building and enhancing a network of trainers who can provide districts with PBIS training and coaching.

TFI data showed “significant growth” in participating schools, especially in tier 1 practices, with decreasing office discipline referrals and in-school suspensions. Over the course of the statewide needs assessment, 175 TFIs were conducted in 46 districts across the state; more than two-thirds of the schools were in an Alliance District (the state’s 30 lowest performing). On the three-tiered TFI, where 70% is considered a level of implementation that brings improved student outcomes, 74% of schools earned scores of 70% or above for Tier 1, 53% earned scores of 70% or above for tier 2, and 43% earned 70% or above for tier 3.

In light of the data and in discussion with CSDE, SERC created booster sessions for the TFI schools and districts to address areas of need identified in the TFIs and help move beyond tier 1 to develop an integrated continuum of supports. The latest, in March through May 2019, included “Universal Classroom Behavior Management,” with 70 participants; and “Restorative Practices in a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS),” which had 60 participants each in two separate sessions. SERC also began developing online modules to address areas such as student and family engagement in support planning and critical features of tier 2.

In addition, the CT SCTG Management Team identified resources from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) for support. Staff from CSDE, SERC, and the regional educational service centers underwent training in the NIRN Hexagon Tool in February 2019 to help identify and select new programs and practices to implement.

The LEARN report concluded: “In sum, the CT SCTG has taken great strides in supporting and promoting implementation of MTBFs across the state, while actively planning for sustainability and adapting the approach and framework to align with competing initiatives and relevant areas of need. The CT SCTG project has created actionable tools, systems, and processes that will continue to assist Connecticut schools in utilizing MTBFs to support the learning of all students.”

## A FOCUS ON DISCIPLINE

SERC had a lead role in facilitating the discussions of the Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative, an offshoot of CT SCTG. The collaborative, which includes a variety of stakeholders, met in October 2018, February 2019, and May 2019.

At the October 31, 2018 session, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady guided them into interest groups on discipline and systems of support, facilitated by SERC’s Michelle LeBrun-Griffin; discipline and racial disproportionality, facilitated by SERC’s Eben McKnight; and discipline policy development and implementation, facilitated by SERC’s Janet N. Y. Zarchen.

At a special session in December 2018, members provided feedback on a Position Statement on Reducing Disproportionality in Suspensions and Expulsions (Exclusionary Discipline) that the State Board of Education adopted in February 2019. In addition to developing an implementation tool to support districts with applying the position statement, CSDE began working collaboratively with SERC to create a series on classroom management strategies.





## ADDRESSING EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE

SERC consultants facilitated a session specifically for school districts identified as having a high rate of exclusionary school discipline practices. Each consultant, Christine Kuehlewind, Sean Kavanaugh, Smita Worah, and Nikki Hendry, was assigned a team to work with one-on-one. They facilitated a conversation around:

- evaluating existing student supports and practices in school regarding behavior and social-emotional learning;
- developing a deeper understanding of the data and the impact on teaching and learning;
- what actions are being taken, what's working and not working, and how we know; and the
- desired results, and what we need to do to get there.

Districts were asked to bring the district's policies, the strategic operating plan, the code of conduct, staff and student handbooks, a sample office discipline referral form, any decision-making tools, and any relevant data. After analyzing out-of-school suspension and expulsion data, systems, and practices, the consultants worked with the school teams to develop an action plan to implement more effective approaches within their schools. The state identified the districts for participation based on their data under State Performance Plan Indicator 4a (a significant discrepancy in suspension/expulsion rate of children with disabilities) and 4b (significant discrepancy by race or ethnicity in suspension/expulsion rate of children with disabilities).

## ADDITIONAL PBIS WORK CONTINUES

The 2018-2019 school year included the PBIS training of the 2018-2021 cohort of eight schools. This training is aimed toward implementing changes in school-wide and classroom supports.

An analysis of suspension rates overall and disaggregated data by students with disabilities and race/ethnicity was conducted to identify schools in need of support. SERC then conducted the training for eight school teams of five to eight participants, including school administrators, general and special education teachers, and support staff, and provided support and coaching to school-based coaches. The training included the essential steps of SWPBIS implementation: establishing teams; identification of school-

wide expectations; developing procedures for encouraging and strengthening school-wide expectations; developing a system for discouraging student behavior violations; developing procedures for data collection and decision-making; developing a system to support staff; and building routines to support and sustain ongoing implementation.

“This experience was fantastic,” SERC Consultant Eben McKnight says. “The schools who participated were fully committed to creating a multi-tiered behavioral framework and reflected on the need for systems and procedures that promote a positive school climate.” Eben says a line stands out from the training, when the teams recorded their a-ha moment: “PBIS is the framework or umbrella of how we select and organize different practices that support the needs of the students in your building by ensuring that we can define the practice, teach, model, progress monitor and evaluate while adjusting for efficiency.” Seven of the eight schools have continued on to the 2019-2020 school year to continue building their multi-tiered behavioral framework.



Some of Connecticut’s PBIS schools have drawn attention from Down Under. In early fall 2018, a delegation of educators from Australia visited Connecticut schools that have implemented PBIS with SERC’s support.

On September 27, SERC’s Eben McKnight accompanied the delegation at Parkman School, a Grade 3-5 school in Enfield. Eben had provided training and technical assistance to the school’s team in its PBIS implementation.



Enfield’s Parkman School hosting an Australian team on PBIS, with Eben McKnight, SERC; Michelle Middleton, Enfield Schools; Andrew Harmes & Amadeo Ferra, McLelland College, Australia; Tom Spiwak & Principal Irene Roman, Parkman School; and Sue Coull & Kai Pukarinen, Naranga Special School, Australia



## ENTRY INTO SUBSTANCE MISUSE

During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, SERC was granted \$449,000 for year 1 of a two-year project supporting substance misuse prevention and supports in schools. The program aims to bring stakeholders together in opioid misuse prevention efforts, develop intentional programmatic professional support systems, and build capacity of school leaders to monitor, support, and sustain fidelity of implementation of new learning.

First, the grant involves working collaboratively with Torrington and Stratford Public Schools to infuse substance misuse prevention and supports in a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Tier 1 is focused on creating a safe environment and promoting healthy and successful students—determining how the existing curriculum addresses substance misuse. Tier 2 involves early intervention and identifying students and staff at risk. Tier 3 involves intensive support—identifying those at critical risk and collaborating with outside supports and providing wraparound supports.

Year 1 supports began in March 2019 and include the following:

- Form or identify a District Leadership Team, comprised of district leadership, school leadership, social workers, teachers, families, and community partners, that will:
  - Engage in a Root Cause Analysis to investigate and categorize the factors or causes
  - Establish team purpose, goals, norms, and membership
  - Complete an audit of current MTSS structures and current community/family stakeholder engagement
  - Conduct asset mapping of current substance abuse prevention/treatment practices
  - Establish what supports will be available at all tiers of support
- Identify a District-Appointed Prevention Coordinator who will:
  - Support the District Leadership Team in its action plan
  - Participate in school-based support
- Identify and invite students, families, and community stakeholders to participate in focus groups, and use feedback to guide action plans
- Assist with planning and participate in identified training events
- Prepare a presentation on the district's substance abuse prevention work to date, and send a team to attend the summit (see next page)

This work demonstrates the importance of building a sustainable system and then infusing substance misuse supports. After participating in the grant, the districts will effectively implement and sustain all three tiers of substance misuse prevention under Connecticut's Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) framework.

Second, the grant involves partnering with the Education Development Center (EDC) to develop a guiding curriculum for schools on substance misuse prevention for all students Kindergarten through Grade 12. The document will outline critical components of an evidence-based prevention curriculum, with specific attention to opioids, along with resources (local and national) to support implementation that meet the contextual fit of each district. It will include a self-assessment tool for districts to assess their practice and community connections in relation to substance abuse prevention and intervention to assist with the implementation of the curriculum. This work involves:

- Drafting and disseminating a statewide school survey on current substance abuse prevention curricula/practices used
- Researching and identifying key features of the Opioid Prevention Curriculum
- Research and Design, including review of national and state standards, and development of a template for self-assessment and a structure for outcome statements
- Development of resources for key features; and
- Providing drafts for feedback to school districts, stakeholders of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and substance abuse experts.

Finally, the grant involves collaborating on the first large summit for Connecticut school districts. This will raise awareness of the role of schools in substance abuse prevention, along with giving skills and tools to support implementation in schools. This event, held later in 2019, would also be used as a means to support scale-up and sustainability of the overall project.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration awarded DMHAS a State Opioid Response Grant in 2018. Part of the effort involves bringing awareness of the dangers of opioid use directly into the classroom for students in grades K-12. SERC issued an invitation to apply for districts in winter 2019.

## ADMINISTRATORS NAVIGATING A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

SERC once again supported the BSE in its Back to School event for special education administrators. Steve Proffitt, who had just officially begun his new position as SERC's Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design, was the first to welcome participants to the 15th annual event on September 12, 2018. He was followed by BSE Chief Bryan Klimkiewicz, who praised SERC's leadership.

SERC arranged the keynote speaker, Calvin Terrell of Social Centric, a frequent SERC collaborator who also facilitated an afternoon session. Several BSE staff provided updates. SERC also handles registration, management of the online resources page, and other logistics for the Back to School meeting.



CT SERC @ctserc · 9/12/18

Thank you, Bryan, for your kind words about SERC and our leadership: our Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and our newly minted director of Special Ed Programs Steve Proffitt! We're proud to be a partner here at Back to School and with [@EducateCT](#) throughout the year. [#ctb2s](#) – at Red Lion Hotel Cromwell



## SUPPORTING THE ROLES OF FATHERS

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady delivered the keynote address at the “Dads Matter Too” conference at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) August 17, 2018. It was the fourth year the Fatherhood Engagement Leadership Team and the CCSU Fatherhood Group have held the event.

Ingrid shared how she assumed fathers were not important when she was being raised by a single white mother in Costa Rica—but that changed when she met her husband. She had everyone in the room answer the question to themselves: “What is fatherhood?”, then shared the perspectives on this question that she had gathered from all SERC staff.

The team behind the conference developed from the CT Department of Children and Families’ need to increase fatherhood involvement in the system. DCF Commissioner Joette Katz was also among the speakers.



## RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SOUTHINGTON

The objective of our work with Southington was to support the development of its Racial Equity Strategic Plan and facilitate quarterly technical assistance/training for the Southington Public Schools Coalition for Social Justice.

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and SERC Consultant Dr. Vernée Butterfield provided professional learning sessions for participants using the Courageous Conversation™ protocol. They helped them to develop subcommittees, goals, and tasks for each group to implement within both the school and neighborhood community.

The members of the coalition created an overall goal as well as subcommittee goals/tasks that would be carried out during the school year. We involved student voice as a central part of this coalition and the members gained invaluable insight into how they will impact the school and neighborhood communities.

SERC provided technical assistance on the district's identified three structures and levels of organizational support (Steering Committee, District Equity Leadership Team, and District Equity Leadership Team Advisory) to ensure alignment of the district's anticipated outcome with its vision and mission.

As technical advisors, SERC began facilitating conversations among participants to explore the following:

1. History of race and racism
2. Common elements of oppression
3. Understanding the dynamics of systemic and structural racism
4. The impact of internalized racist oppression in the community
5. Personal beliefs and values that impact the development of culturally responsive relationships between and amongst racial groups
6. A working definition of equity and its impact on the community

7. Key components of shared leadership and shared accountability within an equitable framework of action
8. Individual commitment to eliminate the barriers that preclude staff, students and community from being full and equal contributors to the collective well-being of the community.

Southington Women for Progress, which promotes these educational equity efforts in the town, described the group's approach at SERC's Dismantling Systemic Racism conference (for details on the conference, see page 5).

Coverage in the Record-Journal newspaper of the Southington effort:

<https://bit.ly/2VCJudg>

<https://bit.ly/2y4TEdE>

## VIRTUAL LEARNING IN DANBURY

In Danbury, SERC conducted a virtual learning experience with five live webinars/video conferences during the course of the year. Participants explored the different components of IEP Goal and Objective writing that included examining present levels of performance, unwrapping standards, including accommodations and modifications, the three components of a goal or objective, and practice writing their own goals and objectives.

Participants learned how to incorporate CT Core Standards into goals, used a template to include the condition of learning, demonstration of learning, and performance criteria, and gave each other feedback on written goals.

Because the district held its professional learning in 45-minute time slots, SERC was creative about how it provided this learning. Consultant Nikki Hendry opted to do live video conferences and offered them at the district's monthly meetings.

## SUPPORTING EQUITY IN THOMPSON

SERC held a series for school staff in Thomaston to provide them with ways to engage students and families of color to ensure that all students and families feel welcome and included. The “Let’s Talk” series, “As Diversity Grows So Must We: Engaging Families and Students of Color to Ensure Student Success,” included the following topics:

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

#### **Racial Equity in schools: What do educators need to know?**

#### **Implicit Bias, Institutional and Structural Racism**

#### **Cultural Responsive Family Engagement**

SERC Consultants Nitza M. Diaz and Paquita Jarman-Smith held the series at three schools. Participants numbered between 25 and 50 and included teachers, administrators, and central office staff.

## SUPPORTING AVON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### *Addressing challenging topics in the classroom*

SERC Consultant Janet N. Y. Zarchen met with approximately 18 high school English and Social Studies teachers to discuss ways to address challenging topics in the classroom. Recent situations had come up, specifically one about race and racism, where teachers were feeling that certain topics were risky to discuss with students. Janet facilitated a discussion about what these topics were and how the participants might have productive discussions in their classrooms.

In their evaluations afterward, participants referred to a better understanding of the need to consider the influence of their own race in the classroom. Specific comments included:

*The compass was helpful in considering people’s thinking about a controversial topic and how to navigate moving forward with the conversation.*

*Really productive discussion with cross-discipline colleagues.*

*Many useful strategies/resources were provided that will be useful in class.*



Janet also worked with an English Language Arts vertical team across the Avon school district. She met with them for three days to help them develop their long-term English Language Arts plan, with support from Dr. Donna Rusack, Assistant Superintendent and Jodi Kryzanski, Program Director.

The team included approximately 25 K-12 teachers (including reading specialists and special educators) and administrators from each school in the district. SERC met with the team three times to begin the work of developing a multi-year plan for the implementation of a new strategy for English Language Arts.

Through SERC's facilitation, the team:

- identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of their current practices in ELA.
- created an inventory of practices and materials.
- developed common understandings of terms commonly used in ELA and curriculum.
- researched elements of strong ELA programs.
- identified and created their visions and beliefs about ELA teaching and learning.

Participants were grateful for the opportunity to talk with colleagues from other grades and schools and to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their current ELA curriculum. Some other comments from evaluations:

*I thought this process made a lot of sense – we've laid the foundation for establishing a vision of ELA instruction. This is exciting work.*

*The work is messy and the process is effective. I have a lot to think about and feel excited about the work ahead. This is important stuff.*

*I felt hopeful that we were all hitting upon the missing pieces of our ELA program. We have the standards, the assessments, etc. We're missing the heart, the joy, the love of literacy.*

The work continued into the 2019-2020 school year, when Janet was to meet with them for a total of 10 days.

# SUPPORTING SPANISH-SPEAKING FAMILIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

SERC's Nitza M. Diaz conducted a six-part series over several months for Spanish-speaking families with children in special education.

The Special Education Network of Wilton (SPED\*NET Wilton) sponsored "The ABCs of Special Education: Six Workshops in Spanish for Family Members and Caregivers." It was designed to help them understand the special education process in order to support their children who have IEPs or a 504 plan.

## **The six evening sessions scheduled at the South Norwalk Library included:**

**October 9, 2018:** *How to Understand the Special Education Process*

**January 8, 2019:** *What Is Your Vision for Your Child: Begin to MAP your child's future PATH*

**February 19:** *What You Need to Know About Goals and Objectives*

**March 12:** *What You Need to Know About Accommodations and Modifications*

**April 9:** *How to Understand Your Child's Evaluation: What do all those numbers mean?*

**May 14:** *What Is Assistive Technology and How Can It Help Your Child?*

These sessions allowed parents from Norwalk and Stamford to learn the process in their own language and in a culturally responsive way. One highlight: A mother came back with her child's IEP and told Nitza that she had written down everything Nitza had said. At the PPT meeting, she had said what she had learned and felt empowered to ask for what her child needed because she knew what to ask for. "It was moving to hear her say that, because these little moments are what matters," Nitza says.

The parents also asked if they could meet Bryan Klimkiewicz, chief of the CSDE Bureau of Special Education. He came, and they asked him a lot of questions about the special education process for their home districts.

Nitza was scheduled to conduct another series at South Norwalk Library during the 2019-2020 school year.

2019 marked year 2 of the contract with the State of Vermont's Agency of Education.

# CROSSING STATE LINES

## *Vermont Work Continues*

SERC provided two sessions of Train the Trainer and eight district visits around the state to complete the Educational Benefit Review Process.

SERC had 175 participants total (over 10 sessions, eight in-district and two Train-the-Trainers) that included general education teachers, special education teachers, general and special administrators, student support services professionals, and behavior specialists.

Participants valued the process and found it a powerful way to look at IEPs. General educators reflected that they have learned what goes into an IEP and how to better collaborate. Special educators reflected that they would look for alignment of their components in the IEP and progress over time. Participants felt that one of the best aspects of the training was the time to collaborate and dialogue with others with multiple roles and to measure their students' progress.

The contract was extended for a third year to provide another Training of Trainers and 11 district visits for the 2019-2020 school year.



## ACCESS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND SERVICES

SERC facilitated half-day sessions on effective strategies for successful Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings: “Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Building Partnerships During the IEP Development Process.” We held three sessions for school and district staff who have a leadership role in the provision of special education services. We held another three sessions for families—specifically those with children who are receiving, or being considered for, special education services.

The sessions were conducted by Doug and Joyce Little of Key2Ed, a Tennessee-based education consulting company focused on the facilitation of IEP meetings. Participants learned strategies to build trust, improve communication, and ensure student-centered conversation while developing an IEP.

Parents appreciated the level of conversation, with most suggesting that the PPT meetings they have attended are not as well organized or as engaging as the model presented. Participating educators were enthusiastic about the approach; several districts subsequently arranged for a two-day in-district training with Key2Ed in early 2019-2020.

The SERC sessions were held November 27-29, 2018, in three locations around the state: Hartford, Danbury, and North Haven. Attendance varied from three to approximately 25.

SERC itself participated in a one-day training with Doug and Joyce Little in June 2019. They helped our consultants reflect on our work in-house and aspire to weave the concepts into our agency so that our collaboration and planning is more efficient and effective.

## CO-TEACHING SUPPORT

From January to March 2019, SERC’s Virginia Babcock conducted a three-evening session for experienced co-teachers called “Advanced Co-Teaching: Tips and Tools for Efficient Planning.” It involved a focus on planning tools and strategies to be used in the implementation of six different approaches to co-teaching, two of which were covered each evening.

Participants included 18 co-teachers, generally a combination of general and special education teachers, from elementary to high school. Other topics included how co-planning impacts parity in a co-teaching partnership, efficient use of planning time, and ensuring that specially designed instruction is incorporated into lessons for students with IEPs.

The sessions were held approximately one month apart, with the opportunity to practice and reflect between sessions. Many in the group shared planning strategies and tools of their own with other participants.

This was a different time slot than most of SERC's professional learning activities for educators, and many participants commented that they enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere despite the distance some had to travel. One participant reported: "It was a great opportunity to collaborate, discuss and plan with my co-teacher, especially about routines and approaches we want to explore further."

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Virginia also provides more one-on-one support. From October 2018 to February 2019, she worked with two kindergarten co-teachers, a general and special education teacher. SERC's role was to fulfill the contract with this district by coaching two kindergarten teachers in their implementation of co-teaching, in order to enhance this service delivery model for four students with IEPs.

This eight-session contract involved on-site training and follow-up support, including observations and coaching. Areas of focus included role clarification, development of parity, planning and implementing various co-teaching approaches, arranging the room to support the use of different approaches, and ensuring that specially designed instruction was incorporated into lessons for students with IEPs who require supports.

Since this professional learning activity was targeted to the needs of the two kindergarten teachers, content

and application were able to occur simultaneously. Through the use of a coaching format, teachers were able to experiment with the different co-teaching approaches they had just learned, and reflect on their use during regular debriefs.

Time was also set aside to explore different planning tools that could be incorporated into lesson plan formats they were already using, which both teachers agreed was helpful. With the number of visits, there was time to reflect on what might be tweaked to ensure more successful implementation of the specific approach—such as room arrangement, structure of the lesson, and sharing of roles throughout the lesson.

Virginia has a similar contract for the 2019-2020 school year that involves coaching two kindergarten teachers in another district.



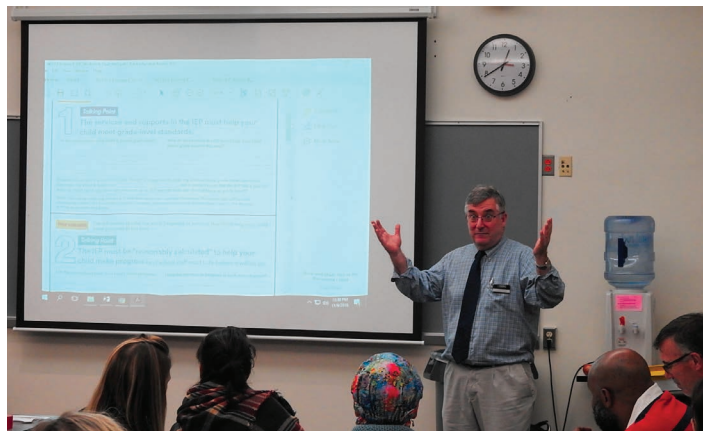
SERC's Virginia Babcock modeling "station teaching" at the November 2018 session of "Making a Difference through Co-Teaching." The participants, like the students in a co-taught classroom, move from station to station.

## TRAVELING ‘TECH SUPPORT’

SERC continues to support schools in the use of assistive technology and accessible educational materials (AEM). In 2018-2019, SERC also took its expertise on the road. SERC’s Smita Worah and Sean Kavanaugh began reaching out to public libraries in 2018 to offer some of the same professional learning opportunities as we provided in schools. At the Russell Library, in SERC’s home city of Middletown, they held an assistive technology demonstration on September 4.



On November 14, the consultants held their session at the library on no-cost and low-cost technology for the classroom, including open-source software. Sean dispelled the notion that “if it doesn’t cost anything, it feels like it doesn’t have any value.” The participants proceeded to make an accessible “squishy book,” using no technology whatsoever.



Every year on Election Day in several Connecticut schools, educators from across the district gather for professional learning from SERC. Much of SERC’s support on Election Day 2018, including from SERC’s Steve Proffitt in West Hartford and Christine Kuehlewind in Hartford, focused on improving IEPs and the IEP process.



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# STAY IN TOUCH

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