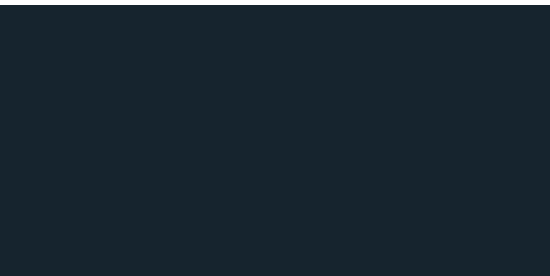


# 2019-2020 **STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER** ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT



2019-2020

## STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

### ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

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STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

## LETTER FROM THE **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*Ingrid M. Canady*

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Dear Partners, Colleagues, and Friends,

Every year, SERC reflects on the fiscal year that passed and looks toward a new year dedicated to our vision: Equity. Excellence. Education. In that sense, the 2019-2020 fiscal year was no different. We have had challenges, successes, and a lot of work coming our way.

But this fiscal year also ended in 2020, a year that has become synonymous across the nation with sudden unexpected adjustments, hardship, and loss. Yet through this unusual shared struggle, this pandemic has also been a story of resilience and adaptability—particularly as demonstrated by our schools. We still seem to measure everything by “before”—before March 2020, right around that unlucky Friday the 13th—and “after,” when school buildings were closed and schools everywhere took on a largely unfamiliar form of education.

At that moment, everything changed for us at SERC as well. Like many others on March 12, I found myself on a lot of phone calls to ascertain how we would respond to the growing threat of the pandemic. After deliberating on one scenario and then another, by the end of the day I announced to all of our staff that they would be working from home for the immediate future.

And yet we became busier than ever before. Much of our in-district work halted when school buildings closed, but we began offering supports virtually. We had to cancel our largest signature event, the Dismantling Systemic Racism conference that began drawing hundreds of participants every year, but we held an online discussion series on educational equity that attracted hundreds to register.

The calls have never stopped coming in to make sure we’re serving all students at this unprecedented time. A lot is unpredictable, but I know I can always count on the dedication of people like you to the children and families of Connecticut. On behalf of all SERC staff, thank you for always marching on toward equity and excellence in education.

Yours truly,

Ingrid M. Canady  
Executive Director

## EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Annual Report 19-20

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### PUBLIC ACT NO. 19-12

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*P.A. 19-12, Sec. 3: "The State Education Resource Center (SERC) shall develop a Black and Latino studies course. Such course shall be one credit and offered at the high school level. In developing such course, the State Education Resource Center (SERC) may utilize existing and appropriate public or private materials, personnel and other resources, including, but not limited to, persons and organizations with subject matter expertise in African-American, Black, Puerto Rican or Latino studies, and the curriculum materials made available."*

SERC has been honored to spearhead one of the most exciting educational initiatives underway in Connecticut over the past year.

On June 21, 2019, the Governor signed Public Act 19-12 that called for SERC to lead the development of a new high school course on African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino studies. The course aims to provide Connecticut schools with a statewide model curriculum that educates high school-age students on all facets of history from multiple perspectives.

The law adds African American and Black and Puerto Rican and Latino studies to the required programs of study for public schools and requires all local and regional boards of education to include these topics in their curriculum beginning with the 2021-2022 school year. As with other courses required under existing law, the State Board of Education must make curriculum materials available to help boards develop their instructional programs.

Under P.A. 19-12, SERC was required to work with stakeholders to complete a draft curriculum and present a completed draft for public comment by September 2020. The law required 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.

Much of the initial work took place during the 2019-2020 fiscal year. It began with the launch of the curriculum Advisory Group, made up of stakeholders who reached out to SERC the moment the legislation was signed into law. The nearly 150 members represented educators, administrators, higher education professors and scholars, researchers and historians, representatives from education and community organizations, and students and families.

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady welcomed the first Advisory Group meeting at the Legislative Office Building on November 12, 2019. Among those invited were individuals who, from the moment the legislation was signed into law, reached out to SERC to offer their support in the development of the course. Key legislative sponsors of P.A. 19-12 provided remarks: Senator Doug McCrory, Representative Bobby Gibson, and Representative Bobby Sanchez. SERC Consultants Dr. Vernée Butterfield, Nitza Díaz, and Michelle LeBrun-Griffin provided an overview of the work plan.



In leading the development of the course, the Advisory Group organized into nine committees to engage in different aspects of the work. Nitza Díaz, Michelle LeBrun-Griffin, and Paquita Jarman-Smith served as the SERC liaisons to the committees, with project support from Wanda Guzman. The committees included:

**Research and Evaluation:** to ascertain what current implementation and best practices look like across the state. This included the review and synthesis of other curricula as well as the development and analysis of a high school curriculum survey to seek input from local high school implementers, including high school administrators, department heads, and teachers.

**Focus Groups:** To garner input from a variety of stakeholders (see below)

**Infrastructure Supports:** to develop recommendations for the implementation of the course, including a description for the Program of Studies, resources for the board of education course approval process, staffing/credentialing requirements, and high school/college credit determination.

**Course Syllabus:** to develop a framework, including learning objectives, an outline of scope and sequence of content aligned with national and local standards, and teaching pedagogy.

**Content Development:** two separate committees to create units of study in African American/Black content and Latino/Puerto Rican content, including serving as a repository for resources and materials for lesson planning.

**Integration of Content and Assessment:** To create common formative and summative assessments, including performance tasks aligned with essential knowledge and skills of each unit and overall course.

**Publication and Dissemination:** To work with the approved vendor to produce curriculum in print and electronic formats that can be easily disseminated. In addition, the committee will support the development of a method to gather feedback and sample lessons during the initial phase of implementation.

**Professional Learning Plan:** To outline a professional learning plan for initial implementers (2020-2021), including a summer institute and year-long coaching.

**¡Se Parte del Cambio!**

El Centro de Recursos Educativos del Estado (por sus siglas en inglés SERC) está organizando el desarrollo de un curso de estudios sobre:

**Latinos/ Afroamericanos/ Puertorriqueños**

Estamos buscando la opinión de los siguientes grupos:

- Estudiantes actualmente matriculados en la escuela media y secundaria (middle & high school);
- Los Padres/Guardian Legal de estudiantes actualmente matriculados en la escuela media y secundaria (middle & high school);
- Educadores/Maestros y;
- Administradores/Coordinadores de currículo.

**¡Su Contribución es muy importante!**


**¿QUIÉ?** Nosotros queremos escuchar sus ideas. SERC le invita a participar en una de las conversaciones en la comunidad/grupos de enfoque que:

- Aprender la sobre la ley de este curso de estudio (P.A. 19-12), y
- Obtener sus ideas y opiniones sobre los tópicos que considere deben ser incluidos.

**¿POR QUÉ?** Para informar el desarrollo de un currículo a nivel estatal que representará perspectivas múltiples.

**¿CUÁNDO/DÓNDE?** La participación se llevará a cabo a través de reuniones en línea a las 1:30 p.m. o a las 3:00 p.m.

**Ley Pública**  
Número, 19-12  
Una Ley para incluir estudios sobre Afroamericanos y Latinos en el currículo de las escuelas públicas.



**Students - BE A PART OF CHANGE!**

The State Education Resource Center (SERC) is organizing the development of an **African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Course of Studies** and is looking for input from students currently enrolled in middle and high school!

**YOUR INPUT IS CRITICAL!**


**WHO?** We would like to hear your thoughts and ideas. SERC invites you to join one of our community conversations/focus groups which will:

- Review the legislation for this course of studies (P.A. 19-12), and
- Gather your ideas and input on the topics you believe are most important to be included.

**WHY?** To inform the development of a statewide, model curriculum that is representative of multiple perspectives.

**WHEN/WHERE?** Participation will take place via an online meeting at 10:00am.

*\*Any student under the age of 18 will need permission to participate in a Focus Group. If you plan to participate, please download the [parental consent form](#), complete and return to [guzman@serc.org](mailto:guzman@serc.org) before date of Focus Group.*



Seleccione la sesión que le sea más conveniente y haga clic en el enlace.

- **Lunes 20 de Abril a las 3:00 p.m.**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/315255576>  
Meeting ID: 315 255 576
- **Martes 21 de Abril a las 3:00 p.m.**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/416667728>  
Meeting ID: 416 667 728
- **Miércoles 22 de Abril a las 1:30 p.m.**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/767887759>  
Meeting ID: 767 887 759
- **Jueves 23 de Abril a las 3:00 p.m.**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/579033143>  
Meeting ID: 579 033 143
- **Viernes 24 de Abril a las 1:30 p.m.**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/937901991>  
Meeting ID: 937 901 991



¿Información? Por favor comuníquese con Wanda Guzman al [guzman@serc.org](mailto:guzman@serc.org)

Si no puede participar pero le gustaría ofrecer su opinión, por favor responda al cuestionario en línea, haciendo clic al: <https://serc.net/es/312focusgroups>

Join us online at any of the dates and times by clicking on meeting links below.

- **Monday, April 20 at 10:00am**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/398665655>  
Meeting ID: 398 666 565
- **Tuesday, April 21 at 10:00am**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/21714791>  
Meeting ID: 217 147 91
- **Wednesday, April 22 at 10:00am**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/748513398>  
Meeting ID: 748 513 398
- **Thursday, April 23 at 10:00am**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/252109408>  
Meeting ID: 252 109 408
- **Friday, April 24 at 10:00am**  
<https://serc.zoom.us/j/393871385>  
Meeting ID: 393 871 385



Information/Requests? For additional information, please contact Wanda Guzman at [guzman@serc.org](mailto:guzman@serc.org)

Option: If you are unable to participate and interested in providing input, please complete the Focus Group Survey using the following link: <https://serc.net/es/312focusgroups>

In addition to the committee meetings, the Advisory Group was scheduled to meet six times as a whole group to provide guidance and feedback. A second Advisory Group meeting was held January 21, 2020, when SERC delineated the timeline: After the course objectives and scope and sequence were drafted, the course and report would be completed by September 30, 2020; presented at the State Board of Education in November; and revised in December. The State Board of Education would review and approve the course by January 1, 2021, and submit details to the General Assembly by January 15.



*The State Capitol event honoring the new African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino curriculum spearheaded by SERC. Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady is fourth from right.*

On February 21, 2020, the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity hosted a celebration of P.A. 19-12 in the Legislative Office Building, marking African American History Month and specifically honoring Senator McCrory and Representative Gibson. Speakers providing a historical perspective included Dr. Katherine Hermes of Central Connecticut State University; Dr. Fiona Vernal of UConn; and Elizabeth Normen, publisher of Connecticut Explored.

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady was invited to address the gathering. “This curriculum is history in the making,” she said. “It’s the beginning of freedom and liberation for every one of our students [and] for us.”

A reception followed, featuring Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, State Treasurer Shawn Wooden, and Education Commissioner Dr. Miguel Cardona. Bloomfield Superintendent Dr. James Thompson received an award.

In February 2020, SERC announced public focus groups to receive input on the pending curriculum. SERC specifically invited students currently enrolled in middle school and high school, and their parents or guardians; teachers and other educators; and district and school administrators and curriculum coordinators, with separate drop-in times reserved for each group. The focus groups were designed to gather ideas and input on the topics participants believed were most important to include in the curriculum.

The focus groups were originally scheduled to take place at high schools in five separate regions across the state during the month of March, and the first one was held at Torrington High School on March 5. By the time the second focus group was to be held a week later in Bridgeport, the widespread COVID-19 closures were beginning and the focus groups were postponed. In April, SERC announced five additional focus groups would be held online, and they ran daily from April 20 through April 24.

Likewise, the Advisory Group was scheduled to meet in March and every other month thereafter, but COVID-19 prevented the March meeting from being held. The next Advisory Group meeting was ultimately held virtually on May 29 with over 60 participants, including Representatives Gibson and Sanchez, and recognized the commitment and contributions of committee members during the difficult time. In addition to the pandemic, George Floyd had been killed in Minneapolis on May 25.



*"With this curriculum, we have an opportunity to radically reimagine how our history is told"*

*"The content of this course is needed to heal our nation." – comments at the first virtual Advisory Group meeting, May 29, 2020*

## FOUNDATION SUPPORT

The SERC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that was established in 2015 to sustain SERC's programming and services, particularly its work on racial equity. SERC and its Foundation are grateful for the continued support from the William Caspar Graustein Foundation, whose vision of educational equity is aligned with SERC's.

During 2019-2020, a group of four districts comprising Cohort A—Middletown, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury—was in their second year under a Graustein grant for SERC to provide them support in the area of equity. The following represents Graustein-funded SERC activities in 2019-2020.

September 10 & 11, 2019: "Beyond Diversity," a personally transforming two-day seminar on the impact of race on student learning and an exploration of the role of institutional racism on academic opportunity gaps. The approximately 80 attendees included members of District Equity Leadership Teams (DELTs) in Cohort A, including administrators, teachers, and community members, as well as some SERC and Graustein staff. The structure of Beyond Diversity is steeped in Courageous Conversation, a protocol for interracial dialogue developed by Pacific Educational Group (PEG), which ran the seminar and has guided SERC since the early years of its racial equity work.

September – December 2019: SERC's technical assistance to the four cohort A districts to further develop their equity plans and strategies, based on the districts' Board-approved equity policies.

October 14–16: PEG's Summit for Courageous Conversation in New Orleans for 10 SERC staff and one individual each from the New Haven and Waterbury districts. For SERC, the summit helps staff continue to build their capacity in racial equity work.

October – December 2019: PEG Affiliate training for seven SERC staff (Vernée Butterfield, Nikki Hendry, Sarah L. Jones, LèTanya Lawrence, Amanda Pickett, Steve Proffitt, and Michelle Weaver) and two individuals from each of the four Cohort A districts, including one live-training day on December 9, 2019. SERC has been working toward training all SERC consultants as PEG Affiliates, who are qualified to serve as facilitators of Beyond Diversity.

October 2019 – March 2020: Planning and coordination of the 2020 Dismantling Systemic Racism Conference 2020. The conference, scheduled for May 20, 2020, would have been the fifth annual event; the fourth attracted nearly 750

### SPOTLIGHT ON WATERBURY

The District Equity Leadership Team of Waterbury Public Schools, one of the Cohort A districts under the Graustein grant, took the unusual step of passing an Equity Policy in August 2019 to establish a framework for educational equity for all students. To put the policy into action, the 2019-2020 school year represented Year 1 of the district's three-year plan of professional learning leading to a commitment to racial equity in education.

Waterbury had a supplemental contract with SERC to support the initial rollout and application at the middle school level (Phase 1). This included pre-work and an overview session of the Courageous Conversation Protocol with grade-level teams at each school in late February 2020 and a conference in early March.

A planned follow-up for mid- to late March was repurposed due to COVID-19, with overview sessions for central office administrators, coordinators, and supervisors and the development of an online course as a resource for

CONTINUED...



participants, the largest SERC event of the year. As with large-scale events across the nation, the 2020 conference was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SERC offered all of those who were accepted to be presenters at the 2020 event to present at the next in-person racism conference.

January – March 2020: Candidates for Cohort B are sought. SERC sends out invitations to apply, five applications are received, and four districts are accepted: New Britain, Regional School District 13, Southington, and Thomaston.

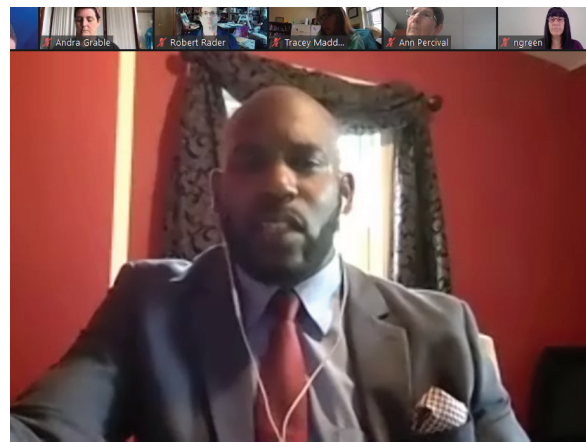
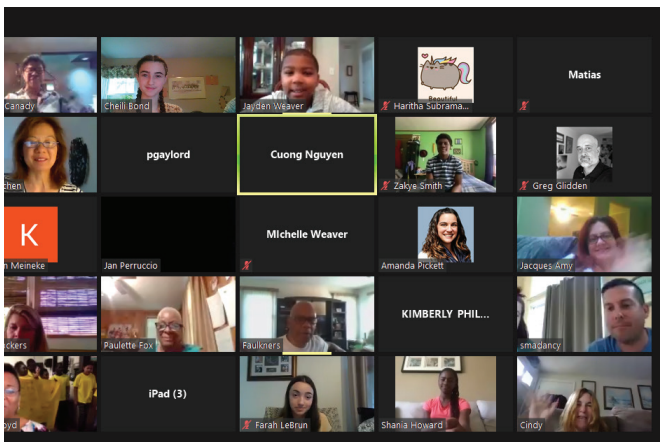
March – June 2020: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a reconfiguration of plans for how to use the grant funds to support schools. Cohort A districts are to work on sustainability plans.

April – June 2020: Five virtual coaching sessions for Affiliates

equity leadership team members.

The learning engaged participants in courageous discourse and promoted their understanding of how aspects of racial identity impact decisions, practices, and students' experiences in the classroom.

*"This was amazing and I felt safe and heard." – participant in Waterbury equity training*



*Left: Children of SERC staff spoke June 4 about their experience with virtual learning.*

*Right: Anthony Gay was a guest speaker on June 18.*

## BUILDING A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unavoidable cancellation of the annual Dismantling Systemic Racism conference in 2020, SERC kept the dialogue going on racial equity. From late May through June 2020, SERC held an online series called "Racial Equity and Education During COVID-19: Our Community's Perspective."

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady led the facilitation of each session, which typically had two featured speakers. In one session, the featured speakers were students ranging from fourth grade through high school.

The weekly topics were:

- May 28: Racial Equity and Education During COVID-19
- June 4: Our Youth Speak: COVID-19 Virtual Learning

- June 11: Distance Learning and Family Engagement: The Perspective of Communities of Color
- June 18: Mental Health and Racial Equity
- June 25: COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Racism: Supporting Asian Students, Families, and Educators

In the June 4 session, the youth were first asked their perspective on recent racial incidents; George Floyd had just been killed on May 25. Then they were asked about their thoughts and experiences on the pandemic and distance learning.

Each equity session routinely attracted well over 100 participants; registration had to be expanded to meet demand. The CT State Board of Education sent a letter to the SERC Board of Directors praising the equity sessions.

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*SERC issued the following statement after the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.*

## STRUCTURAL RACISM CLAIMS ANOTHER LIFE

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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

When a particular event reminds our nation of the reality of racial injustice and violence, leaders and organizations issue statements of condemnation and a reaffirmation of our values. I am heartened by reading fervent messages of support for social justice from schools, districts, and other partners across our state and nation. As you navigate this already complicated time in our history, thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of our children, families, and communities that we all serve.

This Statement affirms SERC's role in this community. Not only that: Racial justice is central to who we are, and addressing structural racism hits to the heart of what we do. We have intentionally addressed race in our work for more than 15 years, creating a blueprint and reports on race-conscious educational equity, holding annual conferences on "Dismantling Systemic Racism," and building the capacity of our staff to support educators in their own work on race as well as navigate a personal and often agonizing journey of self-discovery. But even beyond SERC, the killing of George Floyd is deeply and profoundly personal. I fear this. I live this. George Floyd could have been my husband, my son, my grandson, my brother, my neighbor.

In our virtual meeting with all SERC staff, I shared the range of emotions and pain I am going through in the wake of this distressingly familiar incident of hate and blatant racist actions that have exploded in demonstrations. I was reminded about the importance of harnessing the power of WE. WE need one another now more than ever to combat racism, injustice, bigotry, and hate. WE can never, as an anti-racist community, stand by as men of color gasp for air and call for their mothers until they are forever silenced. WE cannot stand by and witness our communities of color still held down by the legacy of systemic oppression. WE know that our children deserve better; WE know that our families deserve better; WE know that our communities deserve better.

As an organization, SERC will continue developing a culture of learning and growth around structural racism and its implications for student learning and success. This work embodies our vision of Equity, Excellence, and Education. You are a partner in that vision and will always be a part of our WE. Please join us as WE navigate difficult conversations and undertake courageous actions in your own communities. Together, WE will commit ourselves to real, lasting change so that our children can look back on this season of pain and remember us as heroes who did something about it.

Respectfully,

Ingrid M. Canady, Executive Director



## YOUTH & **FAMILIES**

Annual Report 19-20

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### EMPOWERING STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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In 2019-2020, SERC's Nicole M. Vitale continued to coordinate the Special Education Youth Advisory Council (SEYAC), which reaches students who may not typically have an opportunity to share their voice. The council is designed to 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. The council also serves to inform the Division Director of the Bureau of Special Education on issues that are important to special education students.

Students from Simsbury High School have been participating in the Youth Advisory Council since 2017. Students are always part of the planning and decision making as members of the council. In 2019, a decision was made for high school students to mentor a group of middle schoolers who were also in the council for the past year. This included a tour of the high school.

SERC consultants met with high school students for one of the council sessions to discuss how they could work with middle school students, helping make them feel more comfortable and confident entering high school. Discussion included conducting a walk-through of the school and a question-and-answer session, along with what was important for students to know when entering high school, what classes they liked, and how to advocate for themselves, as well as tips and tricks to being successful in school.

As a result, the middle school students now know someone at the high school and a point person if they have a question. Middle school students ended up feeling much more comfortable going to high school, and high school students were very proud of themselves as leaders.

### RECOGNIZING PARENTS

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Every year in November, SERC holds an awards ceremony to honor parents from across Connecticut for their contributions to their schools and communities. The Parental Involvement Recognition Award ceremony on November 21, 2019, took place once again at the Connecticut State Capitol.

For the last few years, SERC held the ceremony in the stately Judiciary Room. In 2019, the event was held in the North Lobby, and for the first time the state Commissioner of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, was present to honor the parents. "You're the first and most influential teachers your students have," Dr. Cardona told the honorees.

SERC's annual Parental Involvement Recognition Award ceremony is held on National Parental Involvement Day, an initiative launched by St. Louis-based Project Appleseed. Connecticut school leaders, program coordinators and others 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.

The 2019 winners of the Parental Involvement Recognition Awards were Sally Ajello, nominated by the Western Connecticut Association of Human Rights of Danbury; Regan Allan, nominated by the Stamford Public Education Foundation; Anita Crawford, nominated by Windsor High School; Dominie Dickens, nominated by the Office of Family and Community Partnership, East Hartford Public Schools; Yadira Esquivel, nominated by the Exchange Club Parenting Skills Center, Stamford; Elizabeth Quiñonez, nominated by the Families Network of Western Connecticut, Danbury; Dawn and Tom Shumbo, nominated by LEARN Student Support Services, Old Lyme; Lizzette Smith, nominated by the Gov. William Pitkin School, East Hartford; Kim Smart, nominated by Windham Middle School, Willimantic; and Antoinette Terenzio, nominated by the North Stonington Christian Academy.



*Photos from left: Ingrid M. Canady, SERC Executive Director, welcoming participants to the Parental Involvement Recognition Awards ceremony.*

*State Representative J.P. Sredzinski, 112th District, came to honor the parents, whom he called the "most important, powerful" people in the Capitol.*



*"I love coming to SERC events!" declared Dr. Miguel Cardona, Connecticut's Education Commissioner. "Thank you, SERC, for the work you do."*



*At left: Honoree Yadira Esquivel with family*

*Below: Dominie Dickens (center) honored with East Hartford colleagues*



*At left: Among the honorees were Dawn and Tom Shumbo for their advocacy for their son Jake, who himself has been a leading voice for other young people with disabilities at other CSDE and SERC events.*

## PARTNERING ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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SERC is one of five agencies that comprise the Connecticut Family School Partnerships (CFSP), created out of a 2018 federal grant to design a Statewide Family Engagement Center for Connecticut. The CFSP promotes shared leadership between schools and families, partnerships to promote equal voice, and a comprehensive web-based hub for family engagement resources and information. Led by primary grantee the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), collaborating partners also include the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), and the African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP).

SERC's efforts under the CFSP have focused on professional learning for schools and community agencies and direct service and training for families, specifically:

- supporting activities identified in the grant that are specific to SERC's strengths and outreach to culturally responsive, relevant, and conscious approaches to family engagement; and
- building the capacity of families, schools, and communities to construct a robust system of family engagement support and training to ensure that students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally, stay in school, and graduate on time.

SERC provided coaching under the grant to the Stamford and Windsor school districts. Initially, SERC consultants met with the districts to help create family engagement plans. The districts selected five schools, and the coaches provided support with training and technical assistance on family engagement and also helped them write action plans specific to each school on engaging families.

Expected outcomes were:

- Two identified district-level teams and district facilitators will be in place to support and sustain four school-level action teams.
- School-level action teams with support and technical assistance from SERC consultants and district facilitators will implement, evaluate, and continually improve family and community partnerships with plans to address student achievement, improved school attendance, and a welcoming school environment.

Once the pandemic hit, SERC met virtually with the district facilitators and provided technical assistance. In Stamford, the focus became communication with families during distance learning. SERC met and discussed actions and strategies to ensure that the five schools participating were collaborating and communicating with families.

SERC also provided statewide training on engaging families of color and on culturally responsive family engagement.

## PARENT LEADERSHIP: A SHIFT ON OVERSIGHT

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The Parent Trust Fund supports programs throughout Connecticut that train parents in leadership skills, including the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), People Empowering People (PEP), and the Parent SEE models. SERC and the Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC), which operated through SERC, began administering the Parent Trust Fund in 2010.

In summer 2019, SERC announced its decision to transfer administration of the Fund to the CT State Department of Education.

In a statement, SERC noted “a range of fiscal circumstances” during its administration of the Fund, “from being fully funded, with matching funds from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, to uncertainty whether it would be part of the legislative budget at all.” The statement continued:

Throughout these fiscal challenges, the advocacy and dedication of so many civic warriors have been clear and why the funding, although reduced, still continues to exist. However, with this significant reduction of funds and with our commitment to ensure that the funding goes directly to the communities, SERC/CT PIRC, in collaboration with our CT State Department of Education (CSDE) partners, has made the decision to transfer the administration of the Fund to CSDE.

The decision was not made lightly, since SERC/CT PIRC has developed great collaborative partnerships with so many grantees and amazing Parent Leadership Programs across the state. It has been an honor to serve the state with this work that has empowered countless parents through PLTI, Parent SEE, PEP and other parent leadership training programs.

The transition to CSDE helped reduce overhead and administrative costs, allowing more funding to be awarded directly to programs.

In spring 2020, families struggled with the unprecedented scenario of their children learning entirely from home. In late May and June, SERC staff held a series of “Screenside Chats for Parents and Families: A Virtual Space to Connect during COVID-19.” With mental health in mind, the focus of the first Zoom chat on May 28 was “Caring for Yourself, Your Family, Your Community.”

At the conclusion of the series, SERC developed a LibGuide through the SERC Library with activities that kids and families could do over the summer that incorporated learning: <https://ctserc.libguides.com>

For more on the library and other work conducted in response to COVID-19, see page 34.

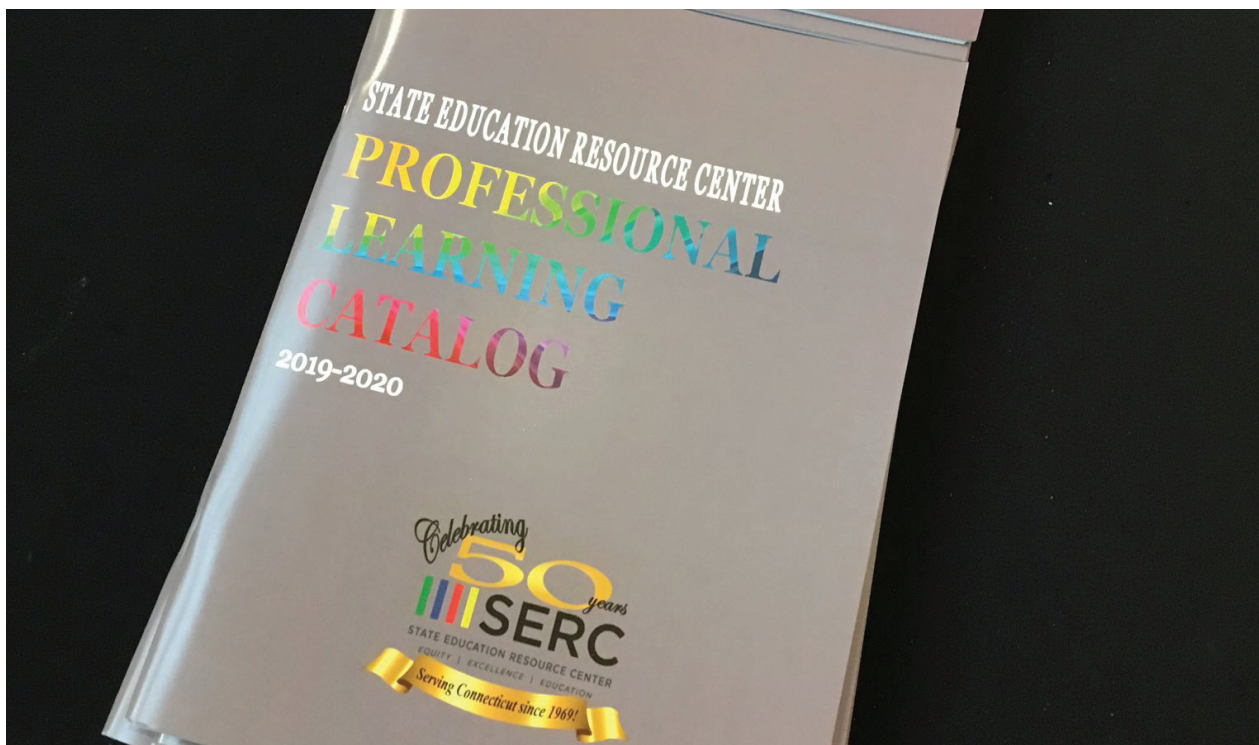
In August 2019, a two-day Statewide Summit on Fatherhood took place at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). The two-day event was sponsored by the CT Department of Social Services’ Fatherhood Initiative, the CT Department of Children and Families’ Dads Matter Too!, and CCSU’s HEALTHYfellows/Man Enough Support Initiative. Ingrid had delivered the keynote address at the Dads Matter Too conference in 2018.



## SUPPORTING THE **STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Annual Report 19-20

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SERC works collaboratively with the CSDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE) to develop, coordinate and facilitate professional learning activities for educators, other professionals, and students and families across Connecticut.

The 2019-2020 school year marked a return of the printed SERC Professional Learning Catalog. For many years, SERC had printed a catalog to list its statewide workshops and training across a range of education initiatives that we operated in collaboration with CSDE, such as Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Early Childhood Education. (In earlier years, every initiative had its own catalog.) Increasingly, our annual catalogs, sometimes with an updated version in the middle of the fiscal year, included descriptions of our own contract and in-district offerings, equity work, and library programs and resources to showcase the wide range of SERC services. Eventually, with updates throughout the year, more information shared electronically and on the website, and the implementation of a fully online registration system, the printed booklets were discontinued while the catalog of activities continued to be entirely available online.

Then in 2019, under the leadership of BSE Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, SERC once again published a Professional Learning Catalog for the 2019-2020 school year. This catalog specifically covered all activities funded by the BSE under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



## 2019 BACK TO SCHOOL MEETING

The 2019-2020 catalog made its debut at the BSE's 2019 Back to School meeting for Connecticut special education administrators, held September 18. The catalogs were delivered hot off the presses for every participant in attendance—500, the most ever.

SERC works closely with BSE to help plan the Back to School meeting every year, and handles registration, management of the online resources page, and other logistics. The 2019 meeting was an opportunity for Dr. Miguel Cardona, who was sworn in as Education Commissioner in August, to be formally introduced to districts across the state.

Among the updates participants received were Connecticut legal developments; trends in special education due process in the state; and professional learning opportunities, including a new 8-day Planning and Placement Team training (see p. 15). Breakout sessions and afternoon meetings included new Connecticut administrators of Special Education Data Training and meetings for directors of approved private special education programs, hearing officers, and surrogate parents.

The activities listed in the catalog were scheduled through May 2020. With large-scale closures beginning in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SERC adjusted many activities to be held online.



*SERC live-tweets the proceedings and receives special thanks from Commissioner Dr. Miguel Cardona*



*At left: Participants arrive for the Back to School Event.*

*Top Right: Youth leaders Ben and Alana from RHAM High School in Hebron use a metaphor of icebergs and special education to reflect on their experience in the Youth Advisory Council.*



*Bottom Right: Students from Bristol Possibilities Theater perform for attendees.*

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Our work in the area of educational leadership represents a true collaboration between the CSDE Bureau of Special Education, SERC and the RESC Alliance to build leadership capacity around special education practices. SERC oversaw and coordinated the scope of the work.

### ***The PPTLI***

The Planning and Placement Team Leadership Institute (PPTLI) is a one-year intensive experience for professionals who chair individualized education program (IEP) teams in Connecticut. The purpose of the institute is to train leaders to facilitate IEP team meetings that are compliant and collaborative.

This institute has been essential to many school leaders and highlights the interagency collaboration in Connecticut. PPT leaders have expressed that this training is not only relevant and necessary but also essential during the time of COVID-19 and beyond. The bonds created by the cohorts are evident in the participation and engagement in the synchronous and asynchronous sessions. Teachers licensed in special education have no required courses that explicitly address facilitation, mediation, or understanding the law and compliance, so the PPTLI builds these competencies. Participants learned to facilitate team meetings, create and write clear and effective IEPs, implement a capstone project, and develop support networks to foster the implementation of best practices in the education of children with special needs.

The 120 participants during 2019-2020 included district staff, including special education directors, principals, special and general education teachers, and student support services professionals. The PPTLI cohorts went virtual after the pandemic hit, and the work continued with most of the participants. A final celebration for the 2019-2020 pilot was held over Zoom on May 19, 2020.

### ***The 8-Day Training***

This particular series is designed to build leadership capacity around special education practices. The innovative training, targeted for all educators involved in the PPT process, is differentiated into three levels to meet the diverse needs of Connecticut school districts. Focused on five key principles, the training addresses special education laws and procedures, improving student outcomes, improving the quality of IEPs, strengthening school and family partnerships, and decreasing the number of state complaints.

Capacity and knowledge are built around special education compliance, state and federal laws, and PPT facilitation. Cohorts throughout the state are given the opportunity to learn through dynamic virtual instruction from an interagency team of presenters.

Participating school district cohorts in 2019-2020 included special education directors, principals, general and special education teachers, and student support services professionals. Most cohorts had an average of 40-60 participants. The districts/cohorts included Norwalk, Norwich/New London; Stamford; Torrington elementary schools and Torrington Middle School; Waterbury/Brookfield; and Plymouth/Regional School District 1, RSD 15, Thomaston, and Wolcott. The training continued online during the pandemic.

### ***Step by Step***

Also to support the state, SERC worked with Dr. Frances Stetson of Stetson and Associates to assist districts with inclusive practices for students with disabilities. SERC Consultant Nikki Hendry

continued to coordinate the project in Connecticut.

The Bureau of Special Education has brought in Stetson after identifying districts across Connecticut that needed to increase the time students with disabilities spent in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) with nondisabled peers. The collaboration involves train-the-trainer sessions on “A Step by Step Approach for Inclusive Schools,” with follow-up on-site technical assistance at participating schools; and statewide sessions from Stetson consultants.

Beginning in winter 2020, SERC trained a new cohort of Connecticut-based trainers on Step by Step. The sessions included observing district-based trainings, live train-the-trainer sessions, and—once the COVID-19 pandemic had progressed—Stetson provided virtual training, including webinars and one-on-one online coaching. Participants learned content and presented portions to Stetson consultants to receive feedback.

The pandemic necessitated suspending the in-person work with plans to continue in the 2020-21 school year. On its website, Stetson and Associates quoted Nikki:

“

*“The virtual option allowed us to keep our training going so that our trainers-to-be will be ready to roll in the fall of 2020. My group felt the one-on-one coaching sessions were so valuable to help them with their content and training skills, and the webinars were great to enhance our content knowledge.”*

And from Stetson:

“

*“Over the years, Stetson and Associates has enjoyed a strong relationship with the CSDE and SERC in advancing inclusive practices and building leadership skills. This group is impressive to work with due to their ranks of highly qualified education leaders, a data-driven approach to selecting priorities for improvement, and for developing processes that foster systemic change.”*

## STATE SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SSIP)

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The State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) is part of the federal Office of Special Education Programs’ Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) initiative to improve results for children with disabilities by improving educational services, including special education and related services. Based on Connecticut’s State-Identified Measurable Result for Children with Disabilities (SIMR) to improve reading performance of students with disabilities by Grade 3, CSDE identified several districts to receive follow-up support.

During the 2019-2020 school year, leadership teams from Ansonia and Windham public schools participated in a guided review of their district-wide literacy practices using the District Literacy Evaluation Tool (DLET) developed by CSDE and SERC. The DLET is a self-assessment tool for districts to consider what their literacy practices are, how they are implemented, and how they support students through the tiers of instruction and special education. The discussion with SERC Consultant Michelle LeBrun-Griffin and the CSDE assisted the districts in identifying priority focus areas for improvement and scale-up.

In addition, SERC provided customized on-site training to special and general education administrators and teachers from Naugatuck, Norwich, and Plainfield. The districts chose customized training on SERC’s IEP Rubric and/or the process of writing IEP goals and objectives based on the CT Core Standards. SERC and CSDE developed a three-step process for writing the goals and objectives. (For more on the IEP rubric, see pages 32-33.)

Due to the restrictions of the pandemic, not all of the on-site training or coaching opportunities could be provided the rest of the school year as planned. It was anticipated that the districts would receive supports virtually in the 2020-2021 school year.

## SCHOOL CLIMATE

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Connecticut has become among the most advanced states for developing high-quality trainers on the implementation of a multi-tiered behavioral framework (MTBF), thanks to the endorsement process developed under the CT School Climate Transformation Grant (CT SCTG).

On the state level, the CT SCTG project was designed to build the CSDE's capacity to support the implementation of an MTBF. On the school level, it would enhance the capacity to implement and sustain an MTBF through training and technical assistance. The 17 endorsed Connecticut trainers and several more from across New England that resulted from the project "have formed a capable and enduring professional learning community that will continue to support a variety of state-level projects, including local and state-level School Climate Transformation Grants across the region," according to the final Grant Performance Report.

The nine-month no-cost extension of the five-year CT SCTG concluded on June 30, 2020. This section summarizes its final fiscal year and the overall results of the grant, coordinated by SERC Consultant Sarah L. Jones and under a partnership with CSDE and the Center for Behavioral Education and Research (CBER) at the University of Connecticut. CBER was the coordinating agency for the Northeast Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Training of Trainers (TOT).

Project highlights included:

- Seventeen trainers from Connecticut achieved endorsement. The goal of the grant was 20, but an additional 11 Connecticut participants had fully completed all of the on-campus TOT trainings. At the time, six of the trainers serving the entire state were from SERC. The "region as a whole has developed widespread capacity and support for New England states," according to the Grant Performance Report. "Participants in the TOT formed a robust professional learning community."
- The grant brought 1,875.5 hours of on-site, job-embedded training and technical assistance directly to schools across Connecticut.
- Created permanent resources to support schools and districts in the implementation of an MTBF, particularly digital modules for additional training and support on indicators from the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) that persistently scored lowest across Connecticut. Using TFI has led to the development of curricula for several statewide sessions that address specific TFI data.

Additional curricula developed under CT SCTG include:

- School Climate Support for Special Education Directors: Back to School Event (September 2019; for more on Back to School, see page 14)
- Using Restorative Practices within a Multi-Tiered Framework (2 days offered in November 2019)
- Universal Classroom Behavior Management (3 days, 2019)
- High-Leverage Classroom Practices for improving Student Learning and Behavior (5 days, Winter 2019-Spring 2020, see p. 25)
- Adapting Restorative Practices for Students with Disabilities (Winter 2019-2020, see p. 21)
- Restorative Practices for School Counselors (Winter 2019-2020, see p. 21)

## CT SCTG COHORTS

68 Total Applicants - Recruitments: Spring 2015, Spring 2016, Spring 2017  
 41 from Connecticut  
 Total Endorsed to Date: 26  
 Connecticut Endorsed to Date: 17

<b>EXPERIENCED</b>		<b>NEW</b>		
16 Connecticut: 12		52 Connecticut: 29		
Cohort A <i>Started Fall 2015</i>	Cohort B <i>Started Fall 2016</i>	Cohort A <i>Started Fall 2015</i>	Cohort B <i>Started Fall 2016</i>	Cohort C <i>Started Fall 2017</i>
8 Connecticut: 7	8 Connecticut: 5	14 Connecticut: 9	16 Connecticut: 9	22 Connecticut: 11
Withdrawn without completion: 3 Connecticut: 3	Withdrawn without completion: 1 Connecticut: 1	Withdrawn without completion: 6 Connecticut: 5	Withdrawn without completion: 2 Connecticut: 2	Withdrawn without completion: 8 Connecticut: 4
Endorsed through the grant: 5 Connecticut: 4	Endorsed through the grant: 4 Connecticut: 4	Endorsed through the grant: 2 Connecticut: 1	Endorsed through the grant: 11 Connecticut: 6	Endorsed through the grant: 4 Connecticut: 2

The grant management team had weathered other challenging years, perhaps preparing it for 2020. As noted in the report:

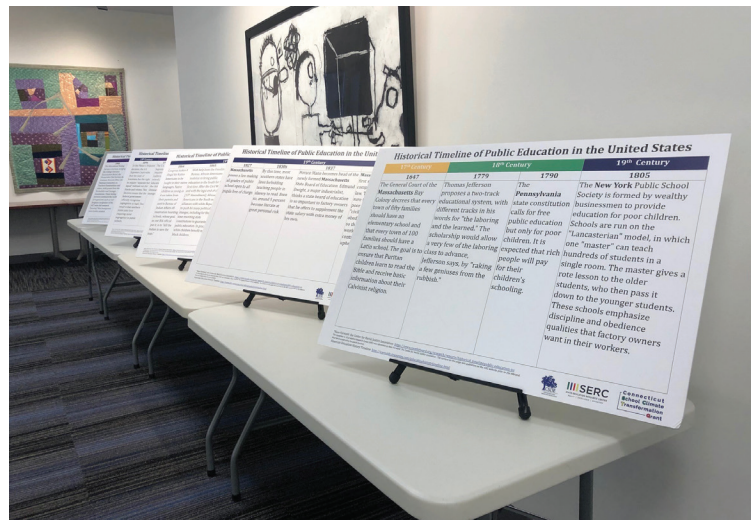
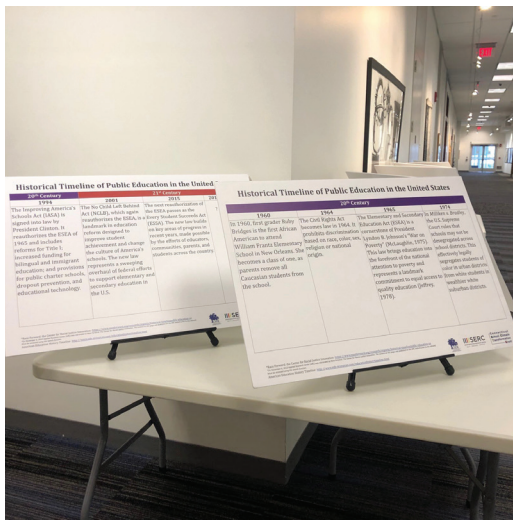
The Management Team certainly did not anticipate facing a global pandemic, the cancellation of in-person classes in Connecticut schools, and transition to remote learning, while completing the programming for the project under the no-cost extension. The CT SCTG Management Team met these challenges with innovative and creative thinking, adapted to the conditions without compromising the integrity of the grant goals, and delivered high-quality training and supports to schools and districts.



## ***SCTG Activities in 2019-2020***

The Northeast PBIS (NEPBIS) TOT increased expectations for ongoing professional development for trainers across the region.

- In November 2019, TOT participants and endorsed trainers gathered at the May Institute conference in Norwood, MA. The session with national expert Leanne Hawken focused on supporting training and implementation of advanced tiers of support, specifically comprehensive training for the use of “Check-In, Check-Out” in schools.
- In February 2020, CBER hosted the NEPBIS Trainers Summit where participants reviewed training material updates and attended training sessions on equity, integration/alignment, and family engagement. (COVID-19 caused the cancellation of the traditional gathering of TOT participants and endorsed trainers scheduled for May 2020.)
- During the no-cost extension, the CT SCTG Management Team held two Collaborative meetings. In each, the group considered the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline experienced by students with IEPs, and the intersection with race and gender.
- Due to COVID-19, the Spring Collaborative Meeting, held in June 2020, was conducted via Zoom and featured the authors of “Schooling for Critical Consciousness: Engaging Black and Latinx Youth in Analyzing, Navigating, and Challenging Racial Injustice,” Dr. Scott Seider and Dr. Daren Graves. The CT SCTG Management Team sent a copy of the book to all members of the Collaborative, and this text will serve as the springboard for future Collaborative meetings.
- In addition to the Collaborative meetings, several other important stakeholder engagement activities happened during the no-cost extension. In October 2019, school leaders from both schools and districts, as well as researchers from Schools of Education at various universities, worked together with educational community partners to provide feedback and suggestions to Leveraging Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to Enhance Educational Leadership. The Team incorporated the feedback and finalized it in June 2020.
- In November 2019, the CT SCTG Management Team partnered with the Connecticut Association of School Counselors to review forthcoming guidance for school counselors across the state. The Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework (CCSCF) incorporates a focus on establishing multi-tiered systems of support and the role the school counselor can and should play in those systems. The draft CCSCF along with a companion Position Statement on Comprehensive School Counseling was later approved by the State Board of Education.
- In January 2020, the CT SCTG Management Team facilitated a vetting session to gather feedback on the proposed Family Guides. The guides are designed to ensure families know and understand their rights regarding the education for their children should they experience a suspension and/or expulsion, and to have a better understanding of the relevant laws and policies. The guides are not meant to provide legal advice, but to explain the general rights of students in Connecticut’s public schools. The guides will be published in English and Spanish and sent to each school in Connecticut in addition to being available for download on the CSDE website.
- The TOT has also been a catalyst for innovative trainings designed to support regional capacity, such as the Summer Behavioral Institute, and a data-based decision-making course that was anticipated in late 2020.



*Historical Timeline of Public Education in the United States displayed at the CT State Board of Ed meeting, December 4, 2019*

Members of the TOT continue to support one another's learning and development. Since many members now know each other well, they easily refer training and technical assistance opportunities to one another. Most importantly, the project provides the underpinnings for robust supports for the schools and districts, and thus students and families, throughout Connecticut and increasingly across the region.

Also as part of the SCTG, Sarah worked with the CSDE and SERC librarians to create a Historical Timeline of Public Education in the United States. Modeled after similar timelines, it was used as an activity at the Fall School Discipline Collaborative held on November 22, 2019, and then set up at a State Board of Education meeting. The timeline provided a context for and connections between the history and the current lived experiences of the students. Sarah worked with the SERC librarians to package the timeline into a kit that has been signed out for display by others, including the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education.

### **Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative**

SERC continued to support the Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative in 2019-2020, its second year. The collaborative, an offshoot of CT SCTG, advises the Education Commissioner and State Board of Education on school discipline policies and practices statewide, and how to reduce the disproportionate and overall use of exclusionary discipline and use alternatives.

Dr. Miguel Cardona, who was appointed Education Commissioner in August 2019, was introduced to the collaborative at its November 22, 2019, meeting. A Historical Timeline of Public Education in the United States (see above) was presented, and Dr. Daren Graves of Simmons and Harvard universities facilitated a student panel on their views of school discipline.

The next session of the collaborative, originally scheduled earlier in the spring, was held virtually on June 16, 2020. Dr. Graves and Dr. Scott Seider of Boston College presented a webinar on Schooling for Critical Consciousness, and Ingrid facilitated a question-and-answer session. SERC's Steve Proffitt and Eben McKnight were also part of the event.

Sarah L. Jones and Lauren Johns have coordinated the collaborative meetings, while Greg Glidden has worked the tech for the meetings and webinars that took place before and during the pandemic.

## Restorative Practices

Through SCTG, SERC Consultants Sarah L. Jones, Bianca Irizarry and Amanda Pickett provided 14 school counseling master's students and two professors from Central Connecticut State University a two-day overview of Restorative Practices (RP).

On day one (January 29, 2020), participants went through interactive experiences to help build their understanding of the core principles of RP and an overview of the continuum of approaches, and practiced the skills necessary to introduce proactive and preventative strategies in classrooms. On day two (January 30), participants had the opportunity to understand how RP can be implemented within a school counseling/student support program and consider the continuum of implementation through that lens, including the data that would be tracked to ensure implementation fidelity and positive student outcomes.



*"Great presenters who adapted content to our group in [an] effective and sensitive manner! Bravo!"*  
– participant feedback on school counselors' training

Another Restorative Practices session focused on adapting the practices for students with disabilities. SERC Consultants Sarah L. Jones, Amanda Pickett, and Dr. Smita Worah explained how the practices were key components of building a class-wide and school-wide sense of community that includes all students. Through interactive experiences, participants learned about the core principles and an overview of the continuum of approaches, and had the opportunity to practice the skills necessary to introduce proactive and preventative strategies in their classrooms. Twenty-nine general and special education teachers registered for the January 16 session.

## #AttendTodayCT

### SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

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Through the collaborative, SERC and the CT State Department of Education continued to work together on school attendance in 2019-2020. The effort built on a national partnership with Attendance Works, a national and state initiative based in San Francisco.

The first Connecticut Student Attendance Symposium was held on March 27, 2019. On November 14, 2019, CSDE and SERC held the second: "Connecticut Student Attendance Symposium II: A Showcase of Promising Practices, Strategies and Successes in Reducing Chronic Absence."

As an event focused on attendance, appropriately enough, it draws a larger and larger crowd. Even more fittingly, the second time around, nearly everyone showed up.

The first symposium had 296 people registered and 239 in attendance. Based on attendance at the first symposium, registration for the second one was originally cut off at 300. However, higher demand led to reopening registration. Symposium II ended up having 389 people registered and a remarkable 379 attend—the registration-to-participant rate increased from 91% to 97%, the highest ratio of SERC events in the 2019-2020 academic year.

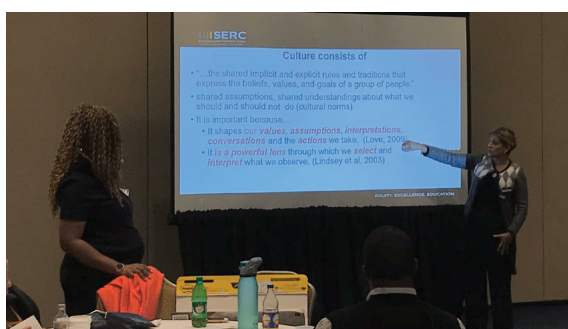


Participants included general and special education teachers and administrators, student support services professionals, and many others, including school attendance coordinators and counselors. Prominent guests, many of whom had attended the first, included Dr. Miguel Cardona, Commissioner of Education; Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner; Desi Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner; Ingrid M. Canady, SERC Executive Director; Steve Proffitt, SERC Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design; Dr. Todd Rogers, Ph.D., Director of Everyday Labs; Hedy Chang, Attendance Works Executive Director; Phyllis Jordan, Future Ed Editorial Director; and various representatives from CSDE, SERC, RESCs, public schools, charter schools and approved private schools.

The morning began with breakout sessions. In collaboration with the Bureau of Special Education, a stakeholder feedback session was facilitated to engage participants in roundtable discussion regarding the latest development of the Guidance Document for Students with Disabilities. Following the morning sessions, a morning address was given by Dr. Cardona as well as a keynote address by Dr. Todd Rogers. The afternoon included some repeated sessions from the morning and a Peer Learning Network session by invitation only, as the intent was to reengage opportunity district participants to continue the peer learning work that was initiated in the 2018-2019 school year.

In evaluations of the symposium, approximately 94% of participants reported increasing their knowledge and skills. Some of the prevailing themes included:

- The respondents' immediate next step is to return to their district/schools with a unique focus on the need to further develop their attendance teams and communication around attendance by examining the role of nudge letters and postcards.
- Continue professional learning around attendance team development and the strategies they use for family engagement. Some respondents felt the need to engage in professional learning that helps them figure out what to do with the truancy data they have.



*Clockwise from left: Sharing a moment at the attendance symposium: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner, CT State Department of Education; Dr. Todd Rogers, Everyday Labs; Dr. Miguel Cardona, Education Commissioner; Hedy Chang, Executive Director, Attendance Works; Ingrid M. Canady, Executive Director, SERC; and Phyllis Jordan, Editorial Director, Future Ed.*

*SERC's LèTanya Lawrence and Nitza M. Díaz presented on addressing implicit biases to reengage culturally diverse students to attend school. They pointed out how familial and cultural rules may differ from school rules and expectations. Without recognizing those differences, schools may assume some parents don't value education.*

### ***An Attendance Awareness Month Focus on Homelessness***

SERC had a lead role in a CSDE attendance event that focused on homelessness and featured U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy.

SERC's LèTanya Lawrence, Steve Proffitt, Janet N. Y. Zarchen, and Sarah L. Jones facilitated the roundtable discussions on homelessness and school attendance at the Lyceum in Hartford September 23, 2019. The groundwork for the data collection was first established by a variety of speakers with content expertise on related topics, while Senator Murphy spoke from a national perspective.

Speakers included Charlene Russell-Tucker, CSDE Chief Operating Officer; Kiley Gosselin, Executive Director of Partnership for Strong Communities; Richard Cho, Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness; and from SERC, Steve Proffitt, Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design.

Approximately 70 participants attended from groups including: Coordinated Action Networks; the Center for Children's Advocacy; the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness; the Corporation for Supportive Housing; CSDE - Performance and Turnaround Offices; CT Voices for Children; Department of Children and Families; Department of Housing; Department of Social Services; District Attendance Leads & McKinney-Vento Liaisons; Office of Early Childhood; Office of the Child Advocate; Partnership for Strong Communities; Youth Navigators; and SERC.

Each facilitator was trained using the same protocol. Participants submitted responses digitally and in writing. Each group had approximately 15-20 participants.

Specific themes were highlighted as a general pulse of what is happening in the field, based on a sample of people working in both the education and homeless systems. Some of the key findings included the unintentional homeless system barriers that impact not only student engagement but also effective service coordination. The following needs were identified: cross-sectional partnership and communication; routine convening of stakeholders; and differentiated support.



*U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy speaks to the crowd at the Lyceum in Hartford.*





*Clockwise from top: U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy addressed the event; Charlene Russell-Tucker, COO of CSDE and a SERC Board member, opened the Homelessness and School Attendance Roundtable by recognizing SERC and its 50th anniversary; SERC's LèTanya Lawrence, Sarah L. Jones, and Steve Proffitt, as well as Janet N. Y. Zarchen, facilitated roundtables on homelessness and school attendance.*





## A week in the life of SERC support to districts: Praise for our work in Derby and Norwalk



**DerbyMiddleSchoolSTEM** · 1/14/20 ...  
DMS educators attending PBIS training this week. We're learning strategies to make DMS even better! #WeAreDMS #WeAreDerby @ctserc



2 23



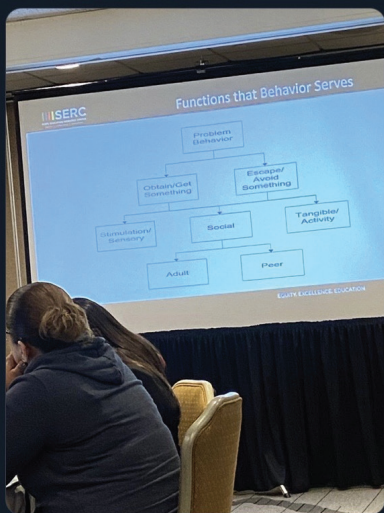
**Ms. Stacey McCoart** @Ms... · 1/10/20 ...  
Great day of Professional Development! Thank you @ctserc ! Amanda was amazing and provided so much insight to our staff.



**DerbySheridan** @Derb... · 1/10/20  
K-5 intervention mapping with @ctserc



**Mrs. Zilich AKA Mrs. Z** @M... · 1/9/20 ...  
Day 2 of an awesome 4-part training on FBAs and BIPs! Learning SO much! Thank you @ctserc @mrtprincipal



## PROVIDING CLASSROOM SUPPORT

In a professional learning series involving several SERC facilitators, teams of teachers had the opportunity to reflect on their role in creating classroom environments that are inclusive to all students.

“High-Leverage Classroom Practices for Improving Student Learning and Behavior,” designed as a five-day training, began January 14, 2020, and continued on March 5 and 6. Ninety-one general and special education classroom teachers registered in teams of three to five, including an instructional coach or administrator.

A goal for the series was relaying a sense of urgency for ensuring equitable access, participation, and progress for our most vulnerable learners. It provided solutions by covering key principles and concepts of Tier 1 instruction for all students and identifying key universal practices that can be used to change and improve outcomes across the student population.

Before delving into best practices on Day 1, the session addressed numerous educational disparities and the implicit biases we share that may contribute to them. In feedback, one participant said, “I can share information learned today about bias in the school system to help teachers better understand examples of bias and ways to avoid personal bias.”

The participants learned about 10 evidence-based strategies for proactive behavior management to enhance their classroom management and instructional practices. The facilitators covered strategies for building relationships, along with embedding the language of classroom expectations into praise and correction, escalation and de-escalation, and the implementation of Behavior Support Plans.

Days 4 and 5 were designed to be focused on the identification of high-leverage, evidence-based instructional practices, particularly in the area of literacy, that have been shown to support academic progress for all students, specifically those with disabilities. Since these last two days were scheduled for May 12 and 13, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the SERC team created an online course accessible in Schoology to cover the remaining content.

SERC Consultant Amanda Pickett was a lead facilitator throughout the training, with support from Eben McKnight, Janet N. Y. Zarchen, Christine Kuehlewind, Sarah L. Jones, Virginia Babcock, and Julia Seymour, as well as Greg Glidden for guiding the restructuring of the final two sessions into distance learning.



*Clockwise from top left: SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady; SERC's Linda Adorno, Bianca Irizarry, Heather Dawes, Amanda Pickett, and Paquita Jarman-Smith with presenter Dr. Ira J. Chasnoff; Larry Katz presenting on the Courage to Speak Foundation he co-founded with his wife Ginger Katz.*

## #CTPrevention

# SUBSTANCE MISUSE PREVENTION TAKES OFF

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation's opioid epidemic was declared a national public health emergency. In Connecticut, the rate of opioid overdoses was above the national average. Given everything else schools are faced with, how do we equip them with effective approaches and practices that help prevent student substance use and tackle substance misuse? Goals of prevention and recovery include decreasing risk factors and fostering protective factors; how can schools play a role in facilitating and reaching those goals?

One approach in Connecticut: a two-year project supporting substance misuse prevention and supports in schools. In September 2019, Connecticut held its first full-day summit under a federal grant to the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). SERC partnered with DMHAS to coordinate the summit, "A Collaborative Approach to Substance Misuse Prevention: Building Systemic Supports in Schools," which took place in Cromwell on September 27, 2019.

The summit focused on the role of schools and how they can work together with students, families, communities, and other stakeholders in addressing the opioid crisis. Breakouts addressed strategies on how schools can partner with local and state and local agencies, organizations and resources, information on evidence-based prevention programs (intervention supports) that can be delivered in a school setting, examples of how schools can support students who are impacted by addiction, and best practices to partner with families.

The morning keynote speaker was Ira J. Chasnoff, M.D., an award-winning author, researcher, and lecturer; president of NTI Upstream; and a Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago. Dr. Chasnoff spoke to the impact of substance use/misuse in various stages of child development and how it may affect factors such as social skills, behavior, and speech and language in addition to the impact on families. The afternoon keynote speaker was Michaela I. Fissel, Acting Executive Director of Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. of New Britain.



The summit was free for attendees, covered by the State Opioid Response Grant that the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration awarded DMHAS in 2018. A second summit was scheduled for spring but was delayed due to the pandemic and later scheduled virtually in the summer.

Under the grant, 2020 also marked Year 2 for Stratford and Torrington Public Schools, which continued the work of Year 1 in seeking to infuse substance misuse prevention and supports into a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Year 2 involved using the substance misuse prevention guiding curriculum, developed in Year 1, and its assessment tool to identify gaps in prevention efforts and create an action plan.

The districts were in the beginning stages of using the assessment tool when COVID-19 struck in earnest. The grant was expected to end initially in September 2020, with an application for a no-cost extension for the districts to finish the work.

Due to the pandemic, SERC arranged a series of online Lunch and Learn sessions. Holding the training virtually allowed SERC to home in on specific subjects, says Bianca Irizarry, SERC's coordinator of the DMHAS grant work.

The first series, "Prenatal Drug Exposure and Learning – What Teachers Need to Know," with Dr. Chasnoff, began June 19, 2020, and ran for three weekly sessions. The June sessions covered "Opiates and Other Drugs: Changes in Brain Functioning in the Exposed Child" and "Opiates and Other Drugs: Changes in Brain Functioning in the Exposed Child."

A second opioid Lunch and Learn series was scheduled for later in the summer.



*Clockwise from top left: Morning keynote speaker Dr. Ira Chasnoff; Bianca Irizarry, SERC's coordinator of the event; and afternoon keynote by Michaela I. Fissel of Advocacy Unlimited*



## PARAEDUCATOR SUPPORT & RECOGNITION

For several years, SERC was a key partner with the Bureau of Special Education in its annual conference for paraeducators that also recognizes the Connecticut Paraeducators of the Year. In 2019, we welcomed the opportunity to again play a leading role in what is now the Paraeducator Development and Leadership Symposium.

The October 28 event was a joint effort of the CSDE, SERC, the Council 4 AFSCME/AFT Connecticut and the RESC Alliance. The symposium drew 140 paraeducators from across Connecticut to provide a unique professional learning opportunity, especially for them, to build paraeducators' knowledge, skill, and efficacy. The event is also used to recognize and celebrate the significant contributions paraeducators make to the successful educational experiences of so many Connecticut students.

Personnel from the RESC Alliance facilitated professional learning sessions aligned to the State Board of Education's Five-Year Comprehensive Plan, "Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students." Paraeducators learned more about their role in Planning and Placement Teams (PPTs) and a trauma-sensitive lens to de-escalation, in which they acted out a scenario between a teacher and agitated student. SERC Consultant Nitza Díaz was included on a panel of paraeducator leadership and development, where it was noted that students increasingly see paraeducators as a second teacher in the classroom. Steve Proffitt, SERC Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design, discussed how the educational benefit of IEPs—and by extension paraeducators—might expand beyond the classroom, such as for extracurricular activities.

SERC's role included symposium planning and development of the program, facilitating stakeholder meetings, content and logistics planning, speaker coordination, and as always, the logistics of registration and working with the venue, the Red Lion Hotel in Cromwell. SERC also provided outreach and support for the Anne Marie Murphy 2020 Paraeducator of the Year Recognition Ceremony, which took place in the middle of the symposium after lunch and honored winners and nominated paraeducators from across the state.

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*“The symposium helped to raise the level of awareness of the importance of paraeducators, that as a Para we are also important to the school and in helping with educating the children we work with. I also never felt so appreciated as I did at the recognition. Thank you for making us feel important.” – from a participant evaluation*



*Clockwise from top left: Paquita Jarman-Smith, who kicked off the symposium, led the planning and development of the event from SERC*

*James Bairaktaris, "Mr. B" from Redding Elementary School, was honored as the 2020 Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year. Finalists Barbara Stevens from CES and Kimberly Izzo from Coventry also received special recognition, as did semifinalists and nominees from dozens of district across the state.*

*Education Commissioner Dr. Miguel Cardona addressed the attendees*



The annual award was renamed in 2013 in honor of the paraeducator who lost her life at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012.





*Left photo: Alycia Trakas, CT State Department of Education; top center photo: presenter Amanda Pickett, SERC; bottom center group photo: Missy Wrigley, SERC (at left) and Alycia Trakas (at right); with presenters Kim Morrison, Kim's daughter Megan, and Noelle Alix, Beans & Co.; and right photo: Steve Famiglietti, NEAT Center at Oak Hill, with SERC's Missy Wrigley*

## #CTTransition19

# SECONDARY TRANSITION & STUDENT VOICE

SERC joined a coalition of partners and sponsors for the 2019 Secondary Transition Symposium, a collaborative event for students with disabilities, their families, and educators across the state on transitioning to life after high school.

Central Connecticut State University hosted the two-day symposium September 20-21, 2019, the first time the annual event was held early in the school year. The previous annual symposium was after the end of the 2017-2018 school year in June.

In addition to SERC, where Missy Wrigley leads the secondary transition programming, symposium sponsors included CSDE, the CT Parent Advocacy Center, the CT Department of Developmental Services (DDS), ADS-Bureau of Aging & Disability Services, the University of Connecticut's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and the CT Secondary Transition Youth Advisory Board. As usual, the symposium featured a panel of speakers from the Youth Advisory Board, who have traveled to speak across the country.

The keynote presentation on the first day was from Kim Morrison and Noelle Alix, owners of BeanZ & Co., a coffee café in Avon that employs an inclusive workforce of those with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities. The second day, Steve Famiglietti from the NEAT Center at Oak Hill shared "My Journey to Independence."

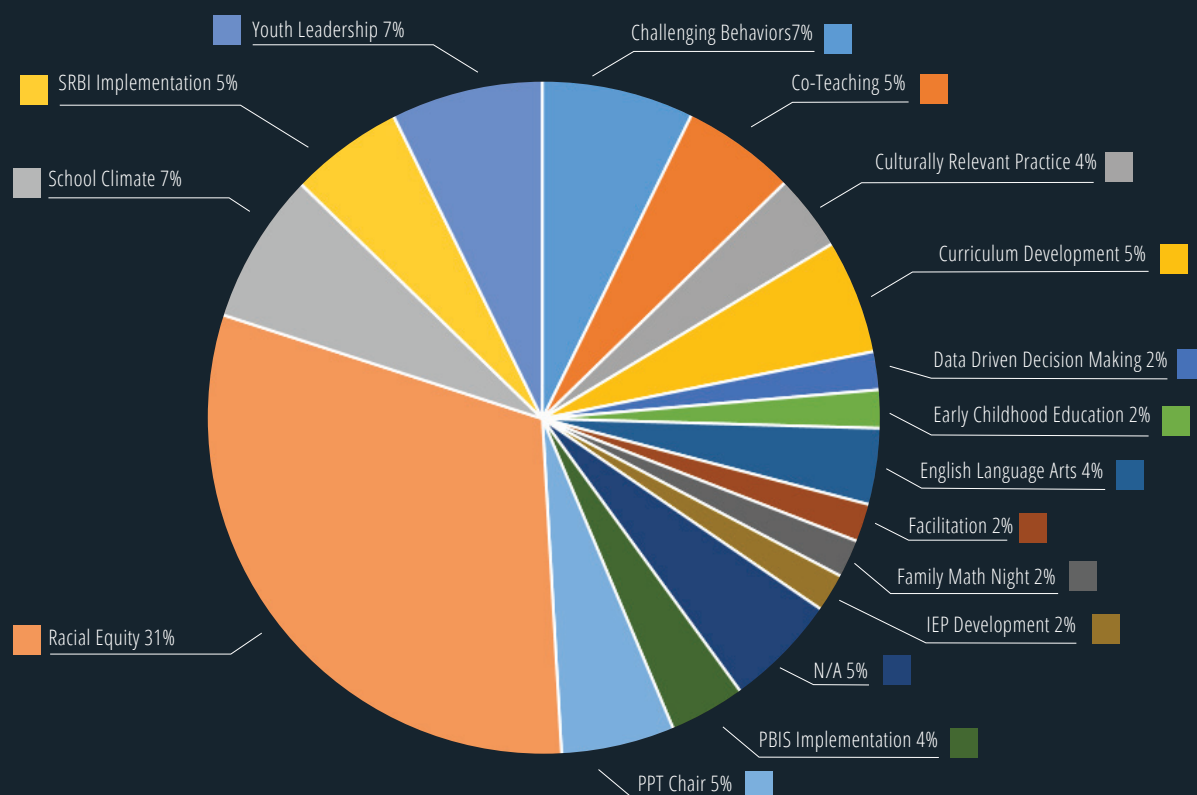
Approximately 50 presenters and organizations were represented throughout the two days. Covered topics included the Student-Centered Online Transition Resource Model; mental health trends and resources; programs from DDS, the CT Department of Labor, and the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; legal issues and transition goals; accommodations in postsecondary education; self-care, facilitated by SERC's Amanda Pickett; and the "Charting the LifeCourse" planning tool, facilitated by SERC's Missy Wrigley and Nitza Díaz.

# SERC IN-DISTRICT

Annual Report 19-20

Our work supporting school districts on site covers a range of areas. In 2019-2020, nearly a third were focused on racial equity.

## PERCENTAGE OF 2019-2020 IN-DISTRICT CONTRACTS BY TOPIC



## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTS

In one in-district professional learning opportunity, SERC's Dr. Smita Worah and Paquita Jarman-Smith assisted schools in reviewing their practices as they relate to assistive technology (AT) and accessible educational materials (AEM).

Participants examined their infrastructure as they considered, documented, and implemented AT and AEM. One common takeaway: They were surprised how much they already had that was considered assistive technology, so serving every student's needs did not always mean a large investment up front. The training and technical assistance plans were developed in conjunction with the school/district leadership and customized to the requirements specified by leadership. Participants included teams of 8-10 professionals comprised of a special education teacher, general education teacher, administrator, speech-language pathologist and/or occupational therapist, school/district information technology coordinator, and paraeducators.

In a separate learning opportunity, SERC consultants provided assistive technology demonstrations. Approximately 150 educators, family members, and students explored the AT equipment and resources, asked questions, and asked for assistance on the use of AT equipment, specific iPad apps, etc.

This opportunity also surprised participants who discovered what was available in their own devices.

### **Data Privacy**

SERC helped special education teachers, district information technology supervisors, and district administrators navigate Connecticut's data privacy law and its implications for students using assistive technology.

Consultants Dr. Smita Worah and Michelle Weaver, J.D., provided data privacy sessions in each of the six regional educational service center (RESC) regions. The sessions also provided guidance to districts on the exception to the privacy law and how to meet reporting obligations on the software or apps used for students with IEPs and Section 504 plans. Some of the participants were not aware of the existence of a waiver form.

## EQUITY IN WEST HARTFORD

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SERC worked collaboratively with West Hartford Public Schools in 2019-2020 to develop a professional learning program on cultural responsiveness and racial equity.

The work was designed to eliminate barriers to talking about race in education. It provided participants, which included K-12 general and special education teachers, administrators, and support staff, the tools to navigate conversations surrounding cultural responsiveness and racial equity.

Participants took a personal in-depth look at their own personal beliefs, values, experiences, and biases, and how they impact their interactions with students and families. More broadly, the effort was designed to explore the historical underpinnings that have led to institutionalized practices that perpetuate injustice, discrimination, and inequalities for targeted individual groups based on their race, disability, economic and social hardship, gender, sexual orientation, age, language and religious creed.

Several SERC consultants facilitated groups of approximately 55 on average. The groups met over four sessions from November 2019 to February 2020.

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*“It made me think about my curriculum and how I can implement discussion surrounded around race in my teaching. I think small discussion is needed with adults and students if we ever truly want to dismantle the uncomfortable feeling of talking about race. Is an important topic that is easy to oversee but important to talk more about.” – participant in SERC's West Hartford equity training*

## PBIS IN NEW MILFORD

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In 2019-2020, four New Milford schools continued working with SERC on systems and practices for behavior support.

SERC had begun PBIS training in the district in fall 2018. In 2019-2020, the schools began working on supports at tier 3, which focuses on the intensive needs of individual students.

SERC Consultants Michelle Weaver and Christine Kuehlewind facilitated sessions together with teams at Northville Elementary, Hill and Plain Elementary, Sarah Noble Intermediate School, and Schaghticoke Middle School. The facilitators introduced the teams to strategies for assessing students' needs for intensive behavior support and creating proactive plans to help students succeed in school. They observed student support team meetings at multiple schools and offered feedback to the teams regarding the team process.

Each school team consisted of four to eight members. The teams were represented by grade-level and special education teachers, as well as from the Unified Arts program; by student support personnel; by building administrators, and, at one school, by a parent.

"She is the most dedicated parent I've seen on a team, and she was totally infused in the school-wide process," Michelle says.

Including the voice of Unified Arts, the student-led arts program for students of all abilities, also helped ensure a whole-school approach to behavior support.

The New Milford schools were engaged in sustaining work done at tiers 1 and 2 as they reviewed their processes for providing tier 3 support. These school teams have created action plans that guide their planning, implementation, and progress towards sustainability of PBIS.

The work was interrupted when school buildings closed in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

## SERC ON **THE ROAD**

Annual Report 19-20

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In winter 2019, SERC received a communication from the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District in Michigan. An online search of IEP practices and development led the district to SERC's IEP rubric, which measures the quality of IEP development for students with disabilities. The rubric is built on the premise that because these students are entitled to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), their IEP should be focused on student outcomes based on the general education curriculum. Educators and families can use the rubric to assess whether an IEP goes beyond compliance to an instructional tool, ensuring students achieve the same general education standards as their nondisabled peers.

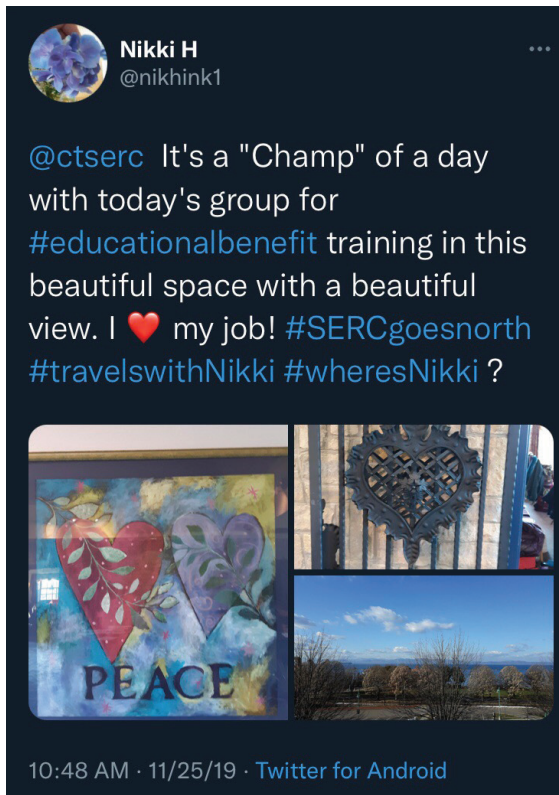
The Muskegon District was seeking to adapt the SERC rubric for its own use. SERC recommends that districts do not use the rubric without any training in it, and if district staff were planning to use it on a large scale to evaluate IEPs and practices, SERC recommends additional training because they need to become reliable as scorers to protect the fidelity of the tool.

SERC had worked with at least one Connecticut district, Hartford Public Schools, to retool the rubric to suit their needs. SERC provided Hartford with extensive training on how to use it and become reliable scorers so everyone scores it the same way. So how would this work in a city nearly 900 miles away, in a state with its own versions of IEPs?

By summer 2009, with a contract signed with the Muskegon district to help guide the process, SERC's Nikki Hendry was headed to Michigan.

"As a consultant, it was very helpful to work with other states around their IEP development and practices and collaborate with other educators outside of Connecticut," Nikki says. "The Educational Benefit Review Process illuminates trends in practice for IEP development, and similar themes emerge as a result."





Nikki had already worked with the Agency of Education in Vermont on the Ed Benefit process, which helps assess whether an IEP is reasonably calculated to provide educational benefit to increase student access to, participation in, and progress in the general education curriculum. In Muskegon, she would provide training to 30 education teachers and administrators on the Ed Benefit process and a training-of-trainers on SERC's IEP rubric.

Nikki was entering her third year working with Vermont schools and districts in 2019-2020. She provided a third round of train-the-trainer sessions, and offered 11 districts the educational benefit review sessions. Four districts participated, with about 200 participants including general and special education teachers, general and special education administrators, and student support services professionals.

"I think districts across the country feel validated when they hear that even after 16+ years and multiple states have done this work, the trends that emerge are similar to what other districts

have discovered," she says. "Evaluations often reveal that participants will likely change their practices around IEP development and many take away the idea of making their IEPs 'stranger-proof' so that anyone who picks up that document will be able to understand and implement the programming for a given student."

In a follow-up communication the following year, the Muskegon district shared that it was continuing with the training it had received through Nikki and sharing with educators in their region. The educators love the tools, especially the IEP rubric, to support their IEP development.

The four Vermont districts were able to complete the training before the state shut down in the COVID-19 pandemic. Work was halted in spring 2020 and a plan was developed to continue virtually in the fall. The contract was extended until December 31, 2020.

Check out SERC's IEP rubric and an accompanying webinar at <https://ctserc.org/component/k2/item/93-iep-rubric>.

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*"I cannot thank you enough for your direct hand in assisting this process and ensuring that it moves forward. While educators are trained to work together, we often get caught up in the process and do not always make it happen. You have been kind and purposeful in our communications and followed through to ensure its success. Thank you for your time in helping Muskegon County grow its capacity for teaching and learning." – Jill Soper, technical assistance coach, Muskegon Area Intermediate School District (MAISD), Muskegon, Michigan, writing to SERC on adapting our IEP rubric*

## RESPONDING TO CHANGE

Annual Report 19-20

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### THE SERC LIBRARY, RENEWED

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*SERC Consultants Christine Kuehlewind and Sarah L. Jones at a SERC display in the State Capitol concourse, February 2020*

After months of inventory and preparation, the SERC Library was proud to reopen its doors to Connecticut educators on October 31, 2019. We were warmly welcomed by patrons both old and new and were able to hand out over 100 newly designed library cards to the public.

A resource library has been part of SERC since its beginning in 1969, but the library's operation had been challenged in recent years. During the 2016-2017 school year, the closing of CSDE's Middletown campus, where the SERC Library was located, forced its relocation down the street to a much smaller space in SERC's administrative offices. This required closing the library temporarily during the transition and reducing the physical collections by approximately 75%, but it did reopen in its new location for the 2017-2018 school year. Then, a reduced operating budget forced the Library to close at the end of the 2018 fiscal year on June 30, 2018, for a much longer period. Much of the library materials remained in storage in the ensuing 16 months.

Restored funding would eventually allow SERC to fill two library associate positions. With the library still closed to the public, the associates worked on the inventory by hand during July and August 2019, while waiting for the online catalog to be fully restored. They went through all the materials in the library to make sure they were in their proper location and that packages had all the items that the material required.

They then reorganized shelves to make them more accessible for patron browsing, creating a map of the library and its shelving to facilitate this. They also created shelf signs for the AT section so that patrons would know the materials were separated by topic. For all the library materials that have a CD/DVD/flash drive component, they inventoried these as well and marked the items in the catalog so that both patrons and library staff were alerted during checkout of additional material to retrieve.

Finally, the SERC Library announced its reopening at the end of October. In the four short months it was open prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, our patrons made it known that one of the library's greatest resources was our vast collection of special education tests and assessments. In reflection of these needs, we upgraded this collection by purchasing 33 more assessments to provide a wider selection for our patrons. The library has also partnered with other SERC staff and projects to offer a more comprehensive variety of assistive technology materials, create a new book collection for the School Climate Transformation Grant, and offer access to the Historical Timeline of Public Education in the United States kit (see p. 20).



*SERC Librarians Cassandra McCarthy and Julia Klann at a SERC Library display at the State Capitol concourse, February 2020*

An ongoing task, which would be halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was the reorganization of the test and assessment reports. Each comes with a reporting document that patrons can write the results of the test on. We made sure we had enough reporting documents and that they are easy to find.

The online catalog was updated to be on brand with the rest of SERC through its use of colors and other features on the site. We were able to add buttons on our catalog page to direct patrons to our LibGuides, online resources, our library blog, and ways to contact a librarian for assistance. On the blog, we published entries on representative resources and diverse children's literature.

Once the SERC Library had to close once again on March 13, 2020, this time for a pandemic, the library stepped up to the plate and created a digital guide titled the "Online Learning and Other Resources for the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic" for our educator and family community members. Our library served the Connecticut community by providing weekly updates to this guide from the time of our closure in March through August and beyond. In addition to this guide, we updated 18 other digital guides on our LibGuides site so educators would have the most up-to-date knowledge and resources while they adapted to the new realities of learning online.



## RESPONDING TO NEEDS IN THE FIELD

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In March 2020, the state of Connecticut and the rest of the United States entered a period of lockdown. On March 13, 2020, SERC issued a statement that it would follow the recent guidance by the Governor that required a review of gatherings involving out-of-state visitors and large events. SERC announced that it would shift any SERC activity online when possible, and cancel all other events and close the SERC Library until further notice.

Some scheduled trainings did shift to virtual. Other districts had carryover funds for the 2020-2021 fiscal year for training that could not go ahead in the spring.

### ***Pivoting to Distance-Based Teaching & Learning***

As an agency, SERC was prepared to make the pivot to distance-based practice in order to continue serving its mission of serving as a resource to Connecticut educators and families.

SERC's technology infrastructure was ready. Essential internal services such as email, file shares, and the phone system had been set up for remote usage for some time, and staff were already trained in how to complete daily work tasks from a remote location; some SERC staff had been teleworking since July 2016.

One relatively new piece of SERC's remote working framework is that of virtual presence, which SERC achieved through the use of Zoom software. In 2019, unaware of the looming pandemic, SERC acquired licensing for Zoom for its entire staff. Staff were trained in its usage as a tool for conducting virtual trainings and technical assistance meetings, webinars, and for regular intra-office communications.

When SERC's offices were closed pursuant to Governor Lamont closing all state offices, SERC's staff were ready to begin working from home without any loss of time or productivity. Now decentralized throughout the state of Connecticut, SERC began the task of reformatting previously scheduled trainings to a virtual space. SERC also served as host and coordinator of multiple public-facing webinars for the State Department of Education, including one webinar targeted at parents that was attended by more than 1,000 live viewers.

As the entire state continued to adjust to the pandemic-reality of remote professional development, SERC developed and delivered a full menu of sessions for all the topics that were offered during a typical year.

### **FUN FACTS:**

#### **March – June 2020:**

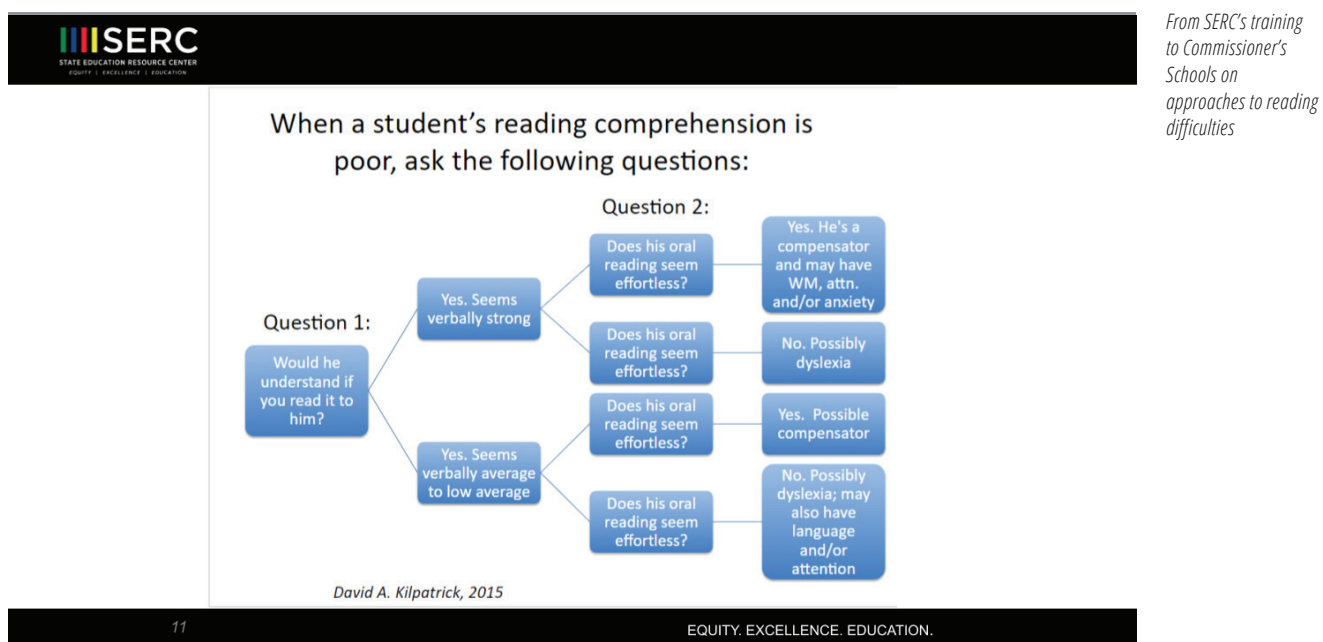
- 2,731 Zoom meetings held (both internal and external)
- 695,278 total remote meeting minutes
- 15,006 participants



# COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK

Through additional Commissioner's Network funds, schools in targeted districts were given an opportunity to partner with SERC for virtual professorial learning sessions and technical assistance. Between May 26 and June 26, 2020, SERC offered sessions on topics such as courageous leadership: achieving equity in our school, social emotional support and well-being, supporting students with disabilities, digital learning, and student and family engagement.

Participants were building-level teachers and administrators from eight schools in five different school districts. SERC, coordinated by Eben McKnight, oversaw logistics such as scheduling and providing schools with virtual links in order to ensure schools participating in the Commissioner's Network could access the training.



## Reading Support

SERC Consultants Claire Conroy and Dr. Smita Worah facilitated a June 2 session for Commissioner's Network schools on assessing and supporting K-12 students with reading difficulties.

Participants learned to recognize the hallmarks of different reading profiles, including dyslexia and other reading disabilities, and the components of appropriate screening and assessment. They then learned about differentiating between the needs of English Learners and those with reading difficulties, and serving those who are in both populations.

Ten educators participated, including general and special education teachers and a special education administrator. The participants reported that they found this presentation helpful to serve a significant portion of their population. They all teach a large portion of students who are English Learners, and they now recognize how appropriate assessment and intervention may look differently depending on the needs of the student.

Within the first few weeks, an internal task force met to help guide the eventual reopening of the office space. The task force worked under separate committees to develop plans related to physical space/facilities, administrative procedures, programmatic concerns, and the SERC Library. A staff survey, the purchase of safety and sanitary equipment, and the institution of safety measures were underway, and remote learning continued, into the new fiscal year.

As schools broke for the summer, SERC was to coordinate with the appropriate state-approved vendors to price the orders, then work with the districts on authorization and invoicing.

*In addition to a virtual series on equity, in late spring 2020 SERC scheduled a series of “Screenside Chats” for parents, “A Virtual Space to Connect During COVID-19.” Separate chats were held in English and Spanish and topics ranged from self-care to summer slide. (See page 12.)*

On May 5, 2020, Governor Lamont announced that in-person classes at K-12 schools in Connecticut would remain closed for the rest of the academic year. On May 20, Connecticut parents and families were invited to a Zoom session to gather their input for the CSDE as it considered options for reopening schools in the fall. Dozens of thoughts, concerns, and ideas were collected and addressed at the session and submitted by email to present the next day to the CSDE for consideration by the Governor's Reopen Connecticut Advisory Group. The state would ultimately encourage districts to reopen.

## OUR MISSION:

SERC PROVIDES RESOURCES, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT,  
AND A CENTRALIZED LIBRARY TO EDUCATORS, FAMILIES, AND  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND OTHER PARTNERS.

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