

2020-2021

STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

2020-2021

STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

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STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ingrid M. Canady

Dear Partners, Colleagues, and Friends,
When many of us joined the education field, we probably could not have predicted the 2020s so far. The long COVID-19 pandemic has brought unexpected challenges we may have never thought about outside a public health context. It has highlighted the ongoing physical and mental health needs of our children and educators that contribute to their school experience. And along with the country's racial reckoning, it has drawn more attention to the very familiar issues of educational access and equity.

Thankfully, SERC's mission and vision were made for this moment. This 2020-2021 Annual Program Report demonstrates how our work on behalf of equity and excellence does not happen in a vacuum but with the drive and commitment of our partners in our government, our schools, and our communities.

Working together, we have seen Connecticut adopt a statewide Black/African American and Latino/Puerto Rican course of studies for the first time in history. Together, we have revised the state's IEP, or individualized education program, that will speak more clearly to families thanks in large part to the voices of students themselves. And together, we have worked to tackle the other epidemics that disrupt education, with support from sources such as the State Opioid Response Grant, under the Connecticut State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

This is only a sampling of our state's efforts, which have not gone unnoticed. The new curriculum and the elevation of Dr. Miguel Cardona from Connecticut Education Commissioner to U.S. Secretary of Education has drawn national attention to SERC and our partners at the Connecticut State Department

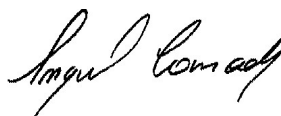
of Education, CSDE. We are proud of the legacy of Connecticut's leadership.

Meanwhile, with additional federal coronavirus funding, we continued to support our schools navigating another year of unprecedented challenges. As students returned to the classroom throughout the first several months of the 2020-2021 academic year, SERC continued to provide services virtually, and eventually on-site to meet the needs of individual schools and districts. Popular professional learning sessions and large conferences returned in a virtual format. We look forward to sustaining this strong virtual presence beyond the pandemic. With this level of demand, the early 2020s have been among our busiest times ever.

But we did not need COVID-19 to remind us that for students to achieve through adversity, we're all in this together.

Thank you, on behalf of the entire SERC staff, for your untiring support of an equitable and excellent education for all.

Sincerely,



Ingrid M. Canady
Executive Director



EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Annual Report 20-21

'Where We Learn About Who We Were': A New Curriculum Marks a New Era



The 2020-2021 fiscal year marked a major milestone for Connecticut education. On July 1, 2020, a law went into effect that would require all school districts to include an African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino course of studies as part of its curriculum. Under existing statute, SERC had a lead role coordinating the development of the curriculum from start to finish.

According to Public Act 19-12, Sec. 3: "The State Education Resource Center 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 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."

The course is the first of its kind to combine both African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino studies into one course that all school districts are required to offer. The course is a full-year elective, and while it has a semester-by-semester focus, it is intentionally designed to accentuate the individual and joint contributions of these groups to our collective history. The purposeful integration into a single course will better assist students in their identity development as well as their content knowledge.

The course expands accessibility to this critical content statewide. In the process of developing the course, SERC surveyed state high schools and learned that an estimated 18-20 out of 206 schools were implementing some form of African American or Latino studies, but no school in Connecticut was yet teaching an integrated course, and research at the national level suggested the same.

Initial Development

Following passage of PA 19-12, SERC established a website (<https://ctserc.org/pa1912>) and got to work.

The genesis of the draft curriculum developed during the 2019-2020 fiscal year through a SERC-facilitated curriculum Advisory Group, representing educators, administrators, higher education professors and scholars, researchers and historians, representatives from education and community organizations, and students and families. Focus groups provided further input.

The Advisory Group organized into nine committees to complete various tasks, as outlined below (edited from the final curriculum document). It met as a full group intermittently through November 2020 to provide feedback and monitor progress.

1. **Research and Evaluation Committee** – Conducted an online curriculum survey of Connecticut high school educators and 62% of the respondents indicated readiness to teach the course and requested comprehensive curriculum and professional learning. Curriculum artifacts were warehoused from 17 districts and eight states with an African American or a Latino Studies course currently in place, and used to inform curriculum development.
2. **Focus Group Committee** – Conducted in-person or virtual focus groups as well as its own online survey. Approximately 1/3 of survey responses were from students expressing their desire for the course to provide: a deeper study of inequalities and understanding of racism as a social construct, a better understanding of varied backgrounds and cultures of intra-racial communities, teaching of “real” history beyond stereotypes, state and local contexts, an emphasis on difference as a strength and not a weakness, and learning activities related to pop culture. A total of 12 focus groups were held, five exclusively for high school students illuminating the following priorities: teacher knowledge of history, safe and brave class climate, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy practiced to center student voice and interests, focus on supporting students’ racial identity development, importance of the portrayal of positive accomplishments and multiple perspectives, consideration of operational challenges for various school settings, and the need for comprehensive professional learning.
3. **Course Syllabus Committee** – Outlined the overarching learning objectives and essential questions to serve as a framework for the course.
4. **Infrastructure Support Committee** – Focused on guidance for successful implementation of this course and supported the development of information provided to districts and agencies in the fall and winter 2020-2021.

- 5 & 6. **African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Content Development Committees** – The heart of curriculum development, including resources and learning activities for delivery across schools and districts statewide as well as synchronous and asynchronous learning options.
7. **Professional Learning Committee** – Outlined a comprehensive professional learning plan for initial implementers (approximately 50 schools) during the 2021-2022 school year and for remaining schools in 2022-2023. The plan includes a week-long summer institute and two-day quarterly trainings, as well as virtual coaching and networking opportunities for educators and administrators.
8. **Publications and Dissemination Committee** – Determined how the curriculum document would be shared, and how updated materials and resources would be readily accessible. It was anticipated that the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) would have an electronic platform for warehousing the curriculum that would include a lesson repository and a process for review and feedback.
9. **Integration and Assessment Committee** – Reviewed the curriculum in its entirety for alignment of standards, content, and assessments as well as coherence across units and semesters.

In August 2020, an Expert Review Panel of national and state-level experts and researchers was convened to review course deliverables as they were being developed, and provide critical feedback and relevant resources. Panel members endorsed:

- the volume of rich content for the single course and a desire to be explicit and accurate with new learning,
- the importance of continuity and congruence of content across semesters, including cross-cultural influences,
- value for focus on inventors and innovators, including women, who brought optimism despite struggles,
- appreciation for materials, investigative learning activities, and teacher resources to maximize relevance and engagement,
- strength of oral history assignments in examining intersectionality of identity and understanding its fluidity, and
- the need for teacher prep to ensure diversity of thought, bi-directional learning (student:teacher, home:school), and unity in community.

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.



Approval & Celebration

As with other courses required under existing law, the State Board of Education (SBOE) must make curriculum materials available to help local boards develop their instructional programs.

At a historic meeting on December 2, 2020, the SBOE officially approved the curriculum. Education Commissioner Dr. Miguel Cardona praised SERC for its leadership in developing the course.

“You were partners in this whole process. The way you did it, the quality that you created, set a bar really high,” he said.

“Let’s not forget the connection between kids wanting to be in school and kids attending school. And when we see that our attendance rate with our Black and Latino students is worse, when we see that our achievement outcomes, our academic outcomes, are disparate in Connecticut, we have to take real action. And real action is being bold about saying we’re going to put something in front of them where they feel they can connect.”

“I appreciate the curriculum in its boldness around not shying away from, and really struggling with, the realities of the history,” Karen Dubois-Walton, a State Board of Education member, said upon the Board’s approval. “I appreciated the centering of so much that’s typically marginalized, and the ability for students to be able to dig in to that.”

Chronicling the History of a Historic Course

Following the Board's approval, SERC released a documentary to inform communities, families, schools, and the general public about the course development process. The 36-minute film, "Making History: The creation of a statewide Black and Latino Course of Studies per CT PA 19-12," features the voices of a wide range of stakeholders involved in the effort.

In the documentary, the lawmakers who sponsored PA 19-12, State Senator Douglas McCrory, State Representative Bobby Sanchez, and State Representative Bobby Gibson, explain the reasoning behind the course, how it came about, the purpose behind its structure, and their vision for education in Connecticut that reflects diverse perspectives. As the documentary clarified:

- The course should not displace or supplant current course offerings, but provide an opportunity for districts to develop pathways of learning. As Sandra Clark, Supervisor of History and Social Studies for New Haven Public Schools, states in the film: "How about those schools that already teach the course? My answer is, there are a number of representatives who have shared resources, suggestions for practice, and recommended sequencing and that this will only enhance the social studies program within their schools."
- By requiring the course statewide, Connecticut is helping to ensure that demographics do not determine who has access. "This is a course for all students, including students who identify as White," says Dr. Daniel HoSang, Associate Professor of Ethnicity, Race & Migration, and American Studies at Yale University. "Black history is the history of all of this country. [Latino] history is the history of all of this country. So this history is for everyone."
- Student perspective and advocacy drove the law that mandated the course development, and students had an integral role in shaping the course content. "We heard from students that yes, they wanted to hear the beauty, the historical greatness, of these peoples from the past, all the way to the present," says Paquita Jarman-Smith, SERC consultant on the project team. "They wanted to learn about their legacy fighting for justice, they wanted to learn more about the arts, the sciences, the innovation, and the culture that has impacted our world in the past, today, and beyond."

On February 2, 2021, Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz led a Black History Month roundtable celebrating the curriculum where she described SERC's lead role in the course development, joined by Governor Ned Lamont, lawmakers who spearheaded the legislation, two students from Hartford Public Schools, and SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady, among others.

Noelia Nunez, a senior at Abbott Technical High School in Danbury, told NBC Connecticut what it meant to have a pilot Latino history course offered at Abbott Tech. "It's become my safe space. It's become my zone, a sanctuary, because it's where we learn about who we were." Nunez helped shape the course that SERC developed. "I'm very proud of it," she said. "Because in a way, we're rewriting history."

"I could not be more proud of our students that pioneered this historical moment," Ingrid said. Deputy Education Commissioner Desi Nesmith likewise praised the students who led advocacy for the legislation and added, "I just really want to call out SERC for the tremendous lift that they provided, and helped all of us to get this over the finish line."

SERC and the curriculum committee continued to correct and revise the final curriculum document through the end of the fiscal year, preparing for official release on July 1, 2021.



At the Black History Month Roundtable, clockwise from the top left: SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady, Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, Governor Ned Lamont, and State Representative Bobby Sanchez.



The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic didn't stop progress on the development of the curriculum. Committee members continued to convene virtually and found their work had particular resonance during difficult times of racial and social unrest.

"The political context of the time complicated our work," says SERC's Paquita Jarman-Smith. "Racial protests, Black men being killed, brought up so much within our communities, this urgency to make change. And the course was envisioned out of the past need, but it [was] made so, so real with our present reality as a community here in Connecticut. In these times and within the context of our standards, we have to look at how we can build civic skills, racial consciousness skills, as well as teach history and find the balance."

Schools throughout the state began piloting the course in the 2021-2022 school year; all districts are required to offer the course beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

Media Spotlights

"I thank Ingrid Canady, the SERC team, and all of our partners who contributed to and drove us to this historic moment."- Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona

-CT Becomes First State to Require High Schools to Provide Courses on Black, Latino Studies (Channel 3 Eyewitness News)

"For me as a Black woman who has had this opportunity and this honor to work with so many talented, thoughtful and wonderful historians, educators, legislators — the whole stakeholder group — we have all held the hearts of our students and the aspirations for them to take the course and be empowered," SERC consultant Paquita Jarman-Smith said on the development of the curriculum. "We want that involvement of the youth. We want their voice. They are our future and they are the future we want to have justice in their hearts to share."

-'Important for everyone': Teaching Black history crucial to all CT students, experts say (CT Insider)

SERC INTERVIEW

From Fox 61:

"The history of every single individual within our Black/African American communities contributes to what Connecticut is today, what Connecticut has become, and what Connecticut is going to be in the future...."

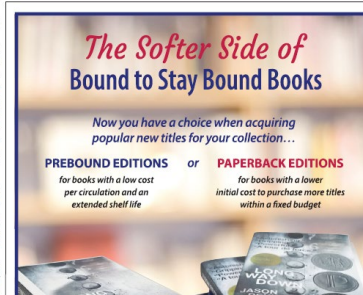
<https://bit.ly/3tPa2lk>

CT To Require Black, Latinx Studies

Connecticut is the first state to require schools to include a Black and Latino studies course. High schools must offer the class as an elective beginning in fall 2022. Students will not be required to take it.

Connecticut governor Ned Lamont called it "long overdue." "Increasing the diversity of what we teach is critical to providing students with a better understanding of who we are as a society and where we are going," Lamont said in the announcement of the new requirement in December. "Adding this course in our high schools will be an enormous benefit not only to our Black and Latino students, but to students of all backgrounds because everyone can benefit from these studies." Some districts in the state already had a course on the subject and even make it a graduation requirement. But this was lauded as an important step, and the push by student advocates was credited with helping to make it happen. Lamont signed legislation in 2019 that created a requirement for boards of education to include an elective course

according to the governor's office. There was also a "review panel" of 10 national and state experts "to review course deliverables as they were developed and provide critical feedback and resources." Details of the curriculum can be found at pa1912.serc.co-ky.



Above: School Library Journal, January 2021

Meghan Hatch-Geary
@2020CTtoy

The curriculum we created made national news. 📰 📺
What a year you've been, 2020! I hope this work leads to a ripple affect across the country. It's long overdue.
[@ctserc @EducateCT](#)

CNN Breaking News @cnbrnk · Dec 9, 2020

Beginning in fall of 2022, Connecticut will require high schools to offer African American, Black, Puerto Rican and Latino studies, becoming the first state in the nation to do so cnr.it/2JQX4GP

6:35 PM · Dec 11, 2020 from Connecticut, USA · Twitter for iPhone

4 Retweets 29 Likes

< **Mackenzie Maynard** ✓
Oct 1, 2020 · 🌐

In case you missed it-- I sat down with Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona and talked about his family heritage and the development of Black and Latino Studies Course led by [SERC - State Education Resource Center of CT](#)

[Connecticut State Department of Education](#)



Critical Race Theory and Education: SERC's Perspective

***SERC issued the following statement on June 15, 2021,
in light of increased attention to critical race theory:***

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and education have recently attracted considerable local and national attention. Here at the State Education Resource Center (SERC), we feel an important duty to add our perspective, as an agency that supports schools in developing effective and equitable classroom practices. In addition, as the state of Connecticut put its trust in us to lead the coordination and development of a prominent new course of studies under Connecticut Public Act 19-12: An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Black and Latino Studies in the Public School Curriculum, the local discussion about CRT has directly included SERC.

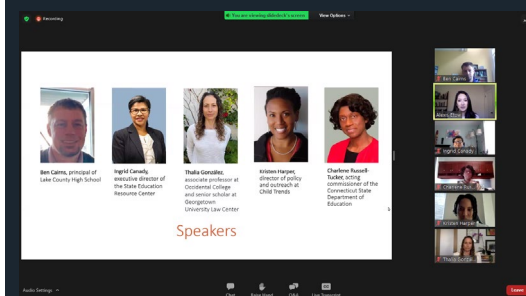
SERC's vision is "Equity, Excellence, Education," and under our mission we serve as a catalyst for educational equity through providing resources and information. Over the last two decades, we have intentionally dedicated ourselves to understanding why racial gaps have been so persistent even when factoring in all other drivers of educational inequities. Through our research, Critical Race Theory emerged as a foundational framework to understand structural racism.

CRT is a theory, not a curriculum taught to students. As with other theories, it guides educators in their practice to serve all students. We learned that CRT: 1. strives to advance a social justice framework; 2. explains how race and racism are organized and operate; 3. aims to redress social inequalities; 4. is typically interdisciplinary and embraces multifaceted disciplines and/or research methods; 5. tends to be organized around core questions that reach into several disciplines; 6. draws upon paradigms of intersectionality; and 7. recognizes that race and racism work with and through gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality as systems of power.

Through all of this research; exhaustive interviews; years of close collaboration with educators, students, and families; and often painful reflection on our own knowledge base and personal experiences, we have developed the most accurate interpretation we could about the role of racism in our schools and our society.

As a professional learning educational organization, we are able to provide educators and students access to the results of our extensive learning, for them to discover, reflect, critically interrogate,

SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady was featured in "Policy Solutions to Address Systemic Racism in Education," episode 3 of ChangeLab Solutions' virtual series "Uprooting the Drivers of Health Inequity." Ingrid and Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut's acting commissioner of education, were among the panelists at the event April 28, 2021. The discussion placed public health in the context of educational policies that oppose racism and promote health equity. "Students have a racial identity," Ingrid said, "and we need to isolate that from the conversation."



SERC and CSDE at the ChangeLab Solutions series



critically interrupt, and add their own insights, for truly understanding the intersection of race and racism is both a personal and collective effort. We believe educators, students, and families are up to the challenge; they have been partners with us on this journey all along.

We know how confusing and disruptive some of these concepts can seem—because we felt it too. But it became impossible to ignore the legacy of racism and its impact on our educational system. We could not discount students' lived experience with race and because of their race. These are their stories, and they have gone untold for so long. We are committed to staying on this journey of advocacy and support as students and educators share their experiences and build their capacity to help make things better for our communities.

Our current national discourse reminds us that conversations about race and racism are not easy. Our collective memories hold centuries of history that we must acknowledge. However, we should use this moment as an opportunity to commit ourselves to change the dynamics of the discourse. We see the African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Course of Studies as a significant first step to creating a vision for how racial equity and cultural responsiveness result in improved student performance, strong relationships among educators and students, and effective school-family-community partnerships.

It is a long process to become intentional about dismantling systemic racism. We are 20 years into it ourselves, and the learning continues. First and foremost, we are here as a resource. SERC will continue to identify policies and practices that enable educators and students to develop, enhance, and maintain cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, and critical consciousness regarding race, racism, and social justice.

SERC welcomes anyone who wants to learn more about what they're hearing. We thank everyone who has become engaged enough to make their voices heard.

State Education
Resource Center
June 15, 2021



In a July 2020 edition of the New York Times Magazine, author and journalist Daniel Bergner describes a breadth of anti-racist voices and training, including one of our Beyond Diversity sessions he attended last September led by our partner Marcus Moore. SERC's affiliate trainers facilitate the discussions and protocol developed by Pacific Educational Group's Glenn Singleton, our longtime advisor and collaborator, including the memorable exercise in which participants line up according to their racial privilege. Berger writes, "there was something powerful in the moment's physicality, in our facing each other across 40 feet of conference-room tables and carpet, in the starkness of our divide; it spoke loudly, with reverberations, about the vast differences in our experience." <https://nyti.ms/35P4iWP>

Foundation Support

The SERC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that was established in 2015 to sustain SERC's programming and services, particularly its work on racial equity. The Foundation receives financial support from the William Caspar Graustein Foundation, while SERC is a contractor for the Foundation.

Among the activities largely subsidized by Graustein's grant to the Foundation is our annual conference on race.

Dismantling Systemic Racism

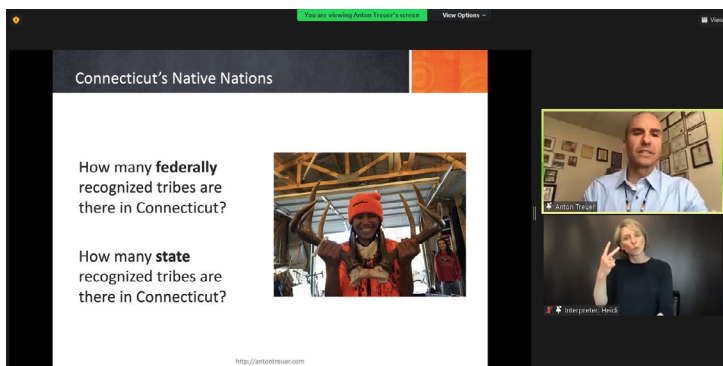
After COVID-19 canceled the 2020 Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, SERC and the Foundation's largest event returned virtually in 2021. The May 7 event marked our fifth antiracism conference and the first online.

"Dismantling Systemic Racism 2021: Virtual Conference on Race, Education and Success" attracted more than 400 participants in a variety of roles, including educators and administrators, school support staff, and students.

Keynote speakers at the 2021 conference were New York-based Puerto Rican singer, filmmaker, and activist Taína Asili, who also performed, and Anton Treuer, author and professor of Ojibwe at Minnesota's Bemidji State University. Treuer spoke of the "absent narrative"—the stories and histories of the students in front of us. The conference concluded with smaller "community conversations" among participants on racial equity and social justice, facilitated by SERC staff.

Race Conference Testimonials

- "The keynote speakers were fantastic and I am so happy I was able to attend. The afternoon discussions were powerful as well and nice to hear all perspectives."
- "It was an outstanding blend of feeling, learning, and thinking during this conference. You definitely got my wheels turning on how I can help make a difference in dismantling racist systems and structures."
- "This was great! The presenters were captivating and engaging. I loved that breaks were incorporated - this work can be really hard emotionally and it seemed like the facilitators and organizers were super thoughtful of participant needs. Really well done."



Keynoters Taina Asili, whose presentation included musical performances, and Anton Treuer. The conference provided ASL interpreters.

How do we respond to arguments we should “move on” from historical racism?

As Anton Treuer put it at SERC’s Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, what if a therapist never asked about your past? To write a happier chapter, he says, we must understand the ones before. “Where we are now is informed by where we’ve been.”

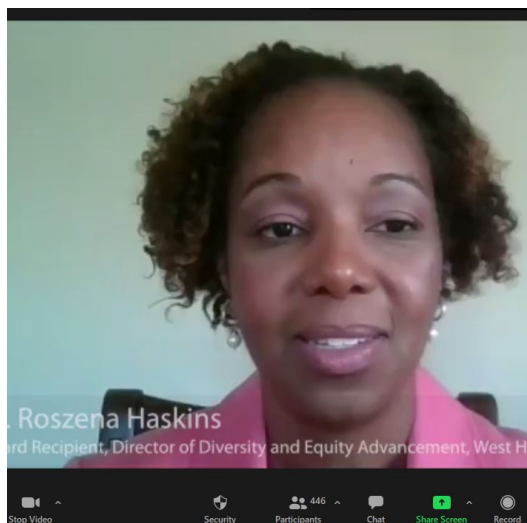


Twitter highlights from the keynotes at the Dismantling Systemic Racism conference.

SERC planned and coordinated the conference on behalf of the SERC Foundation, Inc., through the Graustein grant. SERC Foundation Chair and SERC Board member Jeffrey Leake, as well as SERC Board of Directors Vice Chair Dr. Agnes Quinones, offered remarks.

SERC staff supported all aspects of the conference including facilitation of breakout sessions, registration, contracting with keynote speakers, and technical support.

Conference Honorees



SERC's 2021 George A. Coleman Excellence in Education Award winners, Roszena Haskins and Gwen Samuel

Once again SERC used the conference to bestow its George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Awards. Honorees were Gwen Samuel, a prominent parent advocate from Meriden, and Roszena Haskins, director of equity advancement for West Hartford Public Schools.

SERC created this award to honor and highlight the demonstration of extraordinary acts of commitment and courage to ensure all Connecticut students, especially students of color and culturally and linguistically diverse students, are valued and respected in their school experience. Award recipients are selected based on their steadfast and unwavering action in advocating for children and families of color; galvanizing individuals and coalitions toward equitable action; taking risks in conversation and action regarding issues of equity for racially, linguistically and culturally diverse groups; engaging the diverse needs of members of an education community and reconciling them toward a shared vision; and furthering the exchange of information that affects thinking and effects conviction on matters of equity.

Ms. Samuel created three community-based organizations: the Connecticut Parents Union, the State of Black Connecticut Alliance, and the Meriden Kids Walk Safe Coalition – Safe Routes to School Initiative. She championed parent empowerment bills in the General Assembly that became law: establishing School Governance Councils and barring felony arrests for parents who enroll their children in schools outside their ZIP codes, in addition to extensive other advocacy efforts.

In West Hartford, Dr. Haskins designed and implemented a districtwide Equity and Diversity Council and Welcoming Schools program. In his letter of support for nominating her, Superintendent Tom Moore said “the single most important person in driving change and institutional knowledge around the idea of equity has been Roszena Haskins.”

The Coleman awards are named for a former CSDE administrator and SERC and SERC Foundation Board member who has championed educational equity.

The 2021 conference also included SERC’s Parental Involvement Recognition Awards (see page 31).

Support for District Equity Leadership Teams (DELTs) - Cohorts A and B

Graustein funding continued to support SERC’s work in particular districts with DELTs, which are designed to ensure equity for all students district-wide. During 2020-2021, a group of four districts comprising Cohort A—Middletown, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury—was in their third year under the Graustein grant to SERC; Cohort B, New Britain and Southington, were in their second year.

Cohort A DELTs received the following support:

- seven 90-minute virtual technical assistance visits. The focus of the visits was to help the DELT develop a sustainability plan for the equity work in the district.
- Hexagon Tool training. The Hexagon Tool is used to better understand how a new or existing program or practice fits into an implementation site’s existing work and context. For more, see <https://unc.live/3wLyxJv>.

Cohort B DELTs received the following support:

- nine 90-minute virtual technical assistance visits. The focus of the visits was to help the DELT develop an action plan for the equity work in the district.
- Hexagon Tool training
- Training in Virtual Courageous Conversation for eight DELT members
- Tuition for the PEG Practitioner Certification Program for two DELT members (one district employee and one community member)

Each DELT had at least eight members and included teachers, administrators, other district staff, and community members.

All districts completed and submitted a sustainability or action plan.

DELT members informally shared how they valued the Virtual Courageous Conversation (VCC) training, the Practitioner Certification training, and the Hexagon Tool training. Two districts decided to use their own funds to send more people to Practitioner Certification training. Several districts sent additional staff to VCC training.

SERC planned and coordinated these events and activities on behalf of the SERC Foundation.

SERC Internal Capacity Building

The Foundation, supported by the Graustein Memorial Fund, also sponsored learning opportunities for SERC consultants to expand and enhance their skills. Examples appear below.

Pacific Educational Group (PEG) Practitioner Certification and Recertification

Nine SERC consultants participated in the Pacific Educational Group's Practitioner Certification program in Courageous Conversations About Race™. This program consisted of approximately 50 hours of coursework which included a book study and online webinars.

An additional five SERC consultants who were certified in 2017 participated in self-selected recertification activities. Practitioners need to be recertified every three years.

The program ensures consultants can continue training in Courageous Conversations and incorporating the protocol in their racial equity training to schools and districts. For more information on the certification, go to <https://learn.courageousconversation.com/p/practitioner-certification-program>.

Equity Literacy Institute

A contract between the Foundation and the Equity Literacy Institute was designed to enhance the internal capacity of the SERC staff and to introduce the concepts of the Equity Literacy Framework.

Over the course of two days October 5 and 26, SERC consultants participated in a series of Zoom sessions with members of the institute team. As described here (<https://www.equityliteracy.org/equity-literacy>): "Equity literacy is a comprehensive approach for creating and sustaining equitable schools. The foundations of equity literacy are (1) a commitment to deepening individual and institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies, and (2) the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to vigilantly identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivating equity. At the individual level, when we embrace equity literacy we learn to become a threat to the existence of inequity and an active cultivator of equity in our spheres of influence."

Participant Testimonials

Equity Literacy Institute, conducted by Paul Gorski and Marceline DuBose

"The content presented by Paul and Marceline will enhance SERC's knowledge and skills in facilitating conversations about racial equity."

"It was an enriching and empowering experience from beginning to end! The energy, knowledge, openness, reflectiveness, and level of engagement of the presenters and attendees was terrific! The virtual format worked well."

"Because of this training, I know that I will be better able to facilitate conversations on racial equity. Paul and Marceline helped me to think about what I do well and what I need to improve, what I feel comfortable with and what I fear. I appreciated Paul and Marceline's supportive and direct approach during their presentation."

SUBSTANCE MISUSE PREVENTION

Annual Report 20-21



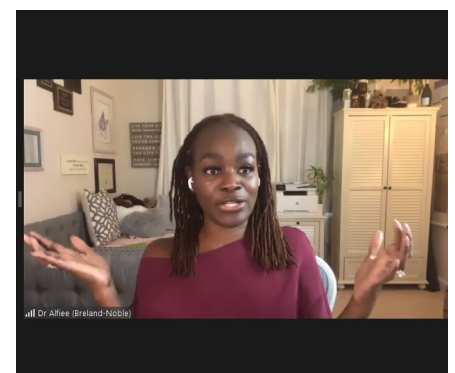
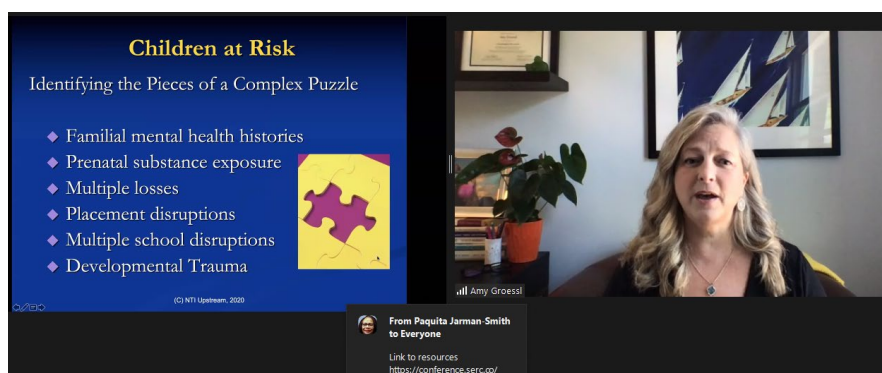
SERC Consultant Paquita Jarman-Smith (at left) and presenters Amy Groessl and Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble (below) at the August 2020 Substance Misuse Summit

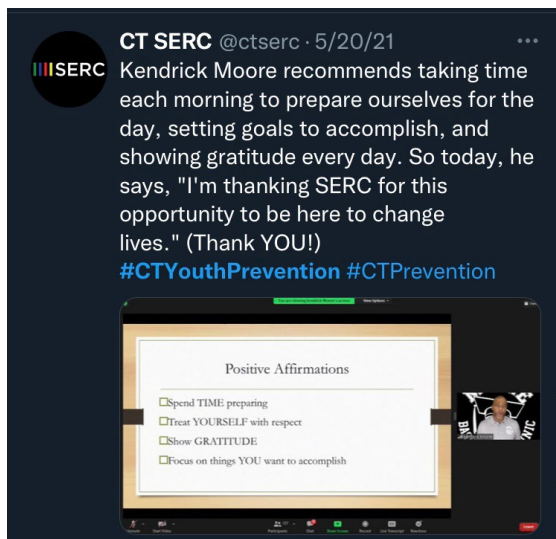
In 2020-2021, as schools and districts continued to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, Connecticut also continued to address the opioid epidemic under a federal grant to the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

SERC had collaborated with DMHAS in September 2019 on a successful substance misuse prevention summit and was planning a second in spring 2020. It ended up being held virtually a few months later.

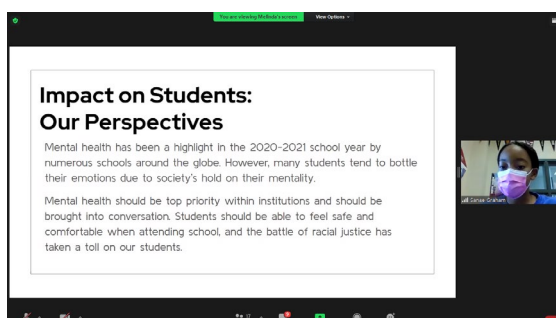
"Substance Misuse Prevention and Supports: A 2-Day Virtual Summit of Strategies for Schools" was held August 18 and 19. The broad topic was "Integrating Substance Use Prevention and Intervention into a Multi-Tiered System of Support." Keynote speakers on the first day were Kelly Perales, co-director of the Midwest PBIS Network and Sarah Howroyd of the CT Hope Initiative.

Dr. Ira Chasnoff, who delivered a keynote in the 2019 summit and presented at Lunch and Learn sessions earlier in summer 2020, returned for the Day 2 morning keynote. He discussed how to identify and navigate student anxiety when returning to school in the wake of the pandemic. Dr. Jessica Jackson, who also presented at the Lunch and Learns, delivered the final keynote on creating a culturally responsive environment to address health inequities. Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble closed it out discussing effective interventions.





The May 2021 Youth Summit included students as presenters and panelists



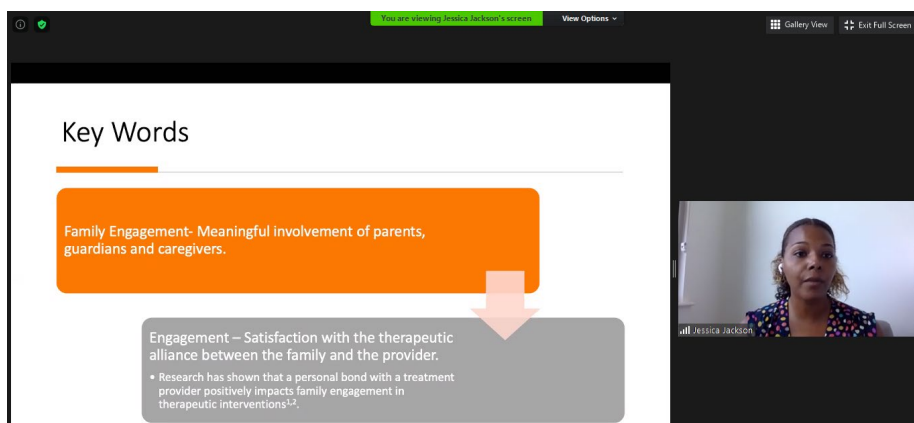
On May 15, 2021, the agencies held the next summit, “Prevention, Wellness, and Healing: A Symposium with a Youth Perspective.” This virtual conference for students and the people who work with them was designed to support positive environments for youth that help prevent substance misuse. By having the youth participants learn from adults and adult participants learn from students, the event aimed to empower both to create change within their communities.

The keynote speaker was Kendrick Moore, a life coach and professional basketball trainer who has created student-driven programs on leadership development for Windsor Public Schools. Moore and former student Denise Solis chronicled a timeline of personal experiences to help bridge the gap of understanding between student and educator.

In the breakout sessions, adult participants heard from students in the Windsor High School Leadership Council on how to handle sensitive topics such as substance misuse and mental health; the State Student Advisory Council on Education, who discussed strategies to connect with students and keep them engaged during the pandemic; and the Student Equity Advisory Board, who discussed how inequity in education influences mental health, connection, self-esteem and identity.

Students participated in breakout sessions on self-care and strategies to tackle stress, recognize mental health challenges when they arise, and understand how to get help for themselves and others; and on race and equity in education, with an emphasis on self-esteem and identity and their correlation with substance misuse. Finally, students and adults came back together for facilitated conversations.

SERC anticipates the continued partnership to plan and implement future events under the grant in 2021-2022.

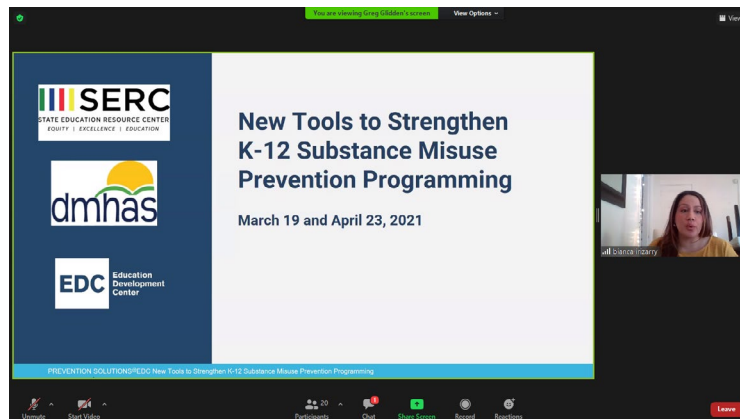


Dr. Jessica Jackson presenting at one of SERC's Lunch and Learn sessions under the DMHAS grant in Summer 2020.

Ongoing Support

The Education Development Center worked with SERC to develop a set of tools that districts across the state can use to assess their current substance misuse prevention programming and inform the selection of new programs, practices, and strategies. SERC, in collaboration with DMHAS, offered a virtual learning opportunity on implementing these tools that includes an orientation, a self-paced online course, and an application for optional coaching to facilitate implementation.

Under the State Opioid Response Grant, SERC and DMHAS developed the document “Universal Opioid and Other Substance Misuse Prevention Planning in Schools: Guidance for Connecticut K-12 Educators and Their Prevention Partners.” They are creating a rubric to score districts on their readiness to implement the guidance and will select two districts in June to do a deeper dive.



SERC Consultant Bianca Irizarry introduces the informational webinar

The combined guidance document, self-assessment tool, and synthesis of prevention programs are designed to support schools in meeting 2019 legislation requiring school districts to provide “instruction related to opioid use and related disorders” under Connecticut’s existing substance use prevention curriculum requirement.

This prevention guidance document describes effective universal opioid and other substance misuse prevention in schools, accompanied by a practical tool for assessing current school-based prevention programs and practices. These help Connecticut educators and their prevention partners understand best practices in K-12 universal substance misuse prevention and critically examine—with an eye toward improving—their schools’ existing universal efforts to prevent opioid and other substance misuse among the students they serve.

The self-paced online course, which launched March 29, 2021, provided participants an opportunity to review and complete the prevention guidance document in addition to the collection of user-friendly tools that offers Connecticut administrators and educators a roadmap for strengthening their school-based substance misuse prevention programming. A webinar held on March 19 and April 23 introduced users to the tools and information on the grant.

SUPPORTING THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Annual Report 20-21

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. This section includes examples of some of this work.

Among recent initiatives, the BSE has worked to revise Connecticut's IEP form. SERC had helped BSE gather student feedback on every page of the IEP. The BSE is expected to implement the new IEP document and the Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS) in the 2022-2023 school year.

8-Day Training Series

on Planning and Placement Team Practices for Improved Student Outcomes

This innovative training was held from July 2020 to May 2021. It was targeted to all educators involved in the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) process, and differentiated into three levels to meet the diverse needs of Connecticut school districts. Focused on five key principles, the training addressed special education laws and procedures, improving student outcomes, improving quality of IEPs, strengthening school and family partnerships, and decreasing the number of state complaints.

The school district cohorts of trainees included special education directors, principals, general and special education teachers, and student support services professionals. Most cohorts had an average of 40-60 participants.

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.

SERC was to update and enhance additional training based on feedback from a year-long Pilot Study beginning in July 2021.



CSDE, the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESC) Alliance, and SERC have built leadership capacity around special education practices, CT-SEDS, and the rollout of the new IEP, working with 22 pilot districts. SERC and the RESC Alliance are overseeing and coordinating the scope of work, demonstrating interagency collaboration.

For more on the new IEP/CT-SEDS, go to <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/New-IEP/New-IEP-CT-SEDS>. The site includes a presentation from district planning sessions on May 27 and June 2, 2021, and a webinar on the 5-year implementation plan for training on the new IEP and CT-SEDS.

CSDE Attendance and Engagement Initiative

In January 2021, CSDE, in partnership with SERC, kicked off its Attendance and Engagement Community of Practice (CoP). The CoP provides districts with the opportunity to discuss problems of practice and share solutions regarding student attendance and engagement for both in-person and remote learning models.

The first CoP on January 20 focused on the topic of data tracking and monitoring, and subsequent CoPs were held in February, March, and May.

SERC is a critical partner in the CSDE attendance initiative with the following roles:

A) Develop, prepare, and provide leadership and guidance to and participate as a member of the Attendance and Engagement System of Support and its Professional Communities:

- Attendance & Engagement CoP
- Attendance & Engagement Talk Tuesdays
- Attendance & Engagement Work Group
- Attendance & Engagement Advisory Team

B) Provide leadership, planning, curriculum development and coordination of the Attendance & Engagement System of Support:

- Updating and maintaining a project plan;
- Taking and sharing notes/minutes at planning meetings and events;
- Scheduling a calendar of planning sessions in advance with a timeline for meeting deliverables, e.g., timed and annotated agendas, speaking points, and other meeting details for review by SERC and CSDE leadership; and
- Maintaining a line of communication with CSDE for planning purposes.

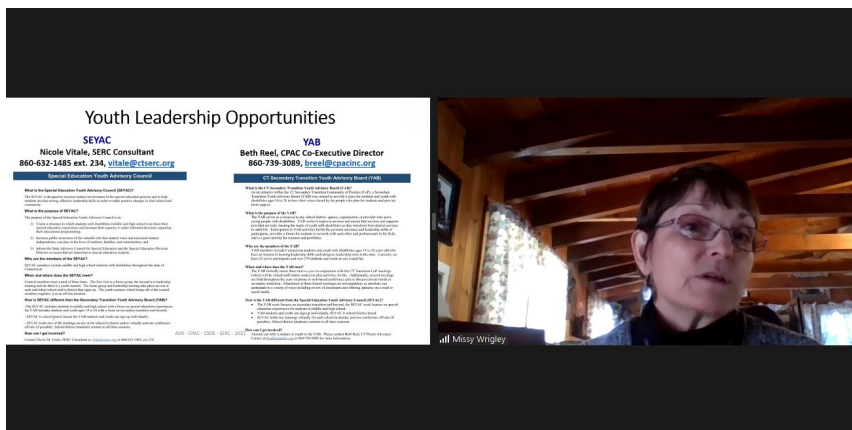
SERC supports the facilitation and delivery of Talk Tuesdays and Communities of Practice. Steve Proffitt, SERC's Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design, coordinates and facilitates the Workgroup and Advisory Team meetings with CSDE Education Consultant Kari Sullivan.

SERC played a critical role in supporting this initiative from both a leadership and logistics perspective to meet the goals and outcomes of the project.

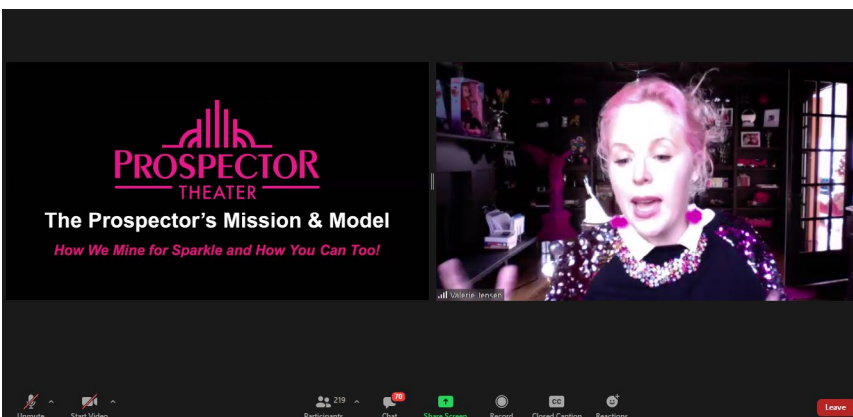
Secondary Transition Symposium

The Connecticut Secondary Transition Symposium brings students and their families together with educators and other professionals to improve secondary transition programming and services for students with disabilities. The 6th annual symposium on January 29, 2021, with the theme of “Empowering Our Youth Beyond 2020,” continued to build the capacity of educators and other professionals, in partnership with middle and high school students with disabilities and their families, to help ensure successful post- school outcomes.

The 2021 symposium was virtual. Given the theme, the symposium began with two youth speakers, Alana Armfield and Benjamin Sullivan. Alana and Ben shared their TED Talk outlining their thoughts about students with disabilities dealing with the labels. The students were followed by a keynote presentation from Valerie Jensen, an award-winning filmmaker, author, and advocate for adults with disabilities.



SERC Consultant Missy Wrigley is a lead coordinator of the Transition Symposium











Valerie Jensen representing Ridgefield's Proprietor Theater


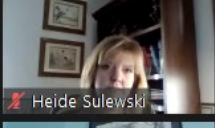
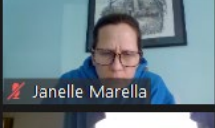

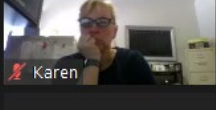
In 2012, Val and her team began redesigning the historic Ridgefield Playhouse, transforming it into the Proprietor Theater. Since opening its doors in November of 2014, over 620,000 ticket buyers have witnessed the power of meaningful employment firsthand. More than 260 “Prospects” have worked at the theater, clocking over 650,000 hours of meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities. Val has spread the mission of the Proprietor across the country, speaking at the Connecticut State Capitol and the White House.


SERC is one of the major stakeholders that collaborates with CSDE and the other sponsors to provide the symposium, and SERC works with CSDE to facilitate all of the planning meetings. Partners from SERC include education consultants, a project specialist, and tech support to coordinate the virtual platform, facilitate breakout sessions, and provide training sessions.

Educators/Professionals Session Presenters & Moderator

 Jill Larmett Disability Resource Coordinator Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) 860-899-3446 jlarmett@capitalworkforce.org	 Cynthia Randolph, LCSW Behavioral Health Clinical Manager Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Young Adult Services (YAS), Office of the Commissioner (OOC) Office: 860-262-6932 Cell: 860-759-0400 Cynthia.Randolph@ct.gov	 Missy Wrigley Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (Pre-Ets) Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) Office: 860-602-4088 Cell: 860-604-2023 Stacey-Ann.Lewis@ct.gov
 Stacey-Ann Lewis Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (Level Up) Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) Office: 860-697-3526 Cell: 860-560-3262 Patricia.Malone@ct.gov	 Brian K. Smith Assistant Regional Director – West Region Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Individual and Family Support Division 203-805-7417 Brian.K.Smith@ct.gov	 Heide Sulewski Program and Services Coordinator, Hartford American Job Center (AJC) Department of Labor (DOL) 860-256-3685 Heide.Sulewski@ct.gov
 Alycia M. Trakas Education Consultant CT State Department of Education (CSDE) Bureau of Special Education (BSE) 860-713-6932 Alycia.Trakas@ct.gov	 Missy Wrigley - Moderator Consultant State Education Resource Center 860-632-1485 ext. 397 wrigley@sercct.org	




Secondary Transition breakout session with Connecticut state agencies














Thank you!


- State Education Resource Center
- Secondary Transition Symposium Planning Committee
 - Emily Ball
 - Ruth Carvalho
 - Lauren Johns
 - Laura Knapp
 - LeTanya Lawrence
 - Mark Linabury
 - Tara Lutz
 - Yana Razumnyaya
 - Beth Reel
 - Barry Rita
 - Brian K. Smith
 - Alycia Trakas
 - Nicole Vitale
 - Missy Wrigley
 - Marty Zaugg
- Keynote Speakers & Session Presenters

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Alycia M. Trakas - CSDE BSE

CSDE Education Consultant Alycia Trakas with symposium sponsors


The symposium was hosted by the CT Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the CT Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), CSDE, SERC, the University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), Prospector Theater, the CT Youth Advisory Board, and the CT Youth Council.

Participants included students with disabilities and their families, educators, and other professionals working within secondary transition. There were 321 individuals registered.

SERC helped coordinate or co-facilitate CSDE sessions for families on attendance and supporting student learning and English learners in the context of the pandemic.

Thriving During COVID-19: Helping Our Children Succeed in School While Learning English

 Informational Session on How to Support our Children who are Learning English




Question and Answer Session for Families with Experts from Bilingual and English as a Second Language Programs

- Families, who you have questions about:
 - Bilingual Programs
 - English as a Second Language Programs
 - The laws and rights that exist regarding Bilingual Programs
 - Ways you can help your children succeed in school
- Come share with us your doubts, concerns, and questions about these programs.
- The State Department of Education (CSDE) and The State Education Resource Center (SERC), along with experts from bilingual programs, invite you to a virtual meeting to answer your questions and provide you with strategies to support children learning English.

Register Now!
Date: Thursday, December 17th, 2020
Time: 6:30 pm-7:30 pm
Registration Link: <https://zoom.us/j/meeting/register?ticketfrom=EHS&hsiteid=V72yurCSXk>

Questions? Contact: Dr. Gladys Lahas, gladys.lahas@ct.gov or Nitra M. Dhar, gladys@serc.org



Connecticut State Department of Education Professional Support Series for Families

Please see below and join as we learn together and grow together.

Serres 021 - January 4, 2023

Don't miss the second in our series of conversations with families.


A Place at the Table: A Parent-to-Parent Conversation about the Importance of Attendance and Supporting Our Kids in School

Join us at our virtual Kitchen Table, and we'll have a chat about how we can partner together to help our kids learn and grow and be successful in school. This time together will offer families and lead school partners the chance to learn about meaningful strategies and key resources to help connect students with learning.

We will talk about:

- Challenges we share in keeping our children connected to school and engaged in learning;
- Words we use and hearing to describe this new way of teaching, such as "in person," "hybrid," and "remote" learning, that we want to understand better, and discuss the opportunities for students; and
- How we, as parents and caregivers, can talk with teachers and school staff to learn, solve problems, and be true partners in our children's learning and success.

Parents and caregivers will have the opportunity to ask questions, share strategies and resources that might help them, and get new information to continue.




Date: Tuesday, January 12, 2021
Time: 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Register: <http://serc.net/govmentable>
(After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.)

Live co-presenters: Translation: Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic


Presenters:

SERC



Nicole Diaz


Education Consultant, SERC



Lufany Lawrence

Education Consultant, SERC

Harford Public Schools




Nuchetto Black-Barthe

Chief Engagement & Partnership Officer
Harford Public Schools

Governing magazine cites CSDE's work with SERC on chronic absenteeism:
<https://www.governing.com/nw/chronic-absenteeism-is-a-huge-school-problem-can-data-help>


- Student Mental Health
- Academic Performance
- Parent/Caregiver Engagement
- Coordinated Services
- Basic Needs




ISERC

Successful Partnerships for student attendance and engagement

- Provide families and educators with resources on how to encourage student success
- Foster personal relationships with families
- Respect families "where they are"
- Are able to speak with families in their primary language
- Value families as assets and engage them in the school decision making process



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EQUITY. EXCELLENCE. EDUCATION.



Orton-Gillingham Introductory Training

This introductory training curriculum is designed to lead to a basic understanding of various elements of Orton-Gillingham instruction, including understanding reading acquisition in all learners and the specific nature and needs of the dyslexic learner. As a dyslexia practitioner and certified Orton-Gillingham tutor, SERC Consultant Claire Conroy assisted in the facilitation of these sessions alongside trainer PK Sanieski, Fellow with the Orton-Gillingham Academy.

Districts are required to implement one of five approved methods of structured literacy teaching approaches by July 2023. Anyone applying for special education endorsement must have completed a program of study in the remediation of reading and language arts, including anyone applying for roles in remedial reading, remedial language arts, or as a reading consultant. (For more information, see P.A. 16-92 and 17-3 as well as P.A. 21-168; <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Specific-Learning-Disability-and-SLD---Dyslexia>.)

Each session had approximately 30 K-12 general and special education teachers and administrators.

LRE Work with Stetson and Associates

Beginning in a previous year, the BSE brought in Stetson and Associates of Houston after identifying districts across Connecticut that needed to increase the time students with disabilities spent in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) with nondisabled peers. Stetson's training on A Step by Step Approach for Inclusive Schools was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic that continued into 2020-2021. Since Step by Step works best as an in-person training, the decision was made to postpone the work until we could be in person again. Instead, SERC coordinated and hosted a series of offerings from Stetson and Associates that discussed a number of different topics related to LRE.

Dr. Frances Stetson provided the keynote address for BSE's Annual Back to School Meeting and laid the foundation for the LRE series that her agency provided for Connecticut. Topics in the series, held in fall 2020 and spring 2021, included the role of the principal in inclusive schools, quality standards for inclusive schools, staffing and scheduling for students with disabilities, and teaching strategies to support students with disabilities.

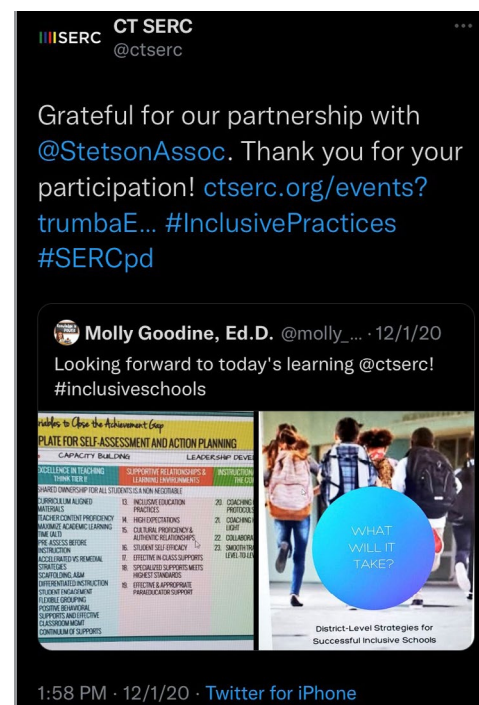
SERC Consultant Nikki Hendry coordinates the LRE work.

Participant Testimonials

Praise for SERC's Orton-Gillingham sessions, held December 2020 - May 2021

"This was phenomenal!! I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to have this experience and am looking forward to continue to grow my knowledge. Thank you for this!!"

"The workshop was interactive and thorough! It was hands on and examples were provided which really helped to solidify my understanding."



Support for Charter Schools

Staff at charter schools—like all schools—found themselves challenged in a virtual learning environment with keeping their students engaged, whether they were a teacher, paraeducator, or a behavioral support professional. This was particularly challenging working virtually with students with disabilities.

The BSE and CSDE Turnaround Office surveyed 23 charter school administrators on technical assistance priority areas and preferred modes of support. The survey results revealed the top five priority areas as: 1) Scientific Research-Based Interventions with implications for special education, 2) mental health and student behavior issues, 3) meaningful inclusion and best practices in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), 4) strategies for working with students with disabilities and implementation of their IEPs, and 5) seclusion and restraint.

As a result of the survey, a series of free virtual learning opportunities was designed to help support the charter school administrators and their staff with special education strategies they could use right away.

The first two-day session in January 2021, “Virtual Engagement and Assessment Strategies for Distance Learning,” covered strategies to meet students’ needs virtually. The training covered learner variability, virtual progress monitoring and assessment, and ways of keeping students engaged through distance learning. The session was geared toward all K-12 educators, whether their district is using or planning for an in-person, virtual, or hybrid model.

Other sessions offered in spring 2021 included:

Universal Design for Learning: Strategies to Support All Students: an introduction to UDL strategies and resources to support reading and writing.

Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities: Strengthening Family Engagement and PPT Facilitation: to examine ways to support, empower, and build advocacy and leadership in families on behalf of their children to address the school’s function at the PPT. Participants discussed and learned about facilitation strategies during PPT meetings to more effectively engage our families.

Supporting the Use of Executive Skills in the Classroom to Meet Core Standards for All Students: virtual coaching/technical assistance, including an overview of executive functioning skills—what they are and how they show up—and an exploration of strategies to implement to ensure access to all students.

This free training for charter schools, which would become required in 2021-2022 to renew their charters, demonstrated the value of flexibility under the circumstances of the pandemic. Some of the content for Commissioner’s Network schools could be adapted to charter schools as well as other stakeholders.

Google Preparation for Educators

Participating educators were exposed to Google Suite for Education tools and provided with in-depth training on each tool in preparation to take the Google Educator Exam, Levels One and Two. Participants had the opportunity to learn about additional features of the tools to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

They also interacted one-on-one with Claire Conroy, a SERC consultant and Google Certified Trainer, to ask questions and clarify understandings as needed. Many participants have gone on to get certified as Google Educators themselves. As one said, “This is a game-changer!”

Claire Conroy and Dr. Smita Worah, a SERC consultant and trainer in assistive technology and UDL, facilitated these sessions. Participants in the sessions included K-12 special and general educators, administrators, student support services professionals, and information technology professionals.

Virtual Engagement and Distance Learning

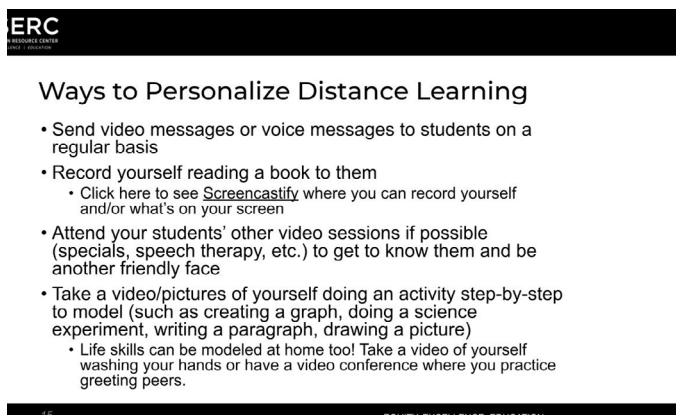
Throughout the year, SERC trained different professionals in multiple districts on how to engage and assess students through virtual and distance learning. Participants learned a variety of strategies to set learning intentions, establish expectations for synchronous and asynchronous learning, and promote teacher-student relationships in the virtual space.

Throughout the sessions, participants discussed setting the conditions for engagement learning through thinking about the functions of engagement.

Consultants Claire Conroy and Dr. Smita Worah researched the content for the sessions and provided training and examples specific to teachers’ needs in multiple grade level and content areas. Special attention was paid to students with special needs, English learners, and any students utilizing assistive technology to learn.

Participants expressed appreciation learning about the strategies to engage students and new resources to provide access. Participants were introduced to a variety of virtual tools such as Padlet, Jamboard and other Google Suite for Education tools, and Read&Write.

The audience included K-12 general and special education teachers and administrators, student support services professionals, and paraeducators.



*From the
SERC training*

Effectively Supporting Students During Distance Learning

SERC Consultants Claire Conroy and Paquita Jarman-Smith provided this training under a contract with Waterbury Public Schools. Participants learned about specific strategies and tools to boost student engagement and participation during distance learning.

Knowing how to effectively use digital tools can help educators even when in-person learning has fully resumed; it promotes the ability to personalize learning for many different students. Educators can more smoothly and efficiently monitor progress, assess students, and adjust more easily to their needs.

Participants displayed significant interest in learning more about the tools displayed (Google Suite for Education apps, Chrome browser extensions, and built-in accessibility features available in iOS). As a Certified Google Trainer herself, Claire was excited to help others become certified as well.

Also under the Waterbury contract, SERC Consultants Claire Conroy, Nitza M. Diaz, and Julia Seymour facilitated Mindfulness and Social-Emotional Learning in Education.

Participants learned how to define mindfulness and its integral connection to social-emotional learning. They learned how the two concepts work directly together and the clinical research behind each. Presenters discussed age-appropriate strategies for using mindfulness and social-emotional learning with students, virtually or in-person.

Participants appreciated the experience of practicing specific mindfulness activities during the session. Presenters talked about the connection between mindfulness practices and social-emotional competencies created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

Approximately 120 paraeducators participated in each of the distance learning and mindfulness sessions, both held October 2, 2020.

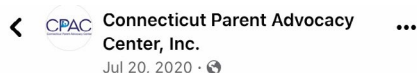
YOUTH & FAMILIES

Annual Report 20-21

Fostering Student Voice

The Special Education Youth Advisory Council (SEYAC), coordinated by SERC consultant Nicole Vitale, allows students with disabilities in middle and high school to share their special education experiences and increase their capacity to make informed decisions regarding their educational programming. During the 2020-2021 school year, council students participated in a workshop with an alumnus who had successfully transitioned to college. Phillip Shenkman discussed and reflected on what his “First Year” was like, sharing some tips and tricks to being successful in school and how to advocate for yourself as a college student, noting the differences between high school and college.

Nicole coordinated and facilitated conversations between students and Phillip. Students shared that they appreciated being able to hear directly from another student's experiences. They liked being able to ask questions at the end of the presentation that directly related to them.



The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center is proud to be a partner with [AFCAMP](#), [CREC - Capitol Region Education Council](#), [SERC - State Education Resource Center of CT](#) and the CT State Department of Education as part of Connecticut's Statewide Family Engagement Center, Connecticut Family School Partnerships (CFSP). To learn more about the CFSP, check out the website for information and resources:
<https://www.ct-fsp.org/wp-content/cache/cache-enabler/www.ct-fsp.org/index.html>
[#FamilySchoolPartnerships](#) [#familyengagement](#)

A graphic consisting of a purple rectangular box at the top and an orange rectangular box at the bottom. The text "Full, equal, and equitable partnerships!" is written in a white, handwritten-style font across the purple box.

Full, equal, and
equitable partnerships!

Building Family Capacity

Partnerships take partnerships! As a partner with the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) under CREC's Statewide Family Engagement Grant, SERC has worked with the other agencies under the grant to promote partnerships between schools and families.

Supporting Black Families

Under the family engagement grant, SERC held a new series in the context of the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice.

The Black Lives Matter series offered participants an opportunity to discuss the pandemic's impact on and needs for Black families. SERC shared resources on trauma-informed self-care, supporting children, and how to engage families effectively in these critical times.

Participants were eager to share their own contexts and efforts to support the Black community. They were very interested in continuing the conversation about the strength and value of Black families and how to continue to meet the needs of families and students.

The sessions included:

April 26, 2021: **Black Lives Matter: A Time to Heal and a Time to Hope**

This session discussed ways to support the family unit's continued well-being and strength with Culturally Responsive Family Engagement.



May 19: **Black Lives Matter - Deep Culture: Let's Talk About Leveraging Partnerships with Black Families**

This discussion included the impact of race and culture on self, students, school environments, teaching practices, and student achievement; the Black family's legacy and cultural capital; positive identity development; and culturally responsive relationships and environments

FREE TRAINING lead by [SERC - State Education Resource Center of CT](#)
When: MAY 19th, 11:00am-1:00pm
Use this link to register:
<https://eventactions.com/eareg.aspx?ea=Rsvp#SEEConnecticut>

June 10: **Affinity Space: Supporting Black Families through a Lens of Care**

The Affinity Space was for families who identify as Black, where discussion was about:

- Affirming the role of the Black family and community
- Strengthening the narrative of Black children and families
- Planning for continued success



Participants were education and family support professionals as well as family members. We had over 120 education and family support professionals attend Session 1 and 2.

[Raising Highly Capable Kids Parent Training and Facilitator Training](#)

Raising Highly Capable Kids is an interactive curriculum for families based on the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, research-based "experiences and qualities" that influence children and youth development. The Raising Highly Capable Kids training for parents helps them learn and apply the developmental assets to raise healthy children and to help ensure their success in different areas of their lives.

The facilitator training is designed to build the capacity of faith-based leaders, community organization leaders, and school staff to implement the Raising Highly Capable Kids parent curriculum. SERC Consultant Nitza M. Diaz, together with Lourdes Delgado, Education Director for the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, coordinated and facilitated 12 sessions for parents and five sessions for trainers in May and June 2021.



SERC's Consultant Nitza M. Diaz congratulates Raising Highly Capable Kids training participants at a 2021 graduation event at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport.



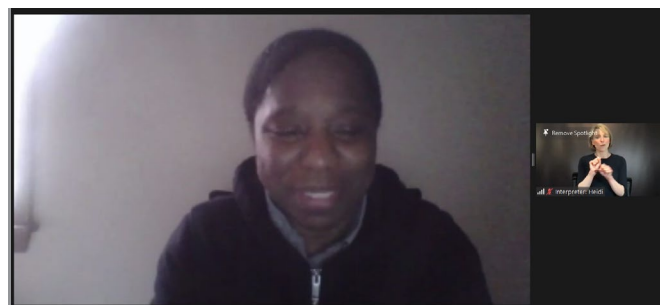
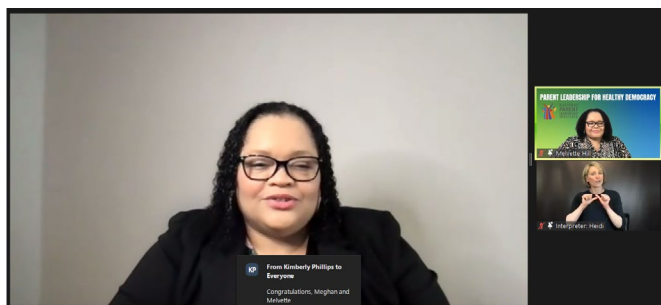
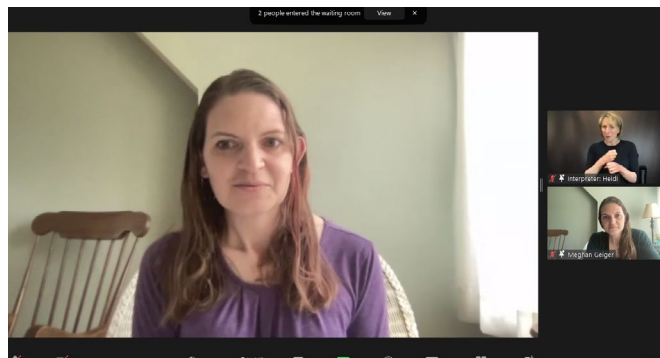
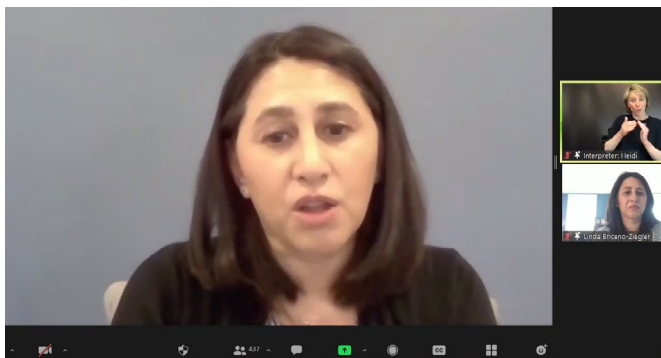
From a parent participant in
"Raising Highly Capable Kids":

"Hay una frase que me impacto desde el inicio del curso. La frase es: 'Que tu pasado no tiene que afectar la crianza de tus hijos sino que nos ayuda a tomar el pasado debil en una fortaleza.' Eso ha cambiado la perspectiva de mi vida en la crianza de mis hijos. Recuerda que un buen fundamento podemos construir grandes edificios. Este curso me ayudo a entender eso. Gracias!"

English translation: "There is a phrase that impacted me from the beginning of the course. The phrase was: 'That your past does not have to affect the upbringing of your children but it helps us to take the weaknesses from the past and turn them into a fortress.' That has changed the perspective of my life while I am raising my children. Remember that with a good foundation we can create great buildings. This course helped me understand that. Thank you!"

To watch in full (en español):
<https://fb.watch/9rLFi7w8Bs/>





SERC's 2021 Parental Involvement Recognition Award winners submitted introductory videos for the awards ceremony. Clockwise from the top left: Linda Briceño Ziegler, Meghan Geiger, Monica Smith, and Melvette Hill.

SERC's Parent Awards

In May, SERC honored the four 2021 recipients of its Parental Involvement Recognition Awards. Awardees are selected based on their active involvement in their children's school or community and their dedication and advocacy to ensure equity for all parents and their children.

The recipients were **Meghan Geiger of Middletown**, who received Middletown Works' H.O.P.E. Award for launching a series of virtual "unconferences" for parents of children with disabilities and serves on the Parent Leadership Design Team and the Lawrence School Governance Council; **Melvette Hill of Danbury**, who coordinates the Parent Leadership Training Institute for the state of Connecticut as well as other roles in her community; **Monica Smith of Mystic**, a tireless advocate for her two children at Groton Middle School; and **Linda Briceño Ziegler of Stamford**, who has served as a parent facilitator for Stamford Public Schools as well as a teacher, volunteer, and advocate.

SERC was pleased to present the parent awards again in 2021 after a delay in 2020 during the pandemic. The 2021 award ceremony was held virtually at the Dismantling Systemic Racism conference (for more on the conference, see pages 11-14).

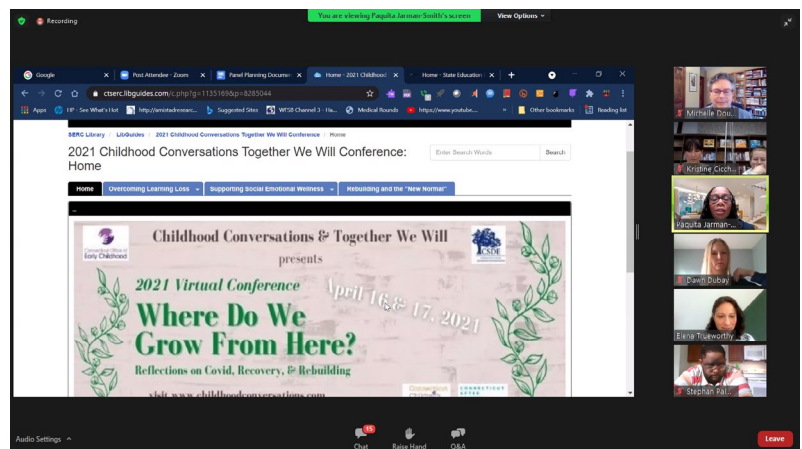
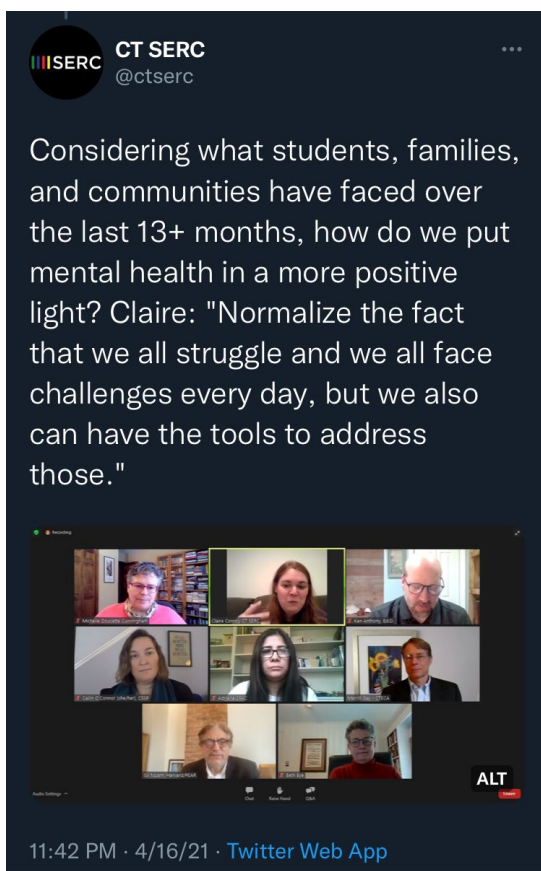
In prior years, SERC has held the event annually at the State Capitol on National Parental Involvement Day in November.

Childhood Conversations/Together We Will: Continuing a Tradition

SERC was part of the 2021 Childhood Conversations/Together We Will conference, a professional development opportunity for parents with a focus on young children. SERC had previously been a co-sponsor of this annual event before and after the conferences merged.

The virtual conference on April 16 and 17, 2021, included SERC Consultants Claire Conroy, Dr. Smita Worah, and Paquita Jarman-Smith as panelists and presenters. The theme was “Where Do We Grow From Here? Reflections on COVID, Recovery & Rebuilding,” and Claire and Smita presented on tech equity while Paquita led a discussion on “A Time to Heal... A Time to Hope.”

The 2021 conference was held jointly by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Connecticut State Department of Education, the CT After School Network, and the Connecticut Children’s Collective. The SERC Library developed a LibGuide especially for the conference; go to <http://ctserc.org/library> for access to all of our library’s LibGuides.



SERC Consultants Claire Conroy and Paquita Jarman-Smith were among the speakers at Childhood Conversations.

SERC LIBRARY

Annual Report 20-21

The SERC Library has been in existence for as long as SERC itself, since 1969. It provides Connecticut education professionals, college and university students, families, and community members access to research, reference, and instructional materials and resources related to education.



COVID-safe, December 2020: SERC Library Associate Cassandra McCarthy mans a SERC Library desk in the lobby outside SERC offices at 100 Roscommon Drive, Middletown.

The Library closed temporarily most recently in March 2020 due to the pandemic. Within a few months, Library staff worked to collect items that patrons had checked out before the closure. Patrons were not charged late fees if they were able to return items during set hours, or arranged their own drop off time, that involved a SERC librarian set up outside the building.

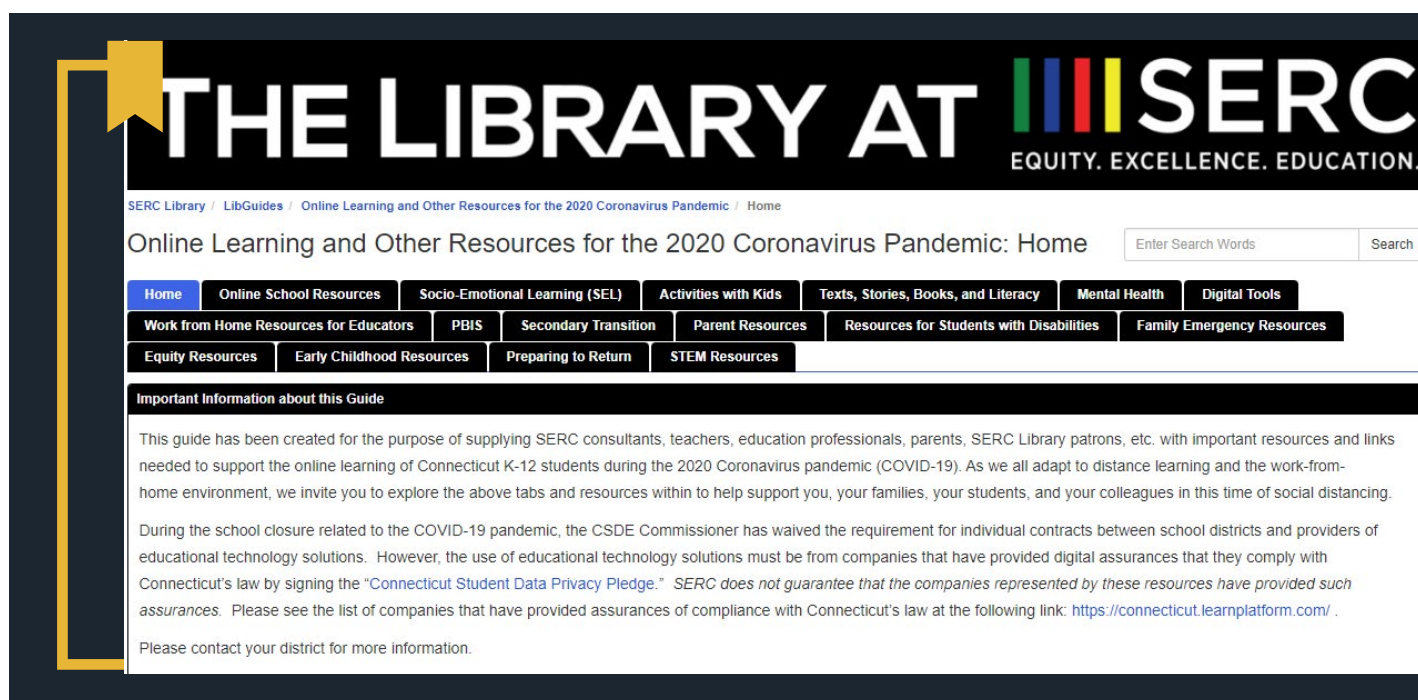
The Library remained closed for browsing but reopened two days a week in December 2020 for checking out and returning items, via the building lobby. Hours were extended further and opened to three days a week in April 2021.

The Library continued to serve users through these scheduled appointments for picking up reserved library materials and returning items; it added a new online calendar system as an option for users to self-schedule these appointments. Reference and general library support was available over email and telephone Monday through Friday.

Meanwhile, Library staff continued the development work that had begun the previous year. They focused on evaluating the current remaining collection and purchasing updates for the highly circulated test collection. The resulting analysis led to the purchase of 80 updated versions of tests to be added to the Library.

Over \$8,000-worth of new assistive technology (AT) materials were also added to the Library's AT Corner Collection, including various digital scanning and highlighting pens, several different types of switches, two new iPad Airs loaded with AT apps, and various curricula around algebra, adapted language arts, early literacy skills, science, pre-employment, and explicit phonemic alphabetic connections.

The AT collection is supported by the Connecticut Tech Act Project and is meant to assist families with children with disabilities—and the educators who serve these families and students—by providing access to low-, mid- and high-tech AT devices. The Library staff want people to try these materials and find what works for them, as well as learn about the latest research and



SERC's LibGuide in response to COVID-19 related educational needs

trends in the field of assistive technology. In addition to demonstrating the use of the AT Corner Collection materials, SERC consultants can provide information on how to create low-tech AT using everyday items as well as the importance of AT in accessing, participating in, and progressing in the general education curriculum.

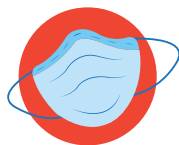
Materials in the AT Corner Collection are available for checkout. Find out more about the collection through its online guide: <https://ctserc.libguides.com/AT>.

To support the agency's grant with DMHAS, the SERC Library provided recommendations around social emotional development and substance misuse prevention resources to purchase using the \$70,000 allotted for the Library. Acquired materials included trauma and stress books for students and educators as well as various social and emotional learning curricula recommended by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Find out more about the DMHAS collection at the library through its online guide: <https://ctserc.libguides.com/DMHASCollection>.

The Library created several online guides curating SERC, Library, and external resources around specific subject areas such as co-teaching and inclusion, assisting children in crisis to develop resiliency, and assistive technology for distance learning to support educators and families. The guides are available online from the library's website.

The SERC Library looks forward to improving its online presence and continuing to update and develop the collection. All materials in the SERC Library are discoverable through the catalog: <https://serc.agverso.com/home?cid=serc&lid=serc>.

More information about the Library can be found on its website: <https://ctserc.org/library>.



Pandemic Response

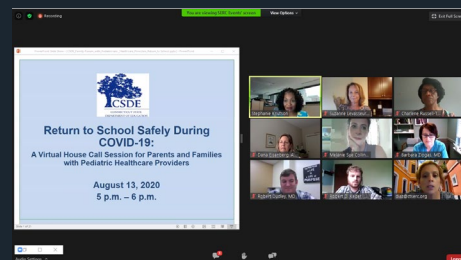
The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act was signed into law on December 27, 2020, and provides another round of funding for states to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in K-12 schools. The CRRSA Act provides \$5.4 billion for the federal Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools (EANS) program, which is part of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund. Under the EANS program, the U.S. Department of Education awarded grants by formula to each Governor to provide services or assistance to eligible non-public schools to address the impact that the coronavirus has had, and continues to have, on non-public school students and teachers in the state.

In March 2021, CSDE notified the state's non-public schools that they could begin applying for funding through the EANS program. CSDE partnered with SERC to administer the application process for the \$15.8 million in EANS aid.

SERC worked under contract to distribute and collect EANS applications through the web and email. It coordinated the EANS reimbursements and assistance, including the procurement of eligible items and services under the control and supervision of CSDE.

In May, CSDE announced its partnership with SERC to gather public input on how Connecticut should use its share of the American Rescue Plan/Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. SERC facilitated online public forums on May 20 and 21 to gather stakeholder feedback, as well as through a public and stakeholder input form, for the state's submission of its ESSER plan by June 7.

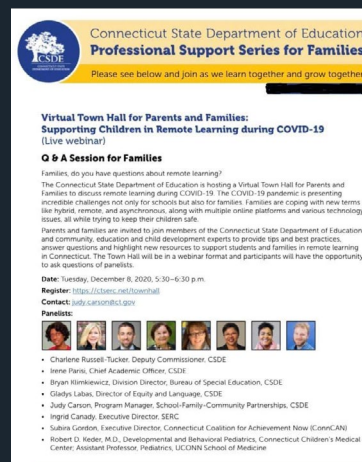
As the pandemic has continued, our work has never stopped. SERC has thrived online and off, adjusting to the needs of CSDE, school districts, and our other partners at a particularly critical time. We look forward to continuing to support them through these challenges and beyond.



On August 13, 2020, SERC collaborated with CSDE to host a Virtual House Call with school medical experts for families to get answers to their questions about COVID-19 and safe strategies for returning to school in the fall. Among the participants: SERC's Nitza M. Diaz, offering support in English and Spanish.



SERC hosted a session for families on September 10, 2020, to address concerns related to returning to school during the pandemic. As with other family sessions, information was also offered in Spanish.



Additional informational sessions for families

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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