

2021-2022

# STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

## ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT



2021-2022

## **STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER**

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**MARJORIE DAVIS**  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

**STEPHEN PROFFITT**  
DIRECTOR FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

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## LETTER FROM THE **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*Ingrid M. Canady*

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To our Partners, Colleagues, and Friends,

It is my pleasure to present SERC's 2021-2022 Annual Program Report.

The fiscal year that began on July 1, 2021, started off with a celebration, and not just for Independence Day. That was the day SERC released the African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino curriculum, representing the voices of literally hundreds of educators, historians, students, and others who were committed to young people's access to the human story that includes every one of us. We are honored to have helped lead this historical moment in Connecticut education and deeply grateful to the partners who helped make it happen.

In the preface of the curriculum, I describe how we look to teachers to "inspire within each student a desire to reimagine the present and the future, based on lessons learned from the past—and provide opportunities for students to grow and develop their own ideas to ensure we continue to strive for justice, equity, and unity for all people." This is personified in Saahil Ray, a high schooler from Newtown and one of the 2022 honorees of our George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Award. Those words from the curriculum also speak to the function of education itself: Inspire. Strive for equity and justice.

When we reflect back each year, we realize how much story we still have left to tell. And yet the curriculum has already drawn considerable media attention to help position Connecticut as a leader in inclusive education. As a 53-year-old agency founded on the state's pioneering attention to students with disabilities, inclusion and access have always been integral to SERC's mission.

Our continued involvement with the attendance and engagement and school discipline collaboratives demonstrate how addressing disproportionality in special education is a partnership effort. So is training on the state's new IEP, which, like the curriculum, demonstrated the leadership of students in shaping the results.



This empowerment of all stakeholders is especially important in a continued era of disruption, from resurgence of the pandemic to other threats. Our new School-Based Center on Prevention, Education, and Advocacy, in partnership with our library, is designed to facilitate access to resources to help ensure a learning environment of wellness and safety.

Through these challenging times, the calls to SERC keep coming. This report provides just a taste of how we have answered the call.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ingrid M. Canady".

Ingrid M. Canady  
Executive Director



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## FACTS ABOUT THE STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER (SERC):

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- SERC was established over 50 years ago as a “focal point of action and communication for special education personnel from throughout the state” of Connecticut (CT State Department of Education newsletter, October 1969). We have served local school districts, state-level policymakers, families, community agencies, and other stakeholders by facilitating professional learning, including technical assistance and training; providing resources, in part through a centralized library; and leading a range of other activities and supports over our five decades in operation.
- As we evolved, SERC was statutorily tasked to serve the CT State Board of Education and led the ongoing effort to integrate special and general education, historically divided systems, into a unified approach to education that promotes equitable policies, culturally relevant practices, and accessible structures that develop successful learning communities within schools. We became a state quasi-public agency in 2014, recognizing our unique position to work closely with communities across Connecticut.
- All of the agency’s efforts are designed to address educational equity and opportunity gaps. SERC’s consultants and staff, in collaboration with our partners, build the capacity of educators, service providers, and families to meet the diverse needs of our student population.
- SERC recognizes that to be effective in facilitating change that is systemic, results-based, and enduring, all stakeholders must be included in the change process. Through partnerships with us, education systems shape their own transformation while SERC facilitates the process and customizes application of research and new thinking. SERC maintains many ongoing, years-long relationships with local education agencies and organizations, and offers continued support to foster and sustain systemic change.

Through this work, SERC is committed to its vision of equity, excellence, and education.

On October 8, 2021, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady received an Equity Champion Award from the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (CALAS) alongside honorees such as U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona.

At the awards ceremony at CALAS’ fourth annual gala, Ingrid described her personal experience coming from Costa Rica.

“Cultural diversity represents the reality of this country. Together we can make the difference that this country and this world needs,” she said.

Two days earlier, the Connecticut State Board of Education passed a resolution honoring Ingrid for her CALAS recognition as well as her overall educational equity work on behalf of the state.



*Honoring SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady at the CT State Board of Education meeting, October 6, 2021.*



# EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Annual Report 21-22

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## A Curriculum Debuts

*#ctblCurriculum*

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On July 1, 2021, after much anticipation, SERC released the curriculum for a new statewide course of study highlighting the African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino contributions to our collective history. On July 1, 2020, the law went into effect that required all school districts in the state to offer the course to its high school students. Public Act 19-12 required the release of the curriculum exactly one year later, on July 1.



The release was the culmination of a process that began in June 2019 when Governor Ned Lamont signed the bill into law identifying SERC to lead the development of the course in partnership with CSDE. Approximately 50 high schools across the state piloted the curriculum in the 2021-2022 school year. All remaining Connecticut high schools will be required to offer the course beginning in the 2022-2023 school year to ensure students of all backgrounds across the state have access to this important history.

Work began in fall 2019 with a 150-member Advisory Group comprised of K-12 and college educators, historians and museum representatives, parents, students, advocates, and the lawmakers who sponsored P.A. 19-12, State Senator Douglas McCrory, State Representative Bobby Sanchez, and State Representative Bobby Gibson. SERC worked with various committees of the Advisory Group to develop the course, including focus groups of educators,

students, families, and community members in winter and spring 2020 virtually during the pandemic.

The CT State Board of Education approved the final draft of the course on December 2, 2020.



## Initial Implementation

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and SERC have worked in partnership to support the implementation of the curriculum, covered in Public Act 21-2.

On July 1, 2021, the date of the curriculum's release, CSDE released a memo to all superintendents of schools, directors of curriculum and instruction, and high school principals on an updated training schedule to be facilitated online by the team from SERC and CSDE.

On July 14, 2021, the agencies held the first virtual "leadership launch" with educators in schools piloting the course. SERC Consultants Paquita Jarman-Smith, who oversees the content for the African American/Black semester, and Nitza M. Diaz, who oversees the content for the Puerto Rican/Latino semester, provided an overview of the curriculum and unit design and of the training and implementation supports. SERC Consultant and Project Coordinator Michelle LeBrun-Griffin facilitated discussions that included the preparation of an "elevator speech" for explaining the course to others. Nitza assured participants that the team would be available all year for coaching and difficult conversations.

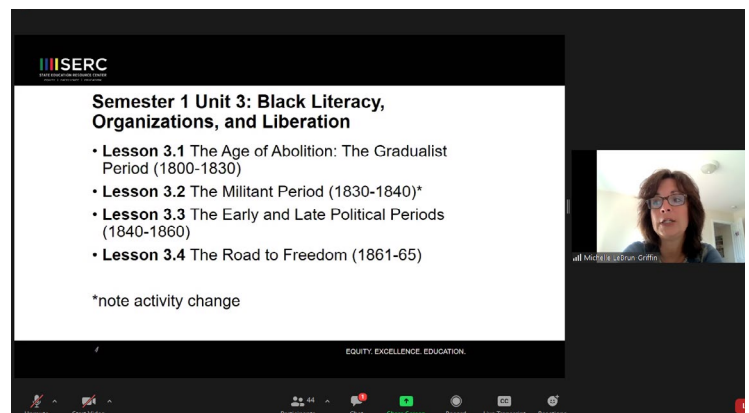
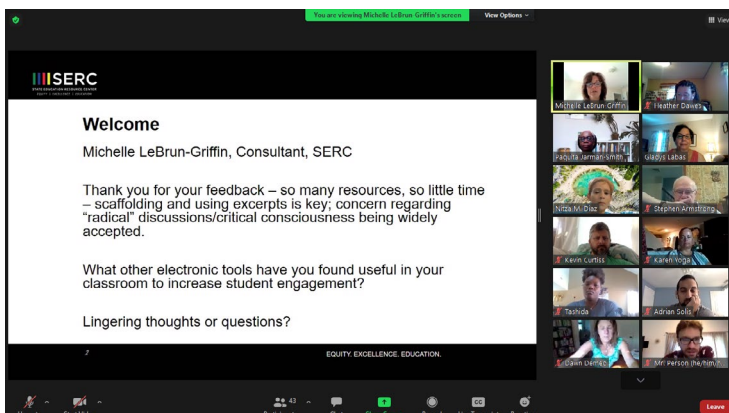
The summer institute began July 26-30 for Cadre 1 and continued August 9-13 for Cadre 2, with teams of at least two to three individuals per high school or district. Guest presenters included Dr. Benjamin Foster, professor of African Studies at Central Connecticut State University who was instrumental in advocating for the curriculum; and Dennis Culliton, Executive Director of the Witness Stones Project.

The educators spent the five days scavenging the curriculum to understand how to navigate it while closely examining each unit. As one participant put it, the experience was "mentally exhausting in the best way possible."



*"You are making history.... We're going to stick together, we're going to support each other, and we're going to do this."*

- Dr. Gladys Labas, CSDE, at the July 2021 Leadership Lunch



*The summer institute for Cadre 2 with SERC Project Coordinator Michelle LeBrun-Griffin, August 2021.*



Events throughout the year supported the work. In a March 3, 2022 regional networking session in Bethel, representatives from the CSDE and SERC team outlined the genesis for the course, goals and structure of its curriculum, and specific implementation strategies. The session included a facilitated dialogue with former Connecticut Interim Commissioner of Education Dr. George A. Coleman and Esther Bobowick, longtime professional learning director at Cooperative Educational Services (CES) in Trumbull. She offered practical suggestions for school leaders responsible for offering this course, including how to support and navigate resistance regarding cultural responsiveness, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The session also featured reflections from teachers and students who have been involved in the initial implementation of the course during the 2021-2022 school year. The meeting was open to district and school level administrators, Board of Education members, and high school staff who will likely be involved in the implementation of the course such as department chairs, teachers, and school counselors.



Great to present with @EducateCT partners on our African American/Black & Puerto Rican/Latino Course of Studies at the regional networking session in Bethel. Gratified by the teacher and student voices! Thanks to @CES\_Connecticut/@EdAdvance for hosting us. [ctserc.org/pa1912](https://ctserc.org/pa1912)

**Rich Reynolds** @HeyReynolds · Mar 3  
#professionaldevelopment on #DiversityandInclusion happening right now!! Join colleagues and learn something new!! @EdAdvance @CES\_Connecticut #bethel #TEACHers #teacher #awesome



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Some essential facts about the course include:

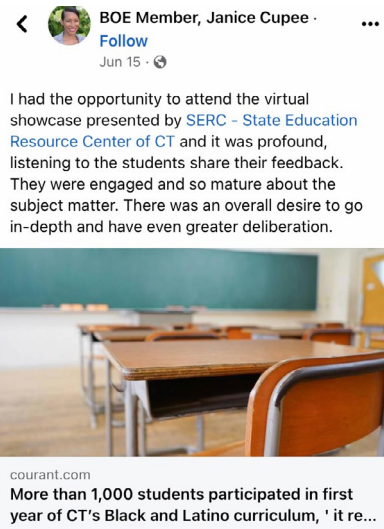
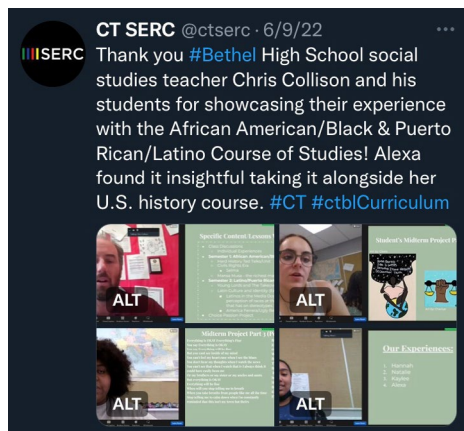
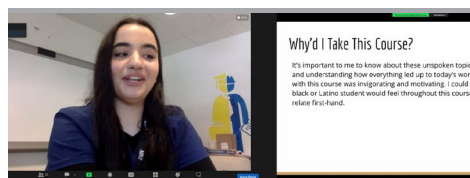
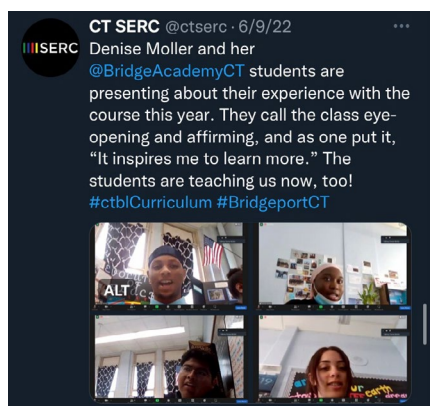
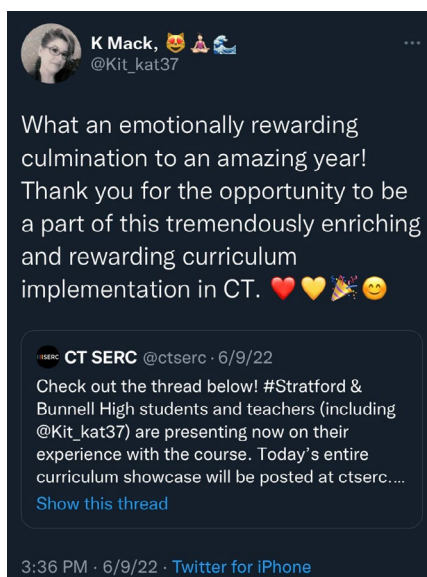
- The course is the first of its kind to combine both African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino studies into one that all school districts are required to offer. The course is a full-year elective, and while it has a semester-by-semester focus, it is intentionally designed to accentuate the individual and joint contributions of these communities to our collective history. The purposeful integration into a single course will better assist students in their identity development as they acclimate in content knowledge.
- The course expands accessibility to this critical content statewide. In the process of developing the curriculum, SERC surveyed state high schools and learned that about 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. It should be noted that this course is not intended to displace or supplant current course offerings, but provide an opportunity for districts to consider pathways of learning, K-12.
- Student perspective and advocacy drove the legislation that mandated the course development, and students had an integral role in shaping the course content, including strong focus group participation and pilot lessons.

The curriculum, as well as background information and a documentary about its development, is posted online at [www.ctserc.org/pa1912](https://www.ctserc.org/pa1912).



While the initial implementers received quarterly training throughout the 2021-2022 academic year, SERC and CSDE held the first leadership launch for the rest of the districts implementing the course on April 27, 2022. The session covered information on the model curriculum, expectations, and the training series.

Finally, toward the end of the academic year, schools that had implemented the curriculum participated in a June Showcase (below). The virtual event on June 9 gave prominent voice to both teachers and students to share their experience with the rest of the state.





## The Curriculum in the Media

The launch of the curriculum brought considerable media attention to SERC and the districts, schools, teachers, and students who brought energy to and built inspiration from the experience.

"Deciding what to include in the 90-day lesson plans of Latino studies involved discussion and reflection among a racially diverse committee, said Nitza Diaz, an education consultant with SERC....

"Diaz recalls one pilot class where students participated in a lesson about police brutality against Latinos.

"'There was a student there, and she stayed quiet, and everybody's quiet,' Diaz said. 'And somebody else said, 'This was so hard to watch. I cannot believe they did that to us.' But then somebody said, 'It was hard, but it was the truth.'"

"When speaking to teachers and facilitators, Diaz emphasizes attention to creating a safe space for students to discuss and process, particularly in diverse classrooms."

**Full story from WNPR/CT Public Media:** <https://www.ctpublic.org/2021-11-28/black-latino-studies-get-a-place-in-the-classroom>

"Instead of answering questions from a textbook or taking extensive notes, the students engage in more collaborative studies such as small and large group discussions and gallery walks, where students can view the research their classmates have done on different subjects....

"'As we grow, we realize we need to bring in those multiple perspectives and as a historian, you know there is no one history and there's no one way to teach history, so we have to bring in all of those perspectives.'"

"Julian Rivera, a junior who has a Puerto Rican background, said his mother encouraged him to take the class so he could learn and teach her about their often-overlooked history in America.

"'My culture, yes it's a U.S. territory, but it's not really talked about in U.S. history. I wanted to dive a little deeper. ... I thought learning more about my background could help me in the future.... by far, one of the best history classes I've ever been in.'"

**Full story in The Hour newspaper:** <https://bit.ly/3iZHCJN>



In 2019, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to require every public high school to offer an elective on Black and Latino history. The new curriculum, which was completed on July 1, will be phased into a limited number of high schools this fall, and will be offered in every school district beginning in the 2022-3 school year.

Emilia Otte takes a deep dive and talks to some of the creators of the course.



ctexaminer.com

**Previewing the Black and Latino Studies Elective in Connecticut Public Schools**

Read the above story: <https://bit.ly/3UYFTBP>



“Taking an African American and Latino Studies class really gives you perspective on how big of an impact these people [who] are considered minorities had on the United States and just on the world in general.”  
- student Angelina Reyes

“SERC has said it believes that through the lens of unique histories, students, with guided support of educators, will connect to their cultural and racial backgrounds and strengthen their understanding of positive identity, among other goals.”

**Full story from the Hartford Courant:** <https://bit.ly/3uRMbsp>

“We want this to be one course that focuses on all of the greatness that these two ethnic groups bring to our culture and our country.” - Paquita Jarman-Smith, SERC Consultant

**Full story from WFSB Eyewitness News:** <https://bit.ly/3j6nUfG>

## Spotlighting the Curriculum

Some schools and districts piloting the curriculum have reached out to their communities, including West Hartford in a virtual information session in February 2022. Jessica Blitzer, department supervisor for social studies at Conard High School and two of the town’s middle schools, said the students who signed up for the course came ready to talk. “They brought the safe space with them.” Students at the session described what it meant for them:

- Exploring topics related to their lives (seeing themselves in the curriculum)
- Being exposed to new ideas and experiences of others (desire to get not just the content, but to process it with students who may think differently than they do)
- Learning their histories; and
- Engaging in conversations on the impact of race and culture.

As one student who identified as white put it, “It is very different reading about something compared to hearing about it from my peers.” Experiencing the course with others helped the student “better able to connect with others and better understand them.”

Roszena Haskins, the district’s Director of Equity Advancement whose biography at the session cited her SERC award for Excellence in Equity, noted that SERC positioned students prominently in the design of the course. She said, “I hope that students who take the course will... shout from the mountaintops” about what it meant for them.

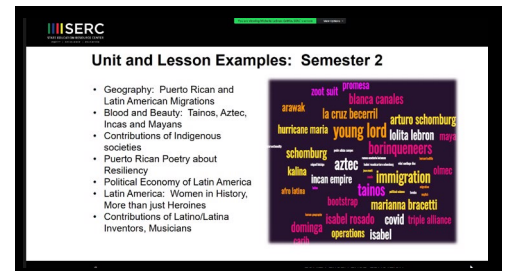


**African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Course of Studies  
List of Initial Implementers for 2021-2022  
Participating in the CSDE/SERC Training Series  
(as of January 3, 2022)**

District	School
Bethel	Bethel High School
Bloomfield	Global Experience Magnet School
Charter	Bridge Academy
Cheshire	Cheshire High School
CREC	Academy of Aerospace and Engineering
CREC	Academy of International Studies
CREC	Academy of Science and Innovation
CREC	Arts HS
CREC	Civic Leadership HS
CREC	Impact Academy
CTECS	Abbott Tech
CTECS	Bullard-Havens Tech
CTECS	Goodwin Tech
CTECS	Grasso Tech
CTECS	Oliver-Wolcott Tech
CTECS	Prince Tech
CTECS	Whitney Tech
Danbury	Danbury High School
Darien	Darien High School
Derby	Derby High School
East Hartford	East Hartford High School
East Haven	East Haven High School
Ellington	Ellington High School
Farmington	Farmington High School
Groton	Groton High School
Hamden	Hamden High School
Middletown	Middletown High School

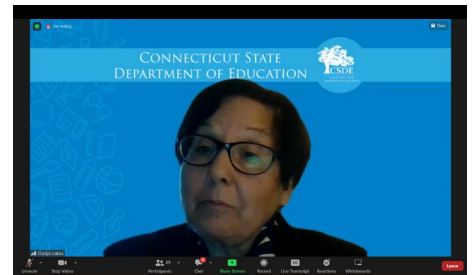


*Virtual trainings were held throughout the year.*





Naugatuck	Naugatuck High School
New Haven	James Hillhouse High School
Newington	Newington High School
Norwalk	P-TECH
Old Saybrook	Old Saybrook High School <i>(Implementing only Semester 1 this year)</i>
Plainville	Plainville High School
Private	High Road School of Hartford
Private	Manchester Clinical Day School
Private	Norwich Free Academy
Private	The Gilbert School
RSD #14	Nonnewaug High School
RSD #19	E. O. Smith High School
Shelton	Shelton High School
South Windsor	South Windsor High School
Southington	Southington High School
Stafford	Stafford High School
Stamford	Stamford High School
Stratford	Stratford High School
Stratford	Bunnell High School
Trumbull	Trumbull High School
USD #1	Department of Corrections
USD #2 (DCF)	Albert J. Solnit Psychiatric Center - South Campus
Waterbury	Crosby High School
Waterbury	John F. Kennedy High School
Waterbury	Wilby High School
Waterbury	Waterbury Arts Magnet School
Waterbury	Waterbury Career Academy
West Hartford	Conard High School
Westbrook	Westbrook High School
Wethersfield	Wethersfield High School
Windsor	Windsor High School



*Gladys Labas, Director of Equity and Language at CSDE and curriculum team partner.*



*SERC Consultant Paquita Jarman-Smith oversaw the development of the African American/Black semester of the curriculum.*



## Foundation Support

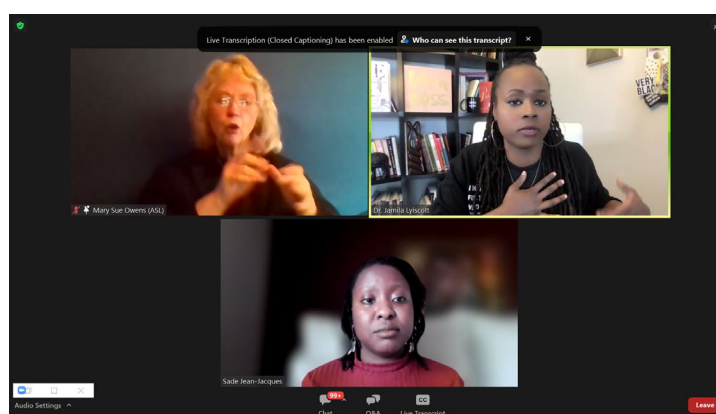
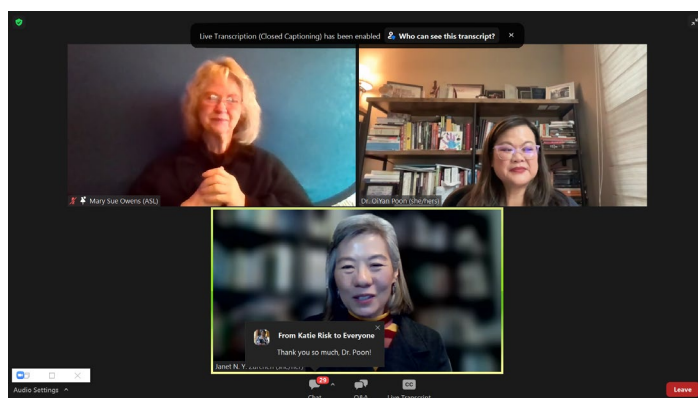
The SERC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that was established in 2015 to sustain SERC's programming and services, particularly its work on racial equity. The Foundation receives financial support from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, while SERC is a contractor for the Foundation.

This section describes some of our work made possible by these funds. For details on the Memorial Fund support to build the SERC Library collection with a lens on racial equity, please see page 23.

### ***Dismantling Systemic Racism***

***#RaceinEd2022***

SERC's sixth conference on racism was the second held entirely virtually. "Dismantling Systemic Racism 2022: Virtual Conference on Race, Education and Success" on May 6 attracted more than 300 participants in a variety of roles, including educators and administrators, school support staff, and students.



*Dr. OiYan Poon (above) told the conference that her parents didn't address racism against Asian Americans at first. When she later asked why, her dad said, "I didn't want you to feel like you didn't have a shot in this society"--but it contributed to a pressure to achieve.*

*If we're serious about dismantling racism, Dr. Jamila Lyiscott (above right) told the conference we must reframe it away from colonialism. "Our communities deserve to be complex and nuanced and basic and have issues... to be alive while being complicated."*

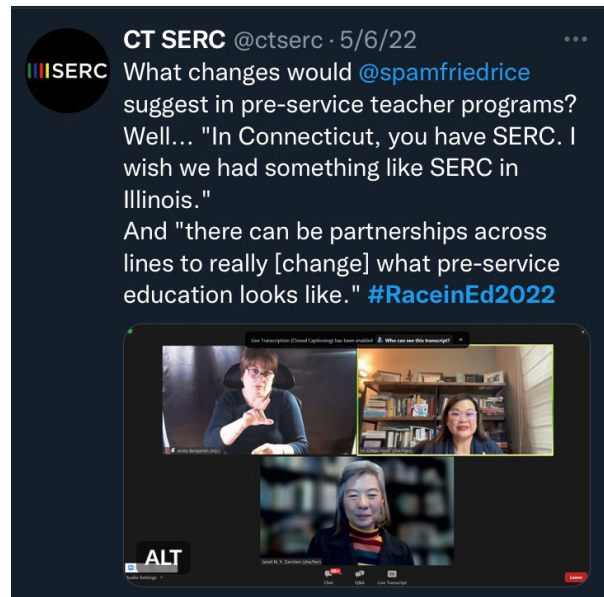
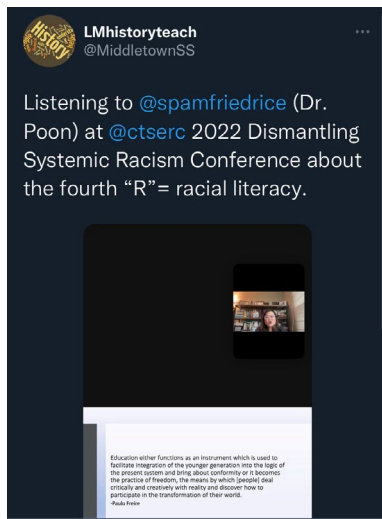
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*"I love how this conference is framed." - Dr. Jamila Lyiscott*

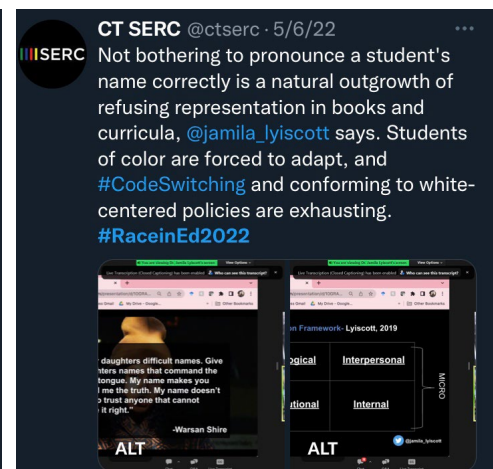
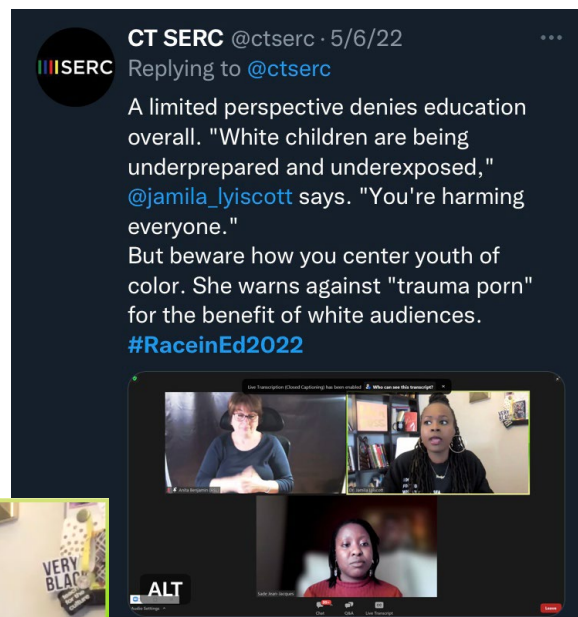
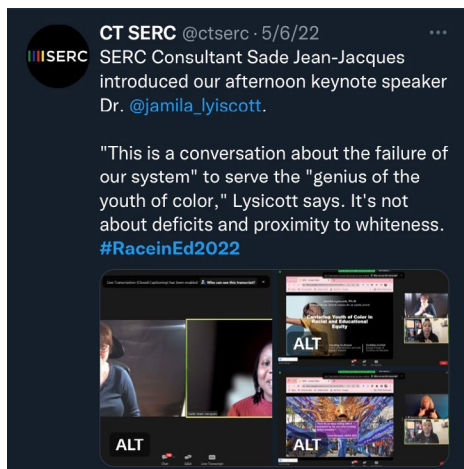




"I hope that SERC continually gets invested in and grows." - Dr. OiYan Poon



This year's keynote speakers included Dr. OiYan Poon of Colorado State University and University of Maryland, College Park, whose research focuses on selective admissions processes, affirmative action policies, and the racial politics of Asian Americans and education; and Dr. Jamila Lyiscott, aka Dr. J, co-founder and co-director of the Center of Racial Justice and Youth Engaged Research at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Cyphers for Justice program.





## George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Award

“

*“I love this work. I’m passionate about it.” - Saahil Ray, Newtown High School junior, on being awarded one of SERC’s 2022 George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Awards*



*SERC’s 2022 George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Award winners: Nakia Alexander, Valerie Bolling, and Saahil Ray*

During the conference, SERC bestowed its 2022 George A. Coleman Excellence in Equity Award to three individuals, and for the first time awarded a student. The award’s namesake George A. Coleman, a former state associate commissioner of education and former SERC Board and Foundation member, introduced the awardees.

Saahil Ray, who was a high school junior at the time of the awards, has led efforts in Newtown High School and his community of Newtown on behalf of equity, diversity, and fostering dialogue on race. He initiated “Diversity Discussions” in partnership with the local CH Booth Library for teens to talk about racial issues during the Black Lives Matter movement; served as president of Students Advocating for Diversity and Equity and as student representative to the hiring



*SERC Project Specialist Heather Dawes traveled from Middletown to Eastern Middle School in Greenwich prior to the Dismantling Systemic Racism conference to present Valerie Bolling with a George A. Coleman Award.*

*Photo: Leslie Yager, source: Greenwich Free Press*

committee for the Coordinator of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and helped organize an advisory lesson on racism for freshmen and sophomores and an Anti-Racism Read-Aloud to elementary students.

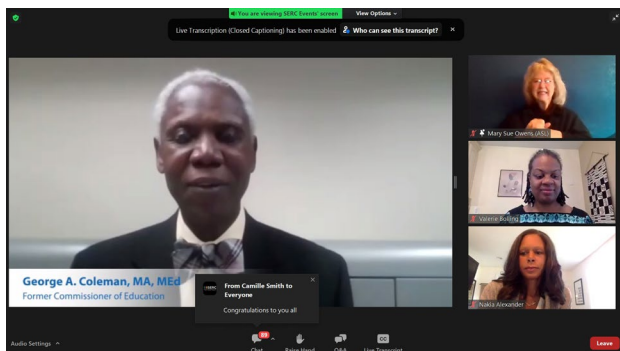
Valerie Bolling, an award-winning teacher and children’s author, has served as diversity, equity, and inclusion co-chair of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. Her articles and children’s books give voice to underrepresented and marginalized children, while she has worked to ensure equity, inclusion, and access in Greenwich Public Schools.



In summer 2020 she coached fellow educators on navigating difficult conversations with students following the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and has mentored and facilitated such challenging discussions with students herself.

Nakia Alexander, parent partner with the Office of Equity Advancement in West Hartford Public Schools, is co-founder of the West Hartford Community Parent Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion organization. In this capacity, she worked for diverse representation in educational material and helped update the

curriculum and instruction related to “Enslavement in CT and in the Division West.” Nakia co-founded root2Rise, a nonprofit organization that aims “to ensure ALL children in the West Hartford community have access to meaningful, empowering and culturally relevant outdoor learning experiences while staying true to our values around equity, anti-racism, stewardship and community.”

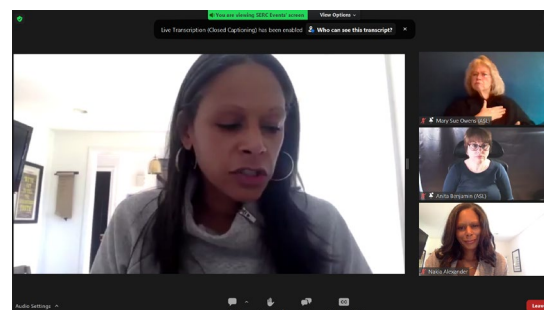


the demonstration of extraordinary acts of commitment and courage to ensure all Connecticut students, especially students

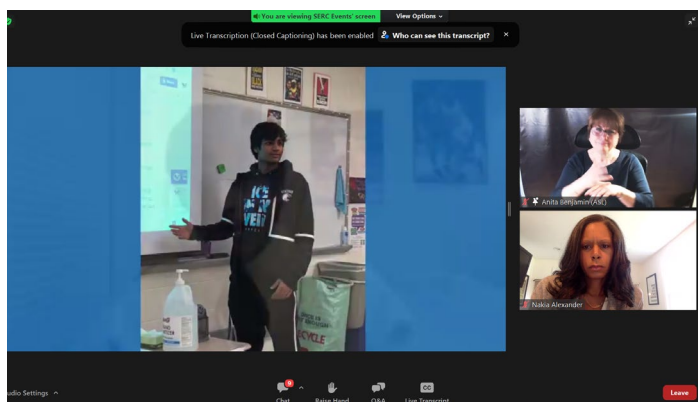
SERC created the award to honor and highlight

of color 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.



*Above: Nakia Alexander and Valerie Bolling listening to the recorded speeches of George A. Coleman and themselves at the conference honoring them with our Excellence in Equity Awards. Below: Newtown High School junior Saahil Ray was busy in school during the virtual ceremony honoring him with an Excellence in Equity Award, and we were happy to have him join us at the end!*



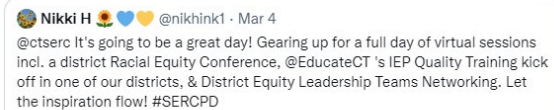


## District Equity Leadership Teams (DELTs) Support & A Spotlight on Waterbury

Through the generous support from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, SERC's work with the DELT districts continued during the 2021-2022 school year. Designed to ensure equity for all students district-wide, a group of four districts comprising Cohort A—Middletown, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury—entered their fourth year under the Graustein grant, while Cohort B, New Britain and Southington, were in their third year.



A busy day for SERC, including our consultant team facilitating breakout sessions at @WaterburySchool's equity conference for elementary school educators on their PD day. Our consultants are always pumped to engage in conversations about race 🗣️ #EquityinEd #SERCpd



12:53 PM · Mar 4, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

Each DELT had at least eight members and included teachers, administrators, other district staff, and community members. All districts had completed and submitted a sustainability or action plan.

The 2021-2022 school year represented Year 3 of the district's three-year plan of professional learning, leading to a commitment to racial equity in education.

Waterbury's work through the years under the partnership included a district-wide equity conference

for middle and central office staff, work with high school and alternative programs, and in the 2021-2022 year, work with elementary schools to implement the district's Equity Policy.

### Equity Kickoff

SERC held a racial equity kickoff for the Waterbury elementary teams on March 4, 2022. Participants:

- Practiced the Courageous Conversations Protocol;
- Engaged in reflective discourse regarding racial equity in education; and
- Explored racial identity and its impact on decisions, practices, and students' experiences in the classroom.



Dr. Lara White, Waterbury Public Schools

A portion was dedicated to a "Common Experience," in which participants examined colorblindness and the role of educators as antiracist leaders; how we affirm racial identity, how we "show up," and how we can interrupt—recognizing that identity is complex and rooted in a social-political construct. An ongoing theme was how educators play a vital role in assisting each child to see the beauty of their uniqueness.

### District Update

On May 10, 2022, Waterbury's DELT held its virtual networking meeting with SERC. Dr. Lara White, the district's Director of Equity and Inclusion, described the district's progress, challenges, and strategy. She noted the encouragement her team received from the previous week's Dismantling Systemic Racism conference, when "it can feel like you're a lone voice."

"When the work is hard," said SERC Consultant Janet N. Y. Zarchen (at right), "it's really important to have someone walk alongside you."





## Evaluating Efficacy

With the support of the Memorial Fund grant and as part of supporting the District Equity Leadership Teams, SERC conducted an evaluation of the technical assistance and training provided to the DELTs. The DELT evaluation involved representatives from five DELTs and 11 SERC technical assistance providers.

Kara Gavin joined SERC as a consultant focusing on program evaluation to help inform practice and future programming. Kara met with a focus group from each DELT, asking them about the technical assistance and training provided by SERC and what other supports they need going forward. She met with coaches and asked similar questions and pulled that together into a report. The focus groups were held with representatives of the DELTs and interviews were conducted with SERC technical assistance providers and two district administrators. In addition, the evaluation was informed by a survey of stakeholders conducted at the end of the 2020-2021 school year and the three DELT networking meetings between March and May 2022.

Both SERC technical assistance providers and DELT members agreed that the Courageous Conversations About Race (CCAR) training and subsequent practitioner certification trainings were a significant source of support. In particular, the CCAR protocol including the Compass were noted as impactful tools for guiding conversations within the DELT and with other district staff.

The most common strength of the technical assistance provided by SERC noted by DELT members was flexibility. Stakeholders described how technical assistance providers were responsive to their needs and accommodating. Following flexibility, DELT members emphasized how SERC support created space for the team to come together and have conversations, which were described as honest, difficult, deep, and rich and pushed members out of their comfort zones. SERC technical assistance providers were described as “reflective partners” who asked questions and reminded the team of what they had learned.

***“I feel like we’ve made more progress in the few years we have worked with SERC than I ever made in years of working in my past districts,”*** one DELT member said.

Technical assistance providers noted how further contracts with districts around racial equity were an indicator of the quality of the support provided. DELT members shared that as a result of the support provided by SERC, commitment to racial equity work has been strengthened.

DELT members noted how they are “building muscle” to engage in this work, including uncomfortable conversations. Overall, 82% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of SERC support their ability to be a leader of racial equity efforts has increased.

## Building Capacity

Pacific Educational Group has helped guide SERC throughout its journey in racial equity work. In addition to attending the annual Courageous Conversation about Race Summit, SERC consultants participated in professional learning with PEG’s David Gonzales on November 1 and 29, 2021, and January 10, 2022.

SERC also offered a “Virtual Courageous Conversation” for educators, families, and other members of the community on March 8 and 9, 2022. An equity transformation specialist from Courageous Conversation facilitated the virtual seminar for participants to examine the impact of race on their lives personally, professionally, and organizationally.



# SERC IN-DISTRICT AND WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Annual Report 21-22

Our on-site work in school districts covers a range of needs. SERC receives many requests from districts, community organizations, and others specifically seeking support in areas from educational equity to literacy to co-teaching.

In 2021-2022, just under half of our in-district contracts were related to racial equity and social justice. Examples of these types of contracts we had during the year are described below.

## District Support

### ***Supporting Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in New Haven***

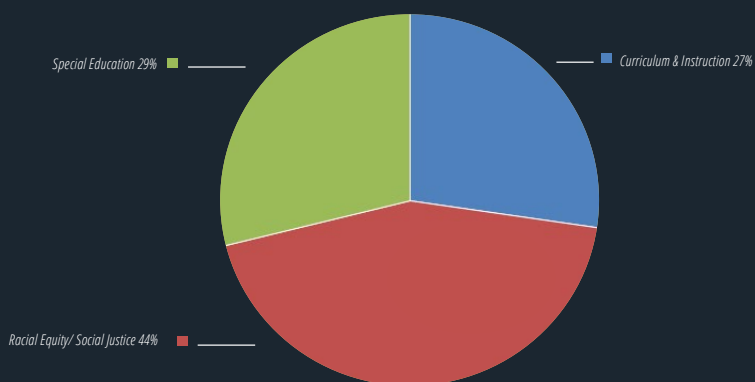
On August 4 and 5, 2021, SERC conducted a virtual summer institute for New Haven Public Schools on culturally responsive pedagogy. The event was designed to help meet the districts' goal to continuously develop a workforce of racially conscious and culturally proficient administrative, instructional, and support personnel.

Attendees included approximately 150 New Haven general and special education teachers, paraeducators, and student support services professionals and other support staff—who even learned from students themselves. Over the course of the two days, participants received support on requiring high expectations of students, teaching critical thinking/analysis, and preparing students to apply a social justice stance in the world.

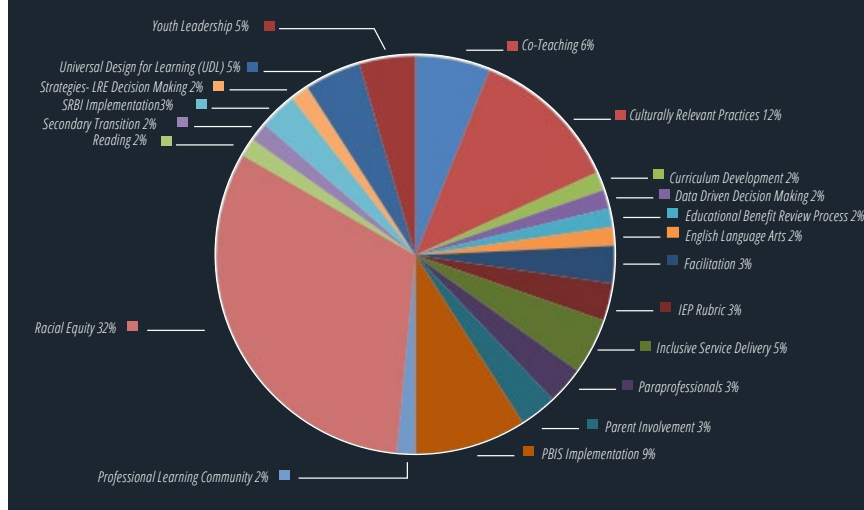
Facilitators included SERC Consultants Paquita Jarman-Smith and Christine Kuehlewind, New Haven Assistant Superintendent Ivelise (Evie) Velazquez, New Haven teachers and students, and various breakout presenters including additional SERC consultants. Keynotes were from Dr. Bettina Love, an award-winning author and the William F. Russell Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, and students from “BLM@NHA,” a Black and Brown Student Union.

Breakouts covered topics such as making “Black Lives Matter in School”; lifting the voices of multilingual learners; anti-bias and anti-racist practices in schools, and families fighting for anti-racist schools; affirming BIPOC students and creating an honest education about structural racism; using student

Percentage of 2021-2022 In-District Contracts by Category



Percentage of 2021-2022 In-District Contracts by Topic





leadership in classrooms, SERC Consultants Nitza M. Diaz and Nicole Vitale on student voice for equity; and a presentation from Students Organized Against Racism; supporting queer and trans students; and teaching African American, Latino/a, and Indigenous studies, history, and literature. SERC Consultants Malik Champlain and Sade Jean-Jacques facilitated a session on “Freedom Dreaming: Reimagining Safe and Affirming Spaces for Black Children,” which was also held during the year outside the conference.

### ***Supporting Racial Equity In New Britain***

For part of its back-to-school professional development in 2021, New Britain Schools—primarily New Britain High School—undertook a virtual course facilitated by SERC consultants that covered the foundational concepts of racial equity. Requested topics included an introduction to culturally responsive pedagogy; diversity, equity, and inclusion; understanding bias; the impact of microaggressions; and power dynamics in the classroom.

SERC had been working with New Britain’s DELT for some time, but this offered foundational content to other staff across seven cohorts over two separate dates. The learning opportunity included a real-time Zoom session alternating with an online course in Canvas.

### ***CROMWELL: Equity in Education***

SERC began its work in Cromwell for the 2021-2022 school year with a virtual one-day racial equity training for all teachers in the elementary, intermediate, and middle schools at the beginning of the year, with two consultants each facilitating the training for each school. Later, SERC Consultants Nicole Vitale and Sade Jean-Jacques would meet with administration at each of the district school buildings throughout the course of the year to help determine what resources they needed. The administrators were assessing their school climate and culture, and discussing what they were seeing and hearing from students. The consultants helped them dig deeper into the data from student surveys.

Ultimately, this led to Nicole and Sade meeting with students themselves. The Unity Club at the middle school, which promotes diversity and a positive school climate for all students, was the safe space for those conversations: Is the school welcoming for all people? What can we change about it to make it better? Nicole says the students were so engaged in those listening circles that student leadership training was bumped to the next school year, as SERC continues work with the district.

## **Organizational Support**

In addition to supporting school districts, SERC works with organizations in building capacity and understanding of equity issues. Examples in 2021-2022 included:

### ***HILL for Literacy***

HILL for Literacy, a Woburn, Mass.-nonprofit that provides its own trainers to schools and districts in areas of literacy, was seeking to infuse anti-bias and antiracist work in its literacy modules. SERC Consultant Janet N. Y. Zarchen and CSDE Consultant Joanne White co-facilitated several virtual 90-minute sessions for HILL for Literacy staff across the organization. While SERC often collaborates with CSDE on professional learning, it marked a milestone for SERC and CSDE to plan and facilitate work together specifically on racial equity.

### ***Gilead Community Services***

SERC has also provided support to Gilead Community Services Inc., a mental health agency based in Middletown and operating throughout the region. SERC Consultants Janet N. Y. Zarchen, Dwight Sharpe



and Sade Jean-Jacques worked with Gilead's equity team to incorporate equity into their strategic plan and helped guide them on training other staff.

### ***Yale Child Study Center***

SERC facilitated three professional learning sessions and follow-up reflective sessions with up to 150 staff from the Yale Child Study Center. SERC Consultants Nicole Vitale and Sade Jean-Jacques facilitated the sessions with staff, professors, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) group, and department leadership.

## **Participant Feedback on SERC's Racial Equity and Social Justice Work**

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As part of SERC's program evaluation efforts, Consultant Kara Gavin conducted a review of participant evaluations of SERC's racial equity and social justice work for the 2021-22 fiscal year. The 1,544 evaluations that were completed represented work with 14 local education agencies (LEAs), six nonpublic schools, and three private organizations as well as statewide sessions. The results revealed:

- 94% of participants responded that their knowledge and skills increased as a result of the professional development;
- 96% of participants found the information presented useful and relevant to their practice; and
- 98% of participants responded that the SERC facilitators were prepared, knowledgeable, and organized.

Participants described the SERC professional learning opportunities they attended as "excellent" and "very engaging." Responses described the content of sessions as thought provoking and the resources provided as relevant and useful. SERC facilitators were frequently noted as knowledgeable, genuine, and well prepared. Many participants praised the way SERC facilitators created space for and encouraged all voices to participate.

### ***Impacts of Professional Development***

In terms of next steps participants would take to improve student outcomes, the two most common categories of responses were self-reflection and teaching practices. For self-reflection, many participants wrote about reflecting on their own biases and how these impact their work as well as learning and growing in the area of implicit bias. Participants discussed thinking critically about their own perspective and how it has been shaped by their lived experiences as well as recognizing the multiple perspectives that students and colleagues hold.

For teaching practices, participants described how they will engage in more conversations with students, get to know students better, share of themselves, listen more, and examine materials and resources. Many participants discussed how they will have more open discussions with students and families about race, identity, culture and equity. In terms of getting to know students better, participants wrote about celebrating differences, acknowledging and valuing multiple perspectives, asking questions, creating deeper relationships, and incorporating student and family beliefs, traditions, and expectations in the classroom.

Participants shared several suggestions for improvement through the open comments section. These included the need to more clearly outline goals and targeted areas for learning and growth, as well as



methods for measuring progress in racial equity work. Participants indicated the need for more time and support with racial equity work including developing actionable steps.

When asked what further professional learning was needed, the top response was teaching practices and curriculum. Participants noted they would like specific strategies, lessons, and activities to support them with having conversations about race in the classroom, particularly with younger students, and with ways to honor and integrate student culture in the classroom. Other frequent responses included further professional learning on race and equity and support continuing the work forward at the school, district, and/or organizational level.

“*Today’s discussion was the most meaningful conversation about race and equity I have ever attended — and I’ve attended many. I think the acceptance the facilitators showed and their nonjudgmental acknowledgement that we are all in different places in this journey supported individual reflection and growth. They did not shame people who were unaware or lacked knowledge and understanding about different aspects of the conversation. This has been rare in other sessions I have attended and the facilitators’ capacity to include everyone was impressive! Thank you!*”

- From participant evaluation

## ***Building Evaluation Capacity***

In April 2022, SERC was one of ten organizations selected to participate in Hartford Foundation for Public Giving’s Building Evaluation Capacity (BEC) Program. The BEC program provides training and coaching to increase evaluation capacity and use of organization-wide evaluative thinking.

This 18-month program began with a kickoff event on June 14, 2022. SERC staff members Krystal Hewitt, Kristy Giacco, and Kara Gavin will participate in monthly trainings and coaching sessions to support SERC’s evaluation efforts.

## Virtual Equity Summits

SERC partnered with CSDE and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) on a series of virtual Equity Summits.

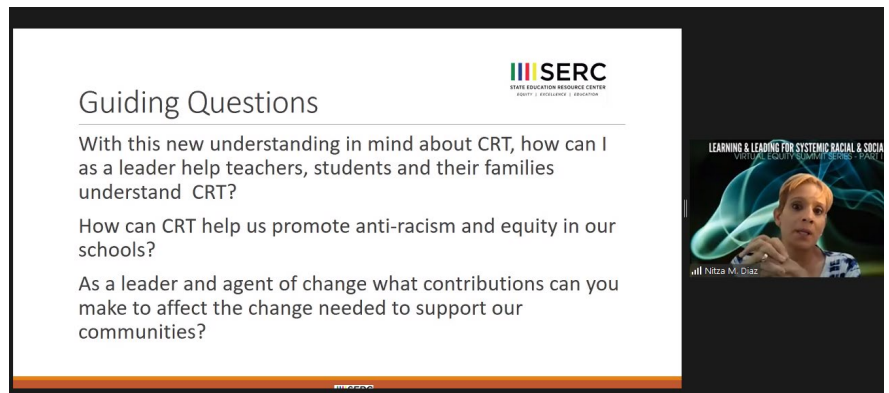
The first event on August 11, 2021—which included a welcome from U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona—was about “Learning and Leading for Systemic Racial & Social Justice.” It tackled addressing racial issues and cultural responsiveness in times of controversy and conflict. Keynote speaker Dr. Johuru Williams of the Racial Justice Initiative at the University of St. Thomas spoke about culturally responsive teaching in the context of the past and present, from the civil rights movements to the 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.



*Dr. Johuru Williams of the Racial Justice Initiative at the University of St. Thomas spoke on the importance of culturally responsive teaching in an age of mass disruption.*



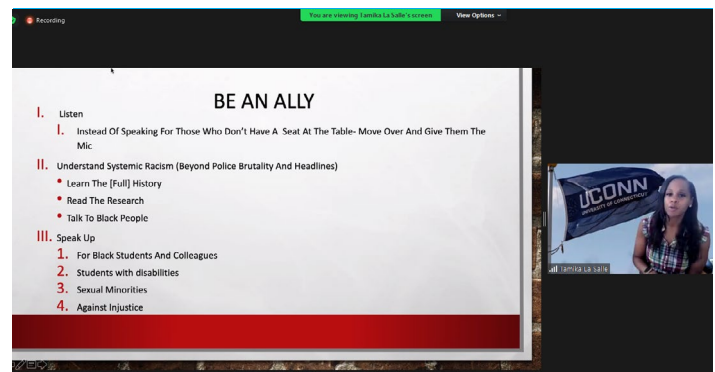
In light of considerable national attention to Critical Race Theory, SERC led breakout sessions on CRT and the concept and controversy surrounding it. SERC Consultant Nitza M. Diaz and Steve Proffitt, SERC's Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design, described the tenets and reflected on addressing fears, policies, and power.



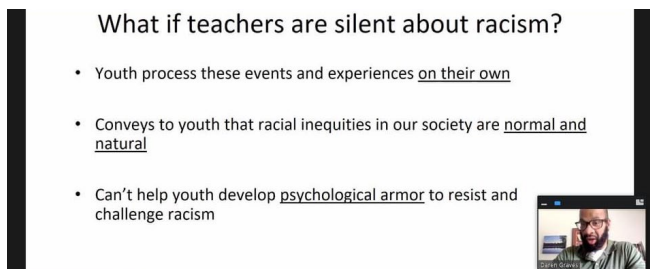
SERC Consultant Nitza M. Diaz helped provide a broader context and history of CRT.



The Equity Summit was just one of the SERC-involved 2021 and 2022 virtual education events that featured student Melinda Lu.



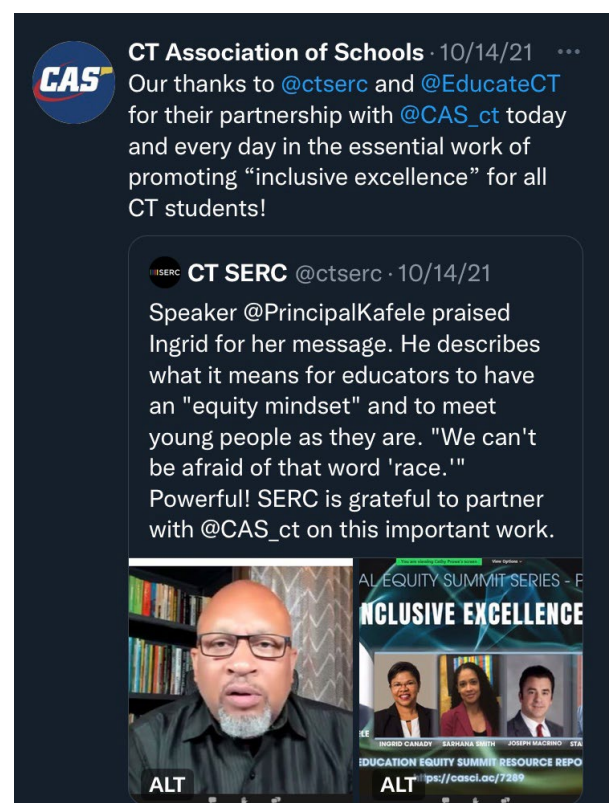
In one of the breakout sessions, speaker Tamika La Salle of the University of Connecticut spoke of moving beyond performative allyship to support minoritized students.



Dr. Daren Graves on speaking out at the Equity Summit.

Drs. Daren Graves and Scott Seider, co-authors of "Schooling for Critical Consciousness: Engaging Black and Latinx Youth in Analyzing, Navigating, and Challenging Racial Injustice," concluded the first summit with tools for antiracist education from educators to students to families. They challenged the participants to consider practices they could implement now and in the future.

The theme of the second summit (at right) on October 14, 2021, was "Exclusive Excellence." "We cannot have inclusion when excluding," SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady said in her opening remarks. "We cannot have excellence when excluding."



Baruti Kafele, a New Jersey-based educator and presenter on principal leadership, was the keynote speaker for the second Equity Summit.



### ***Teach My Kid to Read***

“Teach My Kid to Read” is a program under a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that educates public librarians about how children learn to read. In the 2021-2022 school year, SERC’s Claire Conroy arranged to bring the training to Connecticut under a partnership with the Connecticut State Library.

Reading is not a natural process. To ensure equity in literacy, we must use evidence-based practices to produce skilled readers—and not only educators but public librarians are important partners in this process. Community libraries offer tremendous opportunities to provide early and struggling readers with access to tools and resources that lead to skilled reading.

So with Claire’s support, the State Library hosted the webinar “The Road to Decode: Teach My Kid to Read Comes to CT!” on May 9, 2022. This learning opportunity addressed the current literacy challenges, how we learn to read, and ways to support those competencies through library activities.

The webinar covered the different resources that help children learn to read, what decodable books are, and how decodable books support and supplement reading instruction. Participants learned about implementing a collection of decodable books and what that involves from a librarian perspective.

### ***Accessible Storytime***

Also in partnership with the Connecticut State Library, SERC Consultants Claire Conroy and Dr. Smita Worah presented on March 24, 2022, on how to make storytime accessible to all patrons at our public libraries.

Participants learned about Universal Design for Learning and how it applies to library spaces, the science of reading research, and assistive technology strategies for all readers. By making storytime accessible for any young patron who visits the library, those with disabilities are not restricted to enjoying storytime only during certain times.

Approximately 30 public librarians from various municipalities attended each of these virtual sessions.

### ***Tech for Reading Disabilities***

On March 30, SERC and the Connecticut State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped offered a one-hour virtual workshop to raise awareness on the use of technology to assist K-12 students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities. Participants learned about applications and built-in accessibility features on iOS devices and Chrome browsers, and about the resources at the State Library.





# SERC LIBRARY

Annual Report 21-22

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.



Throughout this year, the library continued the process started in April 2021 and offered patrons appointments to pick up and return materials they had placed on hold via the building lobby. To provide better access times for library patrons, the weekly schedule was modified to provide two or three nights per week.

Eventually the Library itself began reopening to visitors, one day at a time. Beginning in February 2022, the library was available to patrons one Saturday per month during the school year to give patrons more opportunities to come by for appointments as well. SERC Librarians Elizabeth Karr, Megan Devine and Peter Williams offered reference and library support via phone and email Monday through Friday.

## ***Materials Update***



The librarians used this year as an opportunity to give our existing collection physical updates that would make access easier for both staff and patrons. The floor plan of the library was modified multiple times to allow for all restricted materials to be kept in a secure location, as the goal for the next year was to allow patrons back into the library space. Library materials were rehoused as necessary in ways that would allow them to sit better on the shelves and be more accessible to those searching the collection. Specific locations were set aside for the oversized materials collection, which includes many of our curriculum and program kits, our games and activities, assistive technology, tests, and the children's collection. Additional time was spent inventorying and assessing every test and assessment in the library collection to ensure that it was up-to-date and usable, as well as ensuring that the library guide that showcases all of them was up-to-date. You can find all of our available tests and assessments at: <https://ctserc.libguides.com/tests/a-z>.



Library staff continued to make recommendations for social and emotional development and substance abuse prevention resources to purchase in order to support the agency's grant with DMHAS. Staff spent time cataloging and processing numerous materials purchased through the grant. This included over 100 curriculum and program kits that span kindergarten through high school, as well as numerous games, activities, and manipulatives all selected to support positive mental health and substance use prevention. Library staff were also able to use the support of the agency's grant with DMHAS to start

three new collections, all in various stages of development. Through this project, a new version of the library's Children's Collection was started, as well as a collection of Spanish materials and a children's Spanish collection.



*SERC Librarians Peter Williams and Megan Devine at the CLA Conference*

The Library also jump started its Racial Equity and Social Justice Collection, thanks to the support of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Funding was approved to secure professional development materials, ebooks, books for children and teens, games, and activities that address racial equity and social justice. This opportunity also allowed the library to create passive programming kits—which give children an activity to

engage around without the lead of an individual—to give away to local libraries, both school and public, in an effort to encourage youth in the state to share their diverse stories and perspectives.

### ***Sharing at the CLA Conference***

In May 2022, library staff attended the annual Connecticut Library Association (CLA) Conference as a means of connecting with librarians from different communities across the state. SERC librarians along with SERC Consultants Claire Conroy and Dr. Smita Worah partnered with Matt Geeza, the Director for the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LBPH), to present on free resources available from the SERC and LBPH Libraries that could support communities across the state, as well as share information about SERC Consultants potentially running assistive technology demonstrations in public libraries. This opportunity allowed library staff to interact with a broader array of individuals from the state and better establish the library as a public resource.

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>.

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



# SUPPORTING THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Annual Report 21-22

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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. This section includes examples of some of this work.

The programming is designed to address the 17 indicators under the State Performance Plan (SPP)/ Annual Performance Report (APR), which evaluates the state's efforts to implement the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and improve outcomes for students receiving special education and related services. The 2020-2021 school year data was reported in February 2023, while the 2021-2022 data will be reported in February 2023, etc.

## ***Back to School***

Each year, SERC works closely with BSE to help plan the Back to School meeting for special education administrators. SERC handles registration, management of the online resources page, and other logistics.

The 18th Back to School event was held virtually on September 15, 2021, with the theme of "Special Education Recovery and Resiliency." BSE Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz provided updates on topics such as the Special Education Recovery Stipend and American Rescue Act funds following COVID-19 and the individualized education program (IEP) quality training on Connecticut's new IEP system (see below). Julie Wetherly, an attorney and owner of Resolutions in Special Education, delivered a keynote on Special Education Recovery.

## ***IEP Quality Training***

SERC had supported the BSE in the process of developing Connecticut's newly revised IEP form. In 2021-2022, in anticipation of implementation beginning on July 1, 2022, SERC and the RESC Alliance worked in partnership with CSDE to facilitate quality training on the new IEP for all educators involved in Planning and Placement Teams (PPT), and on the use of the new Connecticut Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS). The comprehensive synchronous and asynchronous training around the critical components of the new IEP was designed to ensure more well-written, higher-quality IEPs for students with disabilities.

SERC developed and maintained a website (<https://ct.ieptraining.org>) with complete information on the training and handled registration. The site includes a guide for parents and families via a web module conducted in English and Spanish, a source for special education directors to download reports of personnel from their district enrolled in the training, and a means to request technical assistance around the CT-SEDS.



SERC was responsible for training the priority districts. These comprise the municipalities with the largest populations, the municipalities with the highest number of children under the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program, and with the highest percentage of children under the TFA program to the town's mastery count, which measures students scoring below the state average. SERC Consultant Michelle LeBrun-Griffin coordinated and conducted training along with SERC's Nikki Hendry, Missy Wrigley, Claire Conroy, Julia Seymour, and Steve Proffitt, Assistant Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design.

### ***Attendance and Engagement Initiative***

The Attendance and Engagement Community of Practice (CoP), a partnership between CSDE and SERC, has operated since January 2021. SERC Consultant Christine Kuehlewind and Steve Proffitt, SERC's Director for Special Education Programs and Instructional Design, have worked with CSDE Consultant Kari Sullivan to help meet the goals and outcomes of the project.

The monthly 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. "Talk Tuesdays" are open dialogues that provide district and school staff an opportunity to support one another and their work to improve student attendance and engagement. The sessions are held every other Tuesday for one hour.

Several of the CoP sessions were facilitated by Hedy Chang, Executive Director of Attendance Works and a frequent collaborator, along with Connecticut state and district education professionals. Topics included relationship-building in Tier 1 and 2 and priority groups, summer and afterschool programming and resources, and a spotlight on transition strategies to support rising 9th graders. Among the other presentations were "Focusing on Attendance & Engagement in the New Normal" as well as topics such as policies and procedures concerning truant students and strengthening social-emotional behavioral learning and supports to maximize student engagement and success.

SERC has the following roles in the initiative:

- 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, supporting the facilitation of:
  - 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.



## ***Alternative Schools and Attendance Pilot Project***

The Pilot Project on school attendance began as a partnership between CSDE and SERC to serve six school sites in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, and Winsted. During the 2021-2022 school year, the sites participated in a series of technical assistance visits to examine the practices in place to address identified barriers to attendance.

One technical assistance strategy included asking the school teams to create a visual representation of their attendance notification and intervention process to identify strengths and challenges. Teams also compared their settings to best practices in alternative education with action planning. For those sites that are not technically only an alternative setting, the assistance reviewed their intake and transition processes as well as their intervention process. All sites also revisited their intervention audit and determined those that they are still implementing and those they are not.

SERC's role is ongoing facilitation, with Consultant Sarah L. Jones working on the project in partnership with CSDE.

Data collection resulted in the following areas identified for further supports:

- Student Mental Health
- Academic Performance
- Parent/Caregiver Engagement
- Challenges in Coordinating Services
- Unfulfilled Basic Needs

## ***Targeting Significant Disproportionality in Special Education***

CSDE and SERC partnered with Dr. Edward Fergus to provide a leadership convening on October 29, 2021, for districts identified with significant disproportionality in special education.

Under IDEA, disproportionality exists when students in particular racial or ethnic groups are more likely to be identified with a disability or within a particular disability category in comparison to the number of students of that racial or ethnic group in the total population (refer to SPP/APR Indicators 9 and 10). The convening was planned to launch a yearlong effort to develop a state-level program to support district teams in developing the knowledge and skills, self-efficacy, and equity-driven cross-cultural capacity to define and solve disproportionate patterns of student outcomes specific to referring and evaluating students for special education supports and services.

CSDE Consultant Viviana Toure and SERC Consultant Michelle LeBrun-Griffin coordinated this effort in partnership with Dr. Fergus, who worked with teams of CSDE and SERC coaches in the week beforehand to plan for the convening and follow-up technical assistance.

Special education and pupil services directors from seven districts, with evidence of significant disproportionality for three or more years, were invited to organize district teams of five to eight members to participate in the virtual event. District teams were comprised of representatives from across the district, including the director of special education, superintendent or assistant superintendent/director of curriculum and instruction, principal, special education teacher, school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, English as a Second Language teacher, and reading/literacy specialist.



The convening focused on protocols for root cause analysis, and provided the opportunity for district teams to learn about best practices in Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS) from across the country and state. Participating teams were eligible to receive follow-up technical assistance to develop the structures for the systematic review of process and outcome data in order to make the procedural and systemic changes needed to prevent future disproportionality.

Dr. Fergus delivered a keynote on “Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity,” and each district team member received a copy of his book with the same title (Corwin Press, 2016). SERC’s Malik Champlain, Claire Conroy, Nitza M. Diaz, Michelle LeBrun-Griffin, Eben McKnight, and Janet N. Y. Zarchen were among the education consultants facilitating breakout dialogues on topics such as: assessment practices, culturally relevant practices, and implicit bias in school discipline, which led to the development of tailored district action plans.

The participating district teams were from Avon, Canton, Farmington, Greenwich, Mansfield, Somers, and Stamford. Teams from Canton and Stamford reached out and received follow-up technical assistance from SERC.

Dr. Fergus is the founder of Collaborative Equity Solutions, a consulting clearinghouse of evidence and practices that support educational leaders to address complex issues related to educational inequity. A former high school teacher and community school program director, Dr. Fergus is currently a professor and lead researcher at Temple University and collaborates with states and districts struggling with disproportionality across the country.

## ***School Discipline***

SERC continued to support the Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative in 2021-2022. The collaborative advises the Commissioner of Education 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.

The collaborative meeting on November 18, 2021, featured an update on discipline data and efforts to ensure alternatives to exclusionary practices are used by the Department. The meeting highlight was a panel of school district personnel discussing their approaches. The panel was facilitated by SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady and panelists included administrators from the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), H.C. Wilcox Technical High School, Danbury Public Schools, Shelton School District, Sunnyside Elementary School, Waterford Public Schools, Waterford High School, and Watertown Public Schools.

The next session of the collaborative was held virtually on March 24, 2022. Some of the issues addressed were:

- An ambitious goal to ensure all school buildings have the resources they need to provide comprehensive behavioral health support to students and staff
- A Behavioral Health Pilot that was currently underway in six districts to create a scalable and sustainable system of coordinated care; and
- How to continue to provide social-emotional learning support to districts, including an assessment tool and professional development at no cost.



SERC Consultant Sarah L. Jones and SERC Project Specialist Lauren Johns have coordinated the collaborative meetings, while Webmaster Greg Glidden has worked the technology for the meetings and webinars that took place before and during the pandemic. Consultants Michelle LeBrun-Griffin, Eben McKnight, Janet Zarchen as well as Directors Marjorie Davis and Stephen Proffitt have supported the events.

### ***School Counseling Online Modules***

In November 2020, CSDE released the Connecticut Comprehensive K-12 School Counseling Framework (CCSCF) to guide the programs and services provided by school counselors. The Framework is vital for schools to maximize student success in academic performance, developing and managing social-emotional skills, and planning for postsecondary options—whether higher education, the workforce, or the military.

SERC Consultant Sarah L. Jones, former SERC Consultant Dr. Donna Merritt, and Project Specialist Lauren Johns were among approximately 30 individuals on the Framework guide committee. SERC coordinated the development of web-based learning modules to teach the Framework to Connecticut school counselors, school counselor directors, counselor educators, pre-service school counselors, and administrators. Beginning in 2021-2022, SERC announced a Framework training series, provided by CSDE and the Connecticut School Counselor Association, using the modules.

The CCSCF is based on the American School Counselor Association National Model while providing more information to align with Connecticut's needs. The course was designed to help schools implement the components of the framework in their particular setting.

### ***Structured Literacy Series***

CSDE, in collaboration with SERC, sponsored an online training series featuring structured literacy approaches. These research-based approaches are designed to work with students with SLD/Dyslexia and other decoding challenges. The trainings offered in 2021-2022 were:

- Wilson Just Words Virtual Launch
- Wilson Reading System Introductory Workshop
- Orton-Gillingham Introductory Workshop
- Lindamood-Bell Seeing Stars® Program Symbol Imagery for Phonological and Orthographic Processing in Reading and Spelling (SI)
- Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing® Program for Reading, Spelling, and Speech (LiPS)
- The Nancibell® Visualizing and Verbalizing® Language Comprehension and Thinking (V/V)

All trainings were free to attend for public school personnel. Each session ranged from 30-50 public school staff, including but not limited to special education teachers, general education teachers, speech-language pathologists, general and special administrators, early interventionists, and reading consultants.

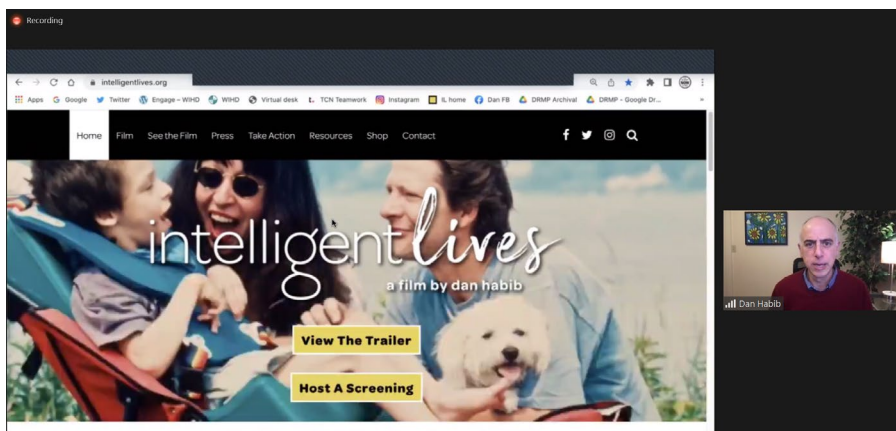
As a trained dyslexia practitioner, SERC's Claire Conroy facilitated each session, helping to answer questions specific to Connecticut public schools and providing numerous resources to further learning.



## Secondary Transition Symposium

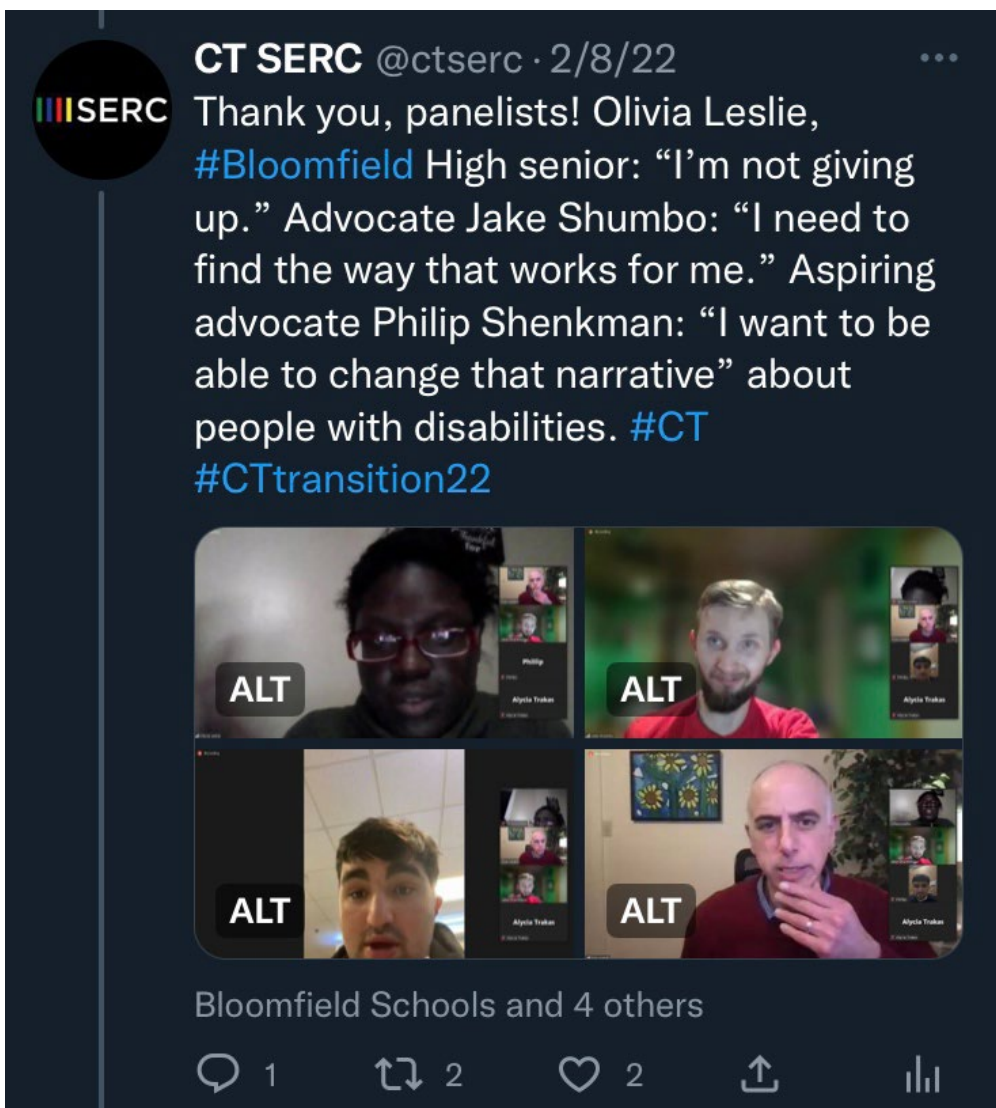
#CTtransition22

Every year, SERC collaborates with CSDE and other partners on the Connecticut Secondary Transition Symposium. The annual event brings families, students, educators, and other professionals together to learn about services and supports for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college, career, and beyond. The symposium went virtual in the 2020-2021 school year, and it was virtual again in 2021-2022—with a twist.



Documentarian Dan Habib shared some of his work with the Secondary Transition Symposium and the story of his own son.

In recent years the symposium ran for two whole days. To adapt a second year to the virtual format, the 7th transition symposium took place in three sessions one week apart for only a portion of each day.



The 2022 symposium had the theme of “#TransitionChallenge: Building Tomorrow’s Leaders Today!” As with the previous events, it was designed 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 symposium had three strands to meet the needs of the different audiences. The family strand on “Navigating the Transition Process” included breakouts on family-school partnerships, featuring the voices of students and their adult supporters; and self-advocacy skills for families, which included a panel of the CT Secondary Transition Youth Advisory Board. The youth



strand on “Your Future: Your Choice” covered navigating college and the workforce as well as self-care and self-advocacy skills for students. The educator/professional strand on “Empowering Youth & High-Quality Programming” covered legal issues in secondary transition, high-quality IEPs, co-regulating, and work-based learning.

The first day, January 25, 2022, featured a keynote by Dan Habib, a filmmaker, parent advocate, and project director at the Westchester Institute for Professional Development. He spoke about effective practices in transition and presented a message about the journey toward inclusion from his now-adult son Samuel, who has cerebral palsy. The final day, February 8, featured a screening of Dan’s documentary about his son, “Including Samuel,” and a discussion with youth panelists.

The event is hosted by the CT Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the CT Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), the University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), CSDE, and SERC.

### ***Learning Through Puppets***

Puppetry can be an effective learning tool and bridge for communication and motivation with all young children. Participants in a two-hour introductory session on June 2, 2022, learned how to use puppets when working with children with neurodevelopmental differences, including those on the autism spectrum.

Lindsey “Z” Briggs, manager for the Jim Henson Foundation and professional puppeteer, conducted the workshop in partnership with the CT State Department of Education Bureau of Special Education and the CT Office of Early Childhood. Past workshop participants have gone on to use the skills they learn to support child development and students’ IEPs in the areas of joint attention, functional pretend play, social/emotional learning, empathy, de-escalation, impulse control, emotional regulation, language learning, and more.

An introduction was presented by Dr. Suzanne Macari, research scientist and co-director of the Social and Affective Neuroscience of Autism Program at the Yale Child Study Center. A recent study co-authored by Dr. Macari and published in Autism Advocate Parenting Magazine (April 2022), “How Puppets Can Be Used in Autism Therapeutics,” had demonstrated how puppetry can increase engagement and potentially social learning opportunities. Results indicated that children diagnosed with autism had similar attentional responses to puppets as their peers without autism. The Jim Henson Foundation was instrumental in helping to design and implement the study.

Approximately 80 Early Childhood Education teachers and administrators attended. All participants who registered received a free handmade puppet!



*“Thank you for this wonderful opportunity for learning. Your expertise is so cherished!*

*Looking forward to apply with our little cherubs.”*

*- from participant evaluation*



## PARTNERING WITH DMHAS ON **SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION**

*#CTPrevention*

Annual Report 21-22

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The partnership between SERC and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) continued to be very active in 2021-2022, coordinated at SERC by Consultant Bianca Irizarry.

Thanks to a federal grant finalized in 2022, SERC began developing a statewide center for mitigating the impact of substance use and other behavioral problems in the student population. SERC will launch and operate the School-Based Center for Prevention, Education and Advocacy through an extended partnership with DMHAS. The contract covers two years, with a third year pending federal funding.

SERC will implement a process for collaborating with other agencies on shared resources; reviewing and collecting data on risk and protective factors that influence student behavior; raising awareness and involving the school community in preventing substance misuse; and engaging families and the wider community. The SERC Library will serve as a hub of information for the new center to disseminate to schools and their communities.

The center is a natural extension of SERC's collaborative work with DMHAS under a 2018 State Opioid Response Grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Under the grant, SERC has developed programming and materials and held conferences, virtual workshops, and technical assistance on school-based substance use.

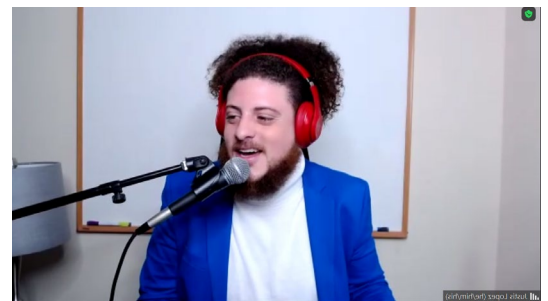
### 2nd Annual Youth Prevention Summit

*#CTYouthPrevention*

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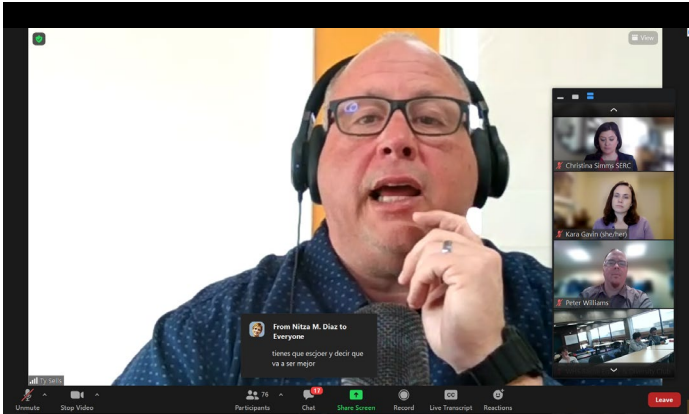
The virtual two-part Youth Summit was a collaboration between DMHAS and SERC, made possible in part by the State Opioid Response Grant. With guidance from their peers and adults, students who attended the summit gained valuable leadership skills and tools to support positive mental health strategies and protective factors that prevent risk taking behaviors such as substance use.

Day one on March 18, 2022, was for youth only. Justis Lopez, CEO of Justis League, opened the day with an energizing keynote with live music, talking about finding joy and mental wellness and being the best version of ourselves. His presentation included student shares about what they want to improve and where they thrive, including a student podcast. Then Youth to Youth (Y2Y), a student-led, adult-guided organization, facilitated a series of morning breakout sessions. Belon Hill and student panelists described the different types of self-care, from emotional to social. In the afternoon, Ty Sells and Javier Sanchez from Y2Y created a space for youth participants to talk about the issues they face.



*Justis Lopez performing at the Youth Prevention Summit.*





*"The quality of your life, health, work and relationships is determined by the quality of your mental health... not the other way around." – Ty Sells, Youth to Youth*

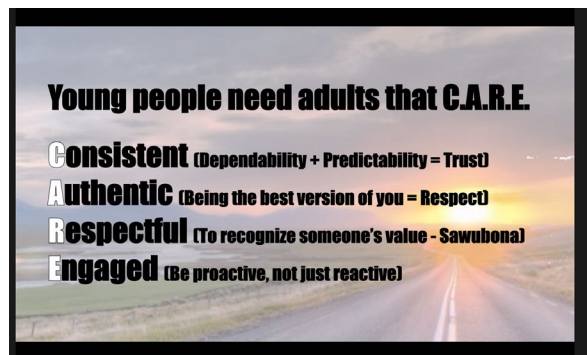


*We heard insights from students in schools across the state participating in the Youth Prevention Summit.*

“

*"This conference was put together by SERC because our hope is in you.... because you can make a difference right now."*

- Youth to Youth speaker Javier Sanchez



*Javier Sanchez offered ways to instill hope and direction in young people. To achieve competency, youth first need coping skills, then how to navigate systems (educational, others) before building marketable skills. And they need an adult who also sees their inherent value.*

Day two on May 18, 2022, brought youth and adults together. Participants worked collaboratively on strategies that build on their strengths to create protective factors that improve mental health practices and reduce risk-taking behaviors.

The morning featured a student panel discussion of "I Just Want To BE," a mini-documentary developed, directed, and produced by the teens of Columbus, Ohio's Youth to Youth Common Ground program. The project was developed to continue dialogue in our communities around the topic of racism and how it can contribute to mental health challenges.

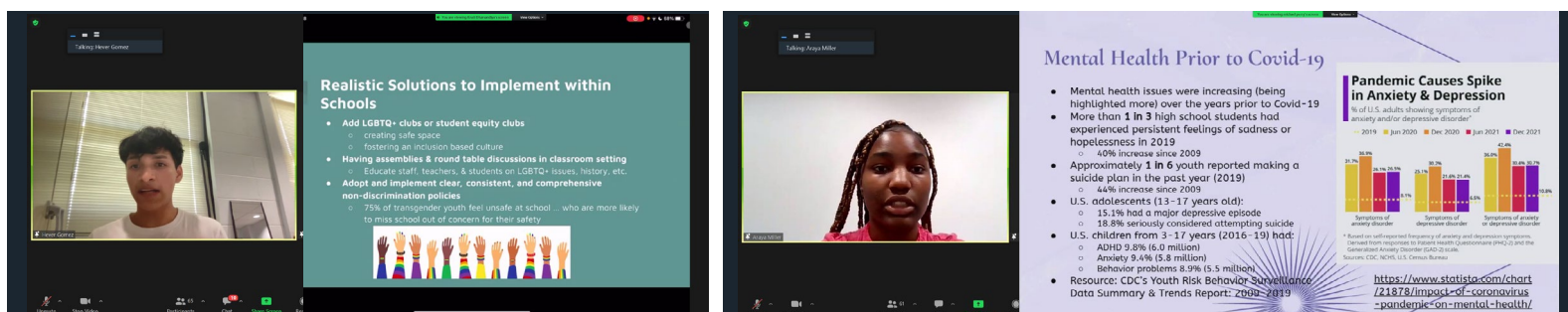
Students involved in the documentary described how they felt heard. One powerful realization: "I have something to say and people are willing to listen to it and grow from it."

Javier Sanchez described how Y2Y helps young people change their circumstances. He recalled a mentor telling him in his youth, "Your past does not have to disqualify you from your future."



The afternoon featured presentations by the Student Equity Advisory Board and the State Student Advisory Council on Education. Students presented about their projects, including an LGBTQ+ student survey and the effects of youth mental health in the context of COVID-19.

SERC coordinated the event and planned the theme and content.



*The Advisory Board's Hever Gomez and Kruti Dharsandiya presented on their survey regarding LGBTQ+ students and solutions to build a more inclusive environment in our schools. Students Araya Miller and Michael Perry shared the effects of youth mental health in the context of COVID-19, and their related survey.*

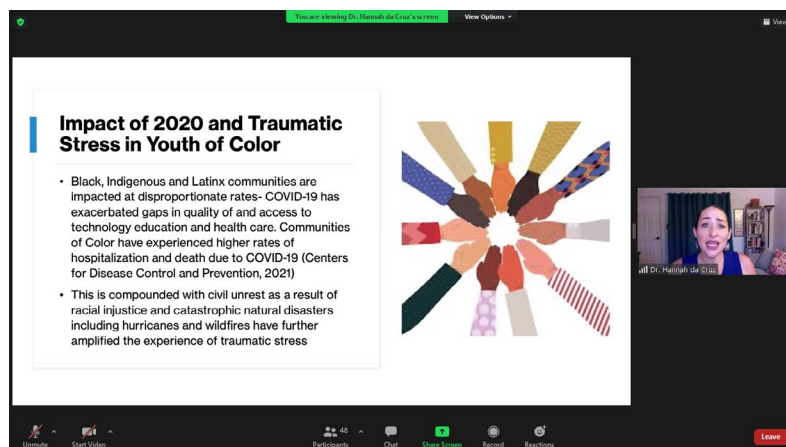
## DMHAS Lunch & Learn Series

Also under the State Opioid Response Grant, SERC moderated and coordinated a series of virtual lunchtime sessions. The intended learning objectives and outcomes were planned collaboratively with the presenters for the content of the series, Dr. Ira Chasnoff, Dr. Hannah da Cruz, and Kendrick Moore.

One four-session series was designed for district and school professionals to develop a school-based system of substance use prevention and early intervention. It centered around evidence-based research and trauma-informed practices geared toward risk prevention in youth and the promotion of mental wellness. Topics included: 1. Understanding Traumatic Stress and the Impact of COVID-19 on Youth; 2. The Trauma-Informed Coping Toolkit: Evidence-Based Tools that Can Be Used by All Youth-Serving Providers; 3. Self-Care for Youth-Serving Providers: Understanding Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and a Fresh Outlook on Self-Care Practices; and 4. Fostering Resilience Among Youth: Psychoeducation on Resilience and Strength-Based Practices to Bolster It.

Each session included approximately 30 to 60 participants from schools, districts, community agencies, and advocacy groups across the state.

A virtual two-session series, held at the end of July 2021, examined the impact of stress on student learning and behavior and explored the ethical principles that can guide the school's approach to substance misuse prevention in a post-pandemic era. It addressed the principles of communicating a prevention message that removes stigma and creates an opportunity for establishing a home-school bridge that serves the best interest of the child. Approximately 25-45 participated in each session.



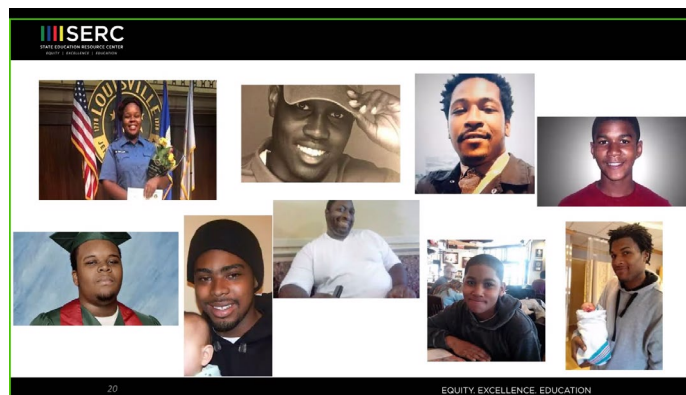
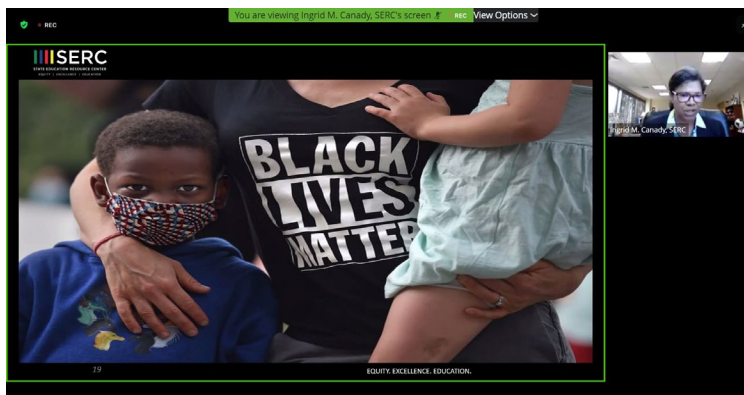
*Dr. da Cruz's July 23 session on "Understanding Traumatic Stress and the Impact of COVID-19 on Youth."*



Other sessions included a series on “Addressing Racial Equity and Social Justice in Prevention” in fall 2021 and winter 2022. Participants underwent a process of self-reflection on personal beliefs and attitudes and how to support the well-being, learning and development of all students in a culturally relevant environment. It offered best practices in building a positive school climate and relationships through equitable prevention strategies for a diverse student population.

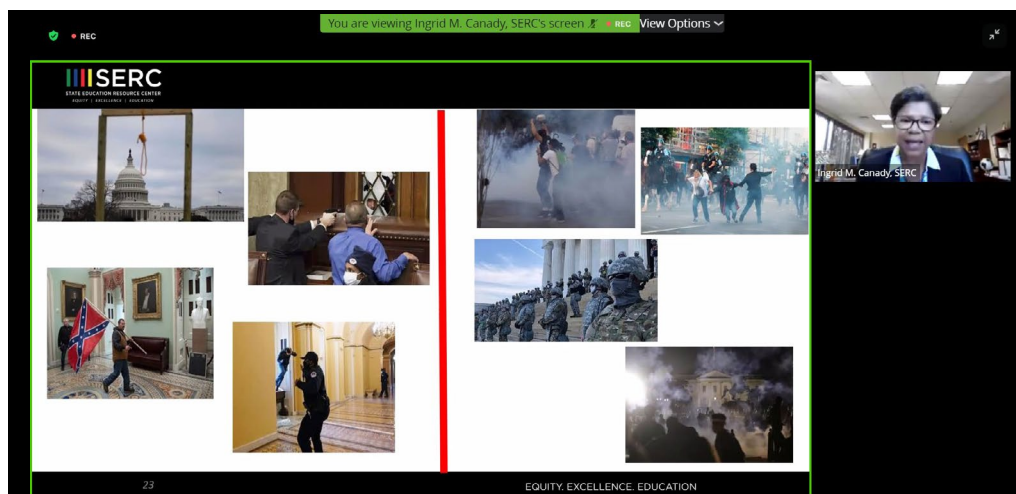
Topics included “Guided Growth: Drugs, Alcohol, Prenatal Exposure, and Implications for Schools,” “Introduction to Developmental Relationships,” “Educational Strategies for High-Risk Children and Adolescents,” and a planned follow-up on preventing substance use.

## Support for Mental Health



On October 22, 2021, SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady delivered the keynote address at the annual conference of NAMI Connecticut, the state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. She spoke of “A Collective Approach to Building the Path for Hope Through Action.”

Ingrid cited our multiple national traumas, the impact of structural racism on mental health and care, and why we must all be an anti-racist agent of change: “This can only happen when we come together to make that change.”





## YOUTH & FAMILIES

Annual Report 21-22

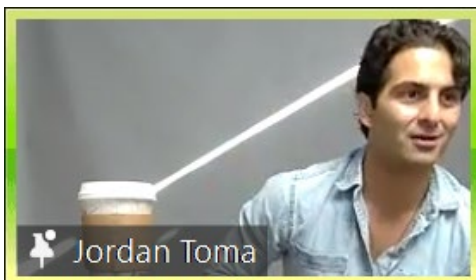
The Special Education Youth Advisory Council (SEYAC), coordinated by SERC Consultant Nicole Vitale, allows students with disabilities in middle and high school to share their special education experiences and increase their capacity to make informed decisions regarding their educational programming. In 2021-2022, this included more than 100 students participating from 10 school districts.

### **Back to School Celebration**

The CSDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE) holds an annual “Back to School” conference for administrators and teachers (see page 25). The 2021-2022 school year introduced a new idea coming out of SEYAC: What about a back-to-school event for students?

The event would include not only members of the Council; invitations would be extended to all Connecticut students with IEPs. And so for the first time, the 2021-2022 school year had a kick-off event with approximately 700 students with IEPs participating from 35 districts across the state.

SERC had put out a statewide announcement about the event, sent to all district special education directors. “Back to School Celebration for Students: Why Not You!” was held October 14, 2021.



*From the virtual Back to School Celebration for students*

While the two-hour event was virtual, students in schools with in-person learning participated together. In one district, Torrington Middle School had all students with IEPs watching from the auditorium.

BSE Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz welcomed the students. The main speaker was Jordan Toma, founder of an organization called I’m Just a Kid with an IEP, who instilled in the students the belief, confidence, and work ethic he learned himself on his own journey through special education. Students were invited to ask Jordan questions through Padlet.

Nicole planned to have Jordan back to work with educators, and he was expected to return to a similar event for students in the 2022-2023 school year.



*Last day of leadership training for Youth Advisory Council students in West Hartford, May 2022*



## ***Student Voice***

SEYAC has provided students with disabilities the opportunity to have their voice heard, including during the development of the state's new IEP form officially implemented July 1, 2022. In 2021-2022, 15 students from the council met with BSE Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz to talk about the State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators.

As noted on page 25, every state is required to develop an SPP and Annual Performance Report (APR) providing an update on the state's implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The APR reports on the state's performance across 17 indicators for students with IEPs, including graduation rates, participation and proficiency rates, parent involvement, post-school outcomes, disproportionate representation in special education, and the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) for improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

In February 2022, CSDE was due to submit Connecticut's six-year SPP to the federal Office of Special Education Programs. It reached out for feedback and input from a representative group of stakeholders, including students with disabilities who sit on the Advisory Council coordinated by SERC's Nicole Vitale.

This gave students the opportunity to learn about how the state operates and runs, what CSDE was working on, and to suggest directly to Bryan Klimkiewicz where the agency should focus its efforts.

"That's a pretty big deal for students to meet with the division director of the state department," Nicole says.

He sought their recommendations from the perspective of what special education means for students themselves—"having kids come up with ideas around what could be done around, say, dropout or graduation rates. What are some ideas that students have to keep kids in school?"

## ***Student Leadership***

In addition to supporting the state, students involved in the council support peers in their own districts.

In Suffield, high school freshmen and juniors presented to middle school students transitioning to high school about how to be successful in high school. The high school students demonstrated their leadership and presentation skills, complete with a PowerPoint, while the eighth graders heard about the older students' experiences and will transition to high school already knowing some of those students.

"They know that there's people like them in the school," Nicole says.

"I think it's a really great opportunity for kids to come together, to have fun. They have a good time."

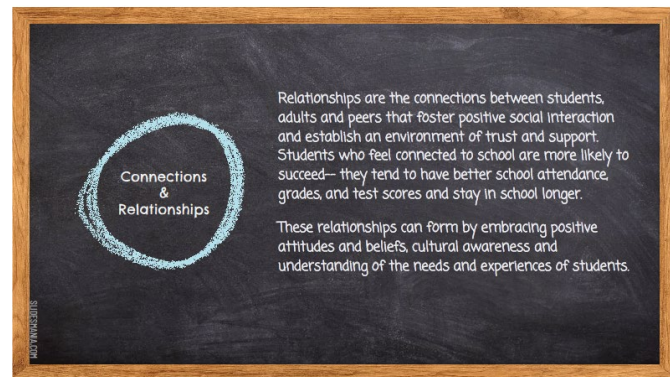
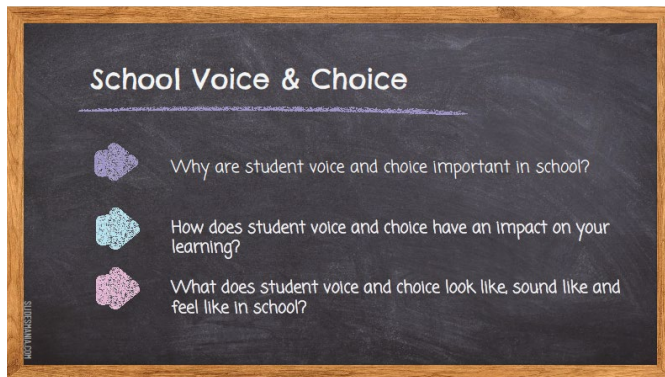
Suffield has been involved with the Council for five years. SERC Consultants Bianca Irizarry and Eben McKnight began working with the new students, while Nicole has been with the high schoolers since they were in middle school themselves and has seen their leadership skills flourishing.



"Just watching them and their growth has been really phenomenal," she says.

Council members have been building a concept for an "ideal school" that would serve all of their needs. During 2021-2022, students worked off themes they had developed in a previous school year. (See graphic below.)

"We had a really successful year this year," Nicole says. "I'm really happy and proud of it."



*From student-led presentations in Youth Advisory Council training, March 2022 (above and at left)*



*From Peer to Peer Mentoring presentation at Suffield High School (below)*

## How to Advocate for yourself

- Talk to your teacher if your IEP is not being followed.
- If you don't feel comfortable talking to your teacher, seek support from counselor/case manager.
- If you are having a hard time handing in work, talk to case manager/teacher to let them know-very understanding of it. Asking for help is very important.
- Sign up for wildcat time to get additional support.
- Understanding where you are struggling/need help so you know what questions to ask (self-reflection).





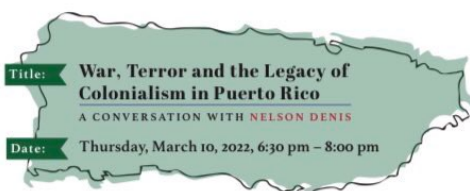
SERC is one of five agencies that comprise the Connecticut Family School Partnerships (CFSP), created out of a 2018 federal grant to design a Statewide Family Engagement Center for Connecticut. The CFSP promotes shared leadership between schools and families, partnerships to promote equal voice, and 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 CSDE, CPAC (the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center), 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.



## 'The Beauty of Being Latino Is...': AN EDUCATION SERIES



Nelson Denis

Diverse Latino groups have rallied over the last century and a half to seek civic and political inclusion. This fifth session of the series considers the consequences of colonialism from when the U.S. "liberated" Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898.

Later that year, Hurricane San Ciriaco destroyed thousands of the island's farms and nearly the entire year's coffee crop. Of 50 million pounds, only five million were saved. Yet the U.S. government sent no money, and the following year it outlawed all Puerto Rican currency and declared the island's peso, whose international value was equal to the U.S. dollar, to be worth


Presenter Nelson Denis warns that Puerto Rico's highways, airports, bridges, tolls, park land, public beaches, ferries, government buildings, ferries, public housing, and public hospitals all could end up subject to widespread privatization. The insular government would still be broke, but with no sources of revenue. In this session, Denis will use his book "War against All Puerto Ricans" to explore how the history of colonialism and U.S. domination continues to affect the lives of Puerto Rican families and their children.

In 2021-2022, the focus continued to be: How do we strengthen family engagement for the most marginalized students?

Highlights included an education series called "The Beauty of Being Latino." This included a kickoff evening session on September 21, 2021, with panelists Kay Munoz of the CT Hispanic Democratic Caucus, State Representative Edwin Vargas, and Alex Rodriguez of Save the Sound. A March 10, 2022, session featuring Nelson Denis, a writer, film director, and former New York State Representative, covered "War, Terror and the Legacy of Colonialism in Puerto Rico."



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## FREEDOM DREAMING:

Creating Safe, Affirming Environments for Black Children

Thursday, March 10, 2022  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM



**Presenters:**  
Malik Champlain &  
Sade Jean-Jacques  
SERC Consultants

For **content questions**, contact  
Paquita Jarman-Smith at [jarmansmith@ctserc.org](mailto:jarmansmith@ctserc.org)  
(860) 632-1485 ext. 313

For **registration questions**, contact  
Emma Velasquez at [velasquez@ctserc.org](mailto:velasquez@ctserc.org)  
(860) 632-1485 ext. 218

During this virtual session, participants will reflect on their own social identities and personal experiences; define freedom dreaming; demonstrate understanding of the importance of affirming spaces within educational settings; and identify strategies to creating safe and culturally relevant spaces for Black students.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

## Black Lives Matter Series

Additionally under the grant, SERC held a series of "Family Engagement Statewide Trainings: Black Lives Matter in Connecticut." SERC Consultants Malik Champlain and Sade Jean-Jacques led a session in March 2022 on "Freedom Dreaming" that they also presented at the summer institute for New Haven Public Schools (see pages 17-18).

A SERC Black Lives Matter Affinity Group met from March to May, 2022, on Black caregiving of

young children. Takiema Bunche Smith, president of Anahsa LLC, facilitated two separate sections for Early Childhood professionals and families/caregivers.

## Raising Highly Capable Kids

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 training for facilitators 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 an online session for trainers in the evening of October 18, 2021.



Connecticut State Department of Education  
**Professional Support Series for Families**  
Please see below and join as we learn together and grow together  
Series 28 - December 2, 2021

### Staying in School Safely During COVID-19: An Evening with CT Medical Experts for Parents and Families

**Date:**  
Thursday, December 16, 2021, 5-6 p.m.

**Register:**  
<https://serc.info/housecall1216>


**Contact:**  
[judy.carson@ct.gov](mailto:judy.carson@ct.gov)

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), together with Connecticut Children's and the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, is hosting a webinar to share the latest medical information for keeping students safe, healthy, and in school during the winter months. This session will address families' most frequently asked questions about vaccinations, quarantining, mask wearing, social distancing, social-emotional supports, and other COVID-related health concerns.

The expert panel includes:

 **Robert Dudley, MD, MEd, FAAP**  
Immediate Past President, CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

 **Robert D. Keder, MD**  
Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Connecticut Children's Assistant Professor, Pediatrics, UCONN School of Medicine

 **Juan Salazar, MD, MPH, FAAP**  
Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs, Physician-in-Chief, Connecticut Children's

This session will be recorded and posted online with closed captioning in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic. Everyone registered will receive a notice when it is posted.

### SERC BLACK LIVES MATTER AFFINITY GROUP Journey to Nia: Power and Purpose in Black Caregiving of Young Children

The Journey to Nia is a program that will support the development of healthy racial, cultural and playful identities of Black children in their earliest years. Nia means "purpose" in Swahili, a West African language, and in the Journey to Nia, Black caregivers and early childhood educators will learn how to identify ways to care for and educate Black children so that they can thrive. We are inviting individuals from the worldwide African Diaspora whose role is parent, mother, father, grandparent, nonbinary parent, caregiver, Early Childhood Educator, etc., to join us on this journey.

The Journey to Nia will include four learning sessions for Early Childhood Professionals (Section A) and four learning sessions for Black families and caregivers (Section B) to build the capacity to fully support their Black children to thrive at home and in school. Participants will learn self-care and community care within the context of racism and racial trauma.

Upon completion, participants who are parents/caregivers will receive a certificate. All participants will receive a certificate of completion for 6 clock hours.

#### Section A (ECE Professionals)

Monday evenings, 7:30-9 pm:  
March 7, March 21, April 25, and May 9, 2022

#### Section B (ECE Family/Caregiver)

Monday evenings, 7:30-9 pm:  
March 14, March 28, May 2, and May 16, 2022

#### Topics for Section A and B:

- Historical contexts of racism and anti-Black racism, and the impact on young children, families, parenting, and educational experiences
- Overview of adult and young children's racial and cultural identity development
- Creating culturally and racially responsive environments at home/school for learning and whole-child development
- Strategies to advocate for Black children in educational settings

\* **Note:** Sessions will involve presentation of frameworks and information, with time for participants to make personal connections to the larger concepts. Sessions are interactive and responsive to the needs of individuals living and caregiving during a pandemic.

For content questions, please contact Paquita Jarman-Smith, SERC, [jarmansmith@ctserc.org](mailto:jarmansmith@ctserc.org).

For registration questions, please contact Emma Velasquez, SERC, [velasquez@ctserc.org](mailto:velasquez@ctserc.org).



**TAKIEMA BUNCHE SMITH (SHE/HER),**  
MPA, MSed  
President, Anahsa, LLC

Takiema has served children, families, and educators in New York City for over two decades in a variety of roles. She has held positions as classroom teacher, teacher educator, content director for Sesame Street, and a nonprofit executive for early childhood programs. In 2012, she began to offer consulting services and has supported individuals and organizations to think more deeply about the programs and policies that impact children and families in formal and informal educational spaces.

Section A for Early Childhood  
Education Professionals  
[Click Here to Register](#)

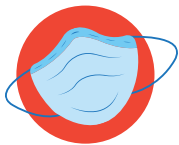
Section B for Early Childhood  
Education Family/ Caregivers  
[Click Here to Register](#)



## Keeping Families Informed

In 2021-2022, SERC provided support to CSDE on its virtual Professional Support Series for Families, including running registration and all the logistical and technical aspects of the Zoom sessions. This included a session in December 2021 for parents and families on continuing to stay safe in school in response to surges of COVID-19.





## Pandemic Response

Under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSA Act), Pub. L. No. 116-260 (December 27, 2020), Congress first authorized the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) program as part of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund to provide emergency services or assistance to non-public schools in the wake of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP Act), Pub. L. No. 117-2 (March 11, 2021), authorized a second round of funding (ARP EANS) to provide services or assistance to non-public schools.

In fall 2021, SERC, in partnership with CSDE, notified the state's non-public schools that they may apply to receive a variety of services or assistance to address educational disruptions resulting from COVID-19. Services and assistance include, for example, supplies to sanitize, disinfect, and clean school facilities; personal protective equipment (PPE); training and professional development for staff on sanitation, PPE, and minimizing the spread of COVID-19; temporary physical barriers to facilitate social distancing; and educational technology to assist students and teachers with remote or hybrid learning.

CSDE partnered with SERC to administer the application process for the \$15.8 million in ARP EANS aid. SERC distributed and collected the ARP EANS applications, coordinating the ARP EANS assistance, including the procurement of eligible items and services under the control and supervision of CSDE.

In May 2021, 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. That outreach continued in 2022, when SERC facilitated two public forums in May.



## 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.

## STAY IN TOUCH:

(860) 632-1485

[info@ctserc.org](mailto:info@ctserc.org)

[www.ctserc.org](http://www.ctserc.org)

100 ROSCOMMON DR., MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457

