



# SERC 2013-14 ANNUAL REPORT



# A YEAR OF CHANGE

## STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

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# INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



Dear Connecticut colleagues and friends,

I do not think SERC ever closed a fiscal year as eventfully as we did in 2013-2014. In June, after years of rapid growth, SERC became a quasi-public agency under Public Act No. 14-212. The end of the fiscal year also saw the retirement of Executive Director Marianne Kirner, who had led SERC for 27 years.

During this period of transition and change, with our governance under a new Board of Directors, I am honored to serve as Interim Executive Director. It feels humbling to be in this position, as the SERC we know today was built under Dr. Kirner's leadership. At the beginning of her tenure, SERC was a special education agency comprised of a handful of individuals running a media resource center and coordinating a series of successful professional development workshops and information fairs. By the time of Dr. Kirner's retirement, SERC had more than 10 times the number of staff and had restructured its identity to one in which special education is woven into a system serving all students, and is focused on equitable opportunities for all of our children.

This growth necessitated new statutory language to clarify our status. With Public Act No. 14-212 establishing us as a quasi-public agency, we can continue our work while a new Board of Directors helps guide us to long-term viability. I look forward to working with our committed SERC staff in collaboration with Board members and the potential to build additional partnerships that have served Connecticut's educators and families so well.

Our work has been built on partnerships, most frequently with the CT State Department of Education but also organizations and community leaders throughout Connecticut that support our vision of equity and excellence in education. As I review the year in this report, I think about how we have not come to this place alone.

To learn more, I encourage our readers to visit some of our Web sites, including [www.ctserc.org](http://www.ctserc.org) and [www.ctpirc.org](http://www.ctpirc.org), and to follow SERC on Twitter, LinkedIn, or other favorite social media platforms. If you would like to speak to us directly, do not hesitate to call us at (860) 632-1485.

Thank you for your interest in this important work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ingrid M. Canady". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ingrid M. Canady  
Interim Executive Director

When Connecticut established the Special Education Resource Center in 1969, just one in five children with disabilities nationwide was provided an education in public schools.<sup>1</sup> While many other states actually had laws excluding children with disabilities,<sup>2</sup> the Bureau of Pupil Personnel/Special Educational Services in Connecticut’s Department of Education celebrated SERC as “a potential new source of help and energy for special education in Connecticut.”<sup>3</sup> SERC, according to a Bureau newsletter at the time, would evaluate the methods and techniques of instruction and “offer greater opportunities for special educators from throughout the state to become directly involved in producing and introducing innovative ideas.”<sup>4</sup>

Not until the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the precursor to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), did federal law guarantee a free, appropriate public education “which emphasizes special education” to every child with a disability throughout the country. The new law was also designed “to assist States and localities to provide” this education and “assure the effectiveness” of these efforts.<sup>5</sup> Connecticut was already well-positioned to do so, and SERC was officially established in statute.



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2000). History: Twenty-five years of progress in educating children with disabilities through IDEA. U.S. Office of Special Education Programs. Accessed October 29, 2013, from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education: Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services. (1969). SERC starts work as new 'herve center' for special education research, development. Dialogue, 1(1). Hartford, CT.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Pub.L. no. 94-142, 89 Stat 773 (1975). Accessed October 29, 2013, from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-89/pdf/STATUTE-89-Pg773.pdf>.



## The SERC Legislation

Previous statutes established SERC through the State Board of Education, not as a separate governing entity. Our collaboration with the CT State Department of Education has served our stakeholders well since the Special Education Resource Center was founded 45 years ago.

Over time, it became apparent that SERC needed a clarification of its legal status to strengthen its long-term viability and secure private and federal grants to continue to meet the state's needs. In the 2014 session, the Connecticut General Assembly considered legislation that would establish SERC as a quasi-public agency. Dr. Marianne Kirner, SERC's executive director through June 2014, testified before the Education Committee. She noted SERC's professional development in every critical area in education, including special education, culturally relevant pedagogy and discipline, early childhood, and school-family-community partnerships:

*"The case of P.J. v. State of Connecticut provides an example of how SERC has made a difference. In 2002, the U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut, approved a settlement agreement regarding high-quality inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities. SERC was part of a comprehensive system of training and technical assistance to ensure progress toward the settlement agreement's goals. At the conclusion of the case in 2012, the presiding judge commended SERC, noting that: 'The efforts made by SERC were designed to extend and improve regular class placements, and the data demonstrate that those efforts were effective' (2:91-CV-180 (RNC), p. 54).*

*"SERC has also made an impact by assisting families and schools to identify practices that facilitate partnerships. As you know, student success depends heavily on family engagement in education. The Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC) at SERC trains educators on strategies for collaborating with families, including how to promote literacy and reading in the early grades....*

*"The teachers we train consistently praise SERC's ability to prepare them to work cross-culturally with both families and children. As one teacher said during an interview with the New Britain Herald, 'The training taught me how to be more open-minded. There were not as many ethnic groups when I grew up in Newington. It's important to be able to relate with different cultures.' ...*

*"With your continued support, SERC will continue to fulfill its mission to provide high-quality programs and activities with transparency and in collaboration with policy makers, state agencies, educators, families, and community partners."*

- Marianne Kirner, Ph.D., excerpts from submitted testimony, March 12, 2014

## Testimonials to the General Assembly

“Last year Sister Carol Ann, Executive Director, and I attended the Leadership Initiative Series “Enhancing the Instructional Programs within Schools” and found it to be most informative regarding current practice as it applies to our special education program. We were so impressed that we asked Alice Henley and Michelle Weaver to come to Villa and present to our teachers on PBIS and on differentiation this year. SERC is a wonderful and needed resource for the educational community in Connecticut.”

- *Eileen Cassidy, Education Director, Villa Maria School, Stamford*

“During my 42 years in education in the State of Connecticut, I have seen first-hand SERC’s commitment to equity and excellence for all of Connecticut’s children....

There is no other agency that has this statewide commitment. SERC is essential in helping our educational institutions to continue their efforts to close the achievement gap and provide a world-class education to all of our students.”

- *Loretta L. Rubin, Middletown*

“By working very closely with teachers in their classroom, the staff at SERC earned their admiration and respect.... It was evident that they valued the advice of these professionals. The results were impressive; our special education referrals declined, student achievement and behavior improved dramatically.”

- *Miriam Morales Taylor, New London Public Schools*





## AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER: PUBLIC ACT NO. 14-212: JUNE 2014

On June 13, 2014, Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed into law Public Act 14-212, officially establishing SERC as a quasi-public agency. This new status defined the State Education Resource Center as a legal entity under CT General Statutes:

“The purpose of SERC shall be to assist the State Board of Education in the provision of programs and activities that will promote educational equity and excellence.” (C.G.S. 10-357a, et al.).

SERC now operates under a number of existing laws that apply to all of Connecticut’s quasi-public agencies, including biennial audits and annual reports to the Governor. The new law also:

- Established a 13-member governance board to oversee SERC, with the chairperson appointed by the Governor;
- Maintained the Special Education Resource Center within SERC, with federal funds granted to the state, as under current law;
- Establish a Connecticut Special Education Resource Center to serve the needs of all public schools; and
- Allowed SERC to continue supporting early childhood programs and activities, now in collaboration with the new Office of Early Childhood.



# SERC's Beliefs and Values

## 1) Learning

*Our mission is to educate and promote growth and change toward improvement and reform, both internally and externally, through continuous reflection.*

In the field, SERC provides a shared learning experience while meeting individual learning needs. The agency models this approach to learning internally as well. SERC staff receive ongoing professional development and create professional learning plans tied to SERC's beliefs and values.

## 2) Excellence

*We promote and sustain a passionate culture of high expectations, quality, and accountability.*

"Excellence" is our vision. We evaluate the effectiveness of our programming through a system of results-based accountability, measuring what we do, how well we do it, and who is better off because of it. We strategically strive for continuous improvement in all we do—in our responsiveness, in the quality of our resources, and in accountability for our programming

## 3) Diversity & Equity

*We maximize the strengths and contributions of people with differing gifts, talents, styles, and abilities, and provide multiple perspectives.*

The SERC community now reflects not only the demographics of Connecticut's schools and communities, but also includes individuals with personal experiences reflective of a successful multiracial, multicultural environment. SERC's work on racial equity and cultural responsiveness is guided by both this personal growth and some of the leading voices in the field.

## 4) Shared Leadership

*We generate individual and collective decision-making, risk-taking, and initiative.*

Effective professional learning incorporates the voices of everyone in the room. The unique needs, mission, and vision of our partners drive our training and technical assistance.

## 5) Community

*We provide a respectful, collaborative, and trusting environment.*

To fulfill its mission, SERC partners with professional and community associations, faith-based organizations, and others dedicated to our children's future. The agency has found that community partnerships are essential to a collaborative approach when working toward SERC's vision:

**Equity. Excellence. Education.**

# SYSTEMS CHANGE

SERC coordinates CT's State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) to establish a statewide system of support for the effective implementation of CT's SRBI Framework (Scientific Research-Based Interventions). The CT State Department of Education (CSDE) stated in its federal application "The CSDE continues to partner with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to serve as the coordinating agency for CT's SPDG because of SERC's strong history of evidence-based professional development, leadership regarding SRBI in the state, and effective grant management."

SERC collaborates with the CSDE and various grant partners, including the six regional educational service centers (the RESC Alliance), the Center for Behavioral and Education Research (CBER) at the University of Connecticut, and CT's Birth to Three System.

As CT increases the number of schools implementing SRBI with fidelity, educators are better positioned to improve the academic achievement of all learners, particularly students with disabilities, students of color, and students acquiring English.

In the 2013-2014 school year, the number of participating schools grew from 47 to 64. This includes seven Preschool/Early Childhood Programs, 19 Elementary Schools, three Intermediate Schools, 17 Middle Schools, 8 PreK-8 Schools, and 10 High Schools representing 32 districts. Approximately 40% of participating schools are from Alliance Districts.



## Building Capacity and Coherence

In September 2013, district leaders from New London Public Schools requested SERC's technical assistance on improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities. SERC outlined a three-phase process to accomplish this work over two academic years.

Phase 1 involves a comprehensive review of the quality of programming for students with disabilities, including students in out-of-district placements. The goal was to provide an overall assessment of current practices regarding the development of individualized education programs (IEPs) and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). SERC consultants used several protocols and instruments to collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the district's five schools.

### WHAT PARTICIPANTS ARE SAYING ABOUT SPDG

"Thank you, very much, for this opportunity. I know that our practices around intervention and behavior have much improved. We have integrated what we learned during our 2.5 years into our regular practice and it is making a difference in student learning. For areas that we have not yet demonstrated as much growth, we know have a way to close gaps. I am appreciative and grateful for this experience."

Alice Jones, Principal, Woodbury Middle School, RSD #14

"CT SPDG provided excellent training in understanding and implementing PBIS. I see this as the greatest strength of the grant for us. The second most effective aspect of the grant has been the use of the ECI forms to monitor student progress. This has provided a vehicle to focus our interventions and move students forward as evidenced by our data. In addition, the insights into literacy, standards-based IEPs, effectiveness of IEPs over time, and a frank look at the way in which we interact with families and our community all helped us to reflect on our work and day to day actions."

Lynn Fichtel, Principal, Consolidated School, New Fairfield

These tools, which are widely used in the technical assistance that SERC provides to districts across Connecticut, include:

- The Educational Benefit Review Process analyzes IEPs to determine the degree to which they can provide educational benefit and positive outcomes to the student.
- The **SRBI Self-Assessment** surveys school personnel on the quality of systems of supports for all students.
- SERC's **IEP Rubric** evaluates how well the IEPs are written in terms of best practices to provide students with disabilities access to, participation in, and progress in the general education curriculum and environment.
- The **IEP Walkthrough Review** assesses the degree of fidelity in implementing the supports and services identified in the IEPs.
- The **School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)** assesses a school's use of Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS).

The results of this comprehensive assessment were shared with New London administrators, and the analysis of these results outlined the targets and supports for Phase 2.

In Phase 2 of the process, SERC consultants assist district and school leaders in strengthening or replicating practices that allow students with disabilities more time with nondisabled peers. In Phase 3, SERC's technical assistance helps establish a process for maintaining implementation of best practices, monitoring progress, and planning for continued growth.



# SERC SPOTLIGHT

## **A Systemic Approach to Addressing Special Education Over-Identification**

For several years, the prevalence of students identified with speech-language impairments (SLI) in North Haven was noticeably higher than statewide rates. This trend caught the attention of officials at the CT State Department of Education, initiating a multi-year partnership between SERC and North Haven Public Schools to address the situation.

In 2008, SERC started to work closely with district staff, beginning with an analysis of system-wide issues that impacted how students were identified to receive speech and language services as part of their individualized education programs (IEPs). SERC Consultant Dr. Donna Merritt led this process. “When we looked at the big picture with the district, we realized that Connecticut’s Guidelines for Speech and Language Programs weren’t being implemented consistently,” she says. Educators were relying too heavily on standardized speech and language assessments, using a “test and place” approach, rather than employing early intervention strategies as part of a multi-tiered general education system.

After this initial analysis, SERC staff worked to increase consistent implementation of the guidelines and strengthen the continuum of speech and language supports at all schools, addressing the communication skills that students need to be academically and socially successful. The district established a professional learning community for speech and language pathologists (SLPs), whose members received approximately 70 hours of job-embedded training and technical assistance. By 2010, the district’s rates had lowered and were on par with statewide rates.

“We saw an enormous change,” remarks Merritt. Prior to SERC’s intensive work with them, SLPs reported applying the guidelines 7 percent of the time. After the work concluded in 2012, their rate of application was 100 percent. More importantly, by this time, the district’s SLI rates had dipped below the statewide rates.

Having a more systematic identification process in place has resulted in a shift in the roles of SLPs. “Their time had been mostly spent providing special education services,” Merritt recalls. Now, SLPs have a more balanced role, serving both general and special education students who experience difficulties with their communication skills. As a result, North Haven students are receiving a much broader range of services to equip them for school success.

A young child with a ponytail, wearing a red t-shirt and blue shorts, is walking on a red running track. The track is adjacent to a green field. The child is looking down and walking towards the camera. The background shows the track curving to the right and a clear sky.

## EQUITY

The year 2013 marked a decade of SERC's focus on racial equity. This work began after data from the No Child Left Behind law showed racial disparities across all subgroups, including those typically associated with achievement gaps such as students receiving free and reduced lunch. From there, we collected an extensive body of research on equity, diversity, and social justice; conducted our own staff's professional learning on racial equity, and then passed along this learning to schools and school districts; and released a document on critical topics in December 2011 ("Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach"), in which we identified five potential solutions to addressing systemic inequities: leadership, professional capacity, school climate, school-family-community partnerships, and teaching and learning. SERC brought this extensive history to its equity work in 2013-2014, and is currently developing follow-up equity documents covering each of the five potential solutions.

# CELEBRATING FAMILY & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Twenty parents from across the state were honored at the State Capitol on November 21, 2013 with a Parental Involvement Recognition Award. The awards were presented by SERC and CT PIRC, in collaboration with the Connecticut Commission on Children. The parents receiving the award had shown active involvement in their child's or children's school or community; support of their local school and contributions to high-quality education for all children; evidence of their ability to make a difference in their local school or community; and dedication and advocacy to ensure equity for all parents and their children.

The individuals who nominated these parents for the award—principals, teachers, program coordinators, and others—were invited to attend the ceremony and introduce their nominees. Other speakers at the ceremony were Theresa Hopkins-Staten, vice-chairperson of the CT State Board of Education; and Steven Hernández of the CT Commission on Children.

Eleven parents and volunteers were honored in 2012, the first year of the awards. The awards mark National Parental Involvement Day, an annual event launched by Project Appleseed, a St. Louis-based educational advocacy group that promotes parental involvement.



*Awarded in 2013: Jeff Coppola and Ken and Cheryl Pawlak of Ansonia; Heather Maguire and Rebecca Parry of Avon; Karen Perham-Lippman of Vernon, for her work with Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hartford; Jillian Miner of Coventry; Michelle DeGagne of Granby; Maureen Suzio of Meriden; Marilyn Dunkley, Brian Kaskel, and Paula Mazo of Middletown; Lorin DeLeo and Bruce and Avenya Buzelle of Milford; Wendy Robertson of New Britain; Heather Hemphill of Plymouth; Emily Maxfield of Portland; Dawn Krzykowski of Waterbury; and Rita Dikegoros of Wethersfield, for her involvement with the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.*

# SERC'S LIBRARY

The SERC Library has proudly served the needs and interests of educators, university students, families, and community providers for more than 45 years. The Library assists in the provision of key components of agency programming and professional learning.

The Library received 4,080 in-person visitors, while more than 92,500 visitors used Library resources online in 2013-2014.

During this year, the Library enhanced its Instructional Materials (IM) collection through new acquisitions of core curriculum and special education resources directly linked to Common Core State Standards.

The SERC Library began implementing Interlibrary Loan (ILL) service for its Books collection. ILL offers members the convenience of borrowing and returning resources from participating libraries, including their local library along with the SERC Library.

Also in 2013-2014, the Library successfully introduced a monthly "R.E.A.D. Night" for beginning readers in grades 1-4, including children with special needs. The Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) program helps children gain practice and confidence by reading aloud to a specially trained therapy dog in a relaxed and fun way at the Library.



# ANOTHER TRANSITION



In honor of her retirement as SERC's longtime executive director, Dr. Marianne Kirner received an official citation from the CT General Assembly. The citation was introduced by Senator Andrew M. Maynard and the co-chairs of the Education Committee, Senator Andrea L. Stillman and Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann.

The citation reads:

*Be it hereby known to all that:*

*The Connecticut General Assembly hereby offers its sincerest congratulations to:*

*Dr. Marianne Kirner*

*in recognition of your remarkable career and years of leadership at SERC. You have made a lasting impression not only in the lives of children and families of Connecticut, but also in the professional development of other educators. We join with colleagues, friends and family today to congratulate you, and also to thank you, for your accomplishments and your many years of dedicated service. We wish you much happiness in your well-deserved retirement. You will be missed by all.*

*The entire membership extends its very best wishes on this memorable occasion and expresses the hope for continued success.*

*Signed by Donald E. Williams Jr., President Pro Tem*

*J. Brendan Sharkey, Speaker of the House*

*Denise W. Merrill, Secretary of the State*

# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## State Education Resource Center (SERC) Financials

	Year Ended June 30, 2014	Year Ended June 30, 2013	Year Ended June 30, 2012
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
*Federal Funds Through the CSDE	\$9,285,634	\$10,594,144	\$10,630,277
**State Funds Through the CSDE	1,100,809	1,472,235	1,831,771
***CT PIRC			159,725
Private Funding	287,224	311,501	210,039
Additional Revenue Through LEAs/Contracts	1,422,557	398,264	657,128
<b>Total Operating Support and Revenue</b>	<b>\$12,096,224</b>	<b>\$12,776,144</b>	<b>\$13,488,940</b>

\*Unexpended federal funding carries over to the next fiscal year.

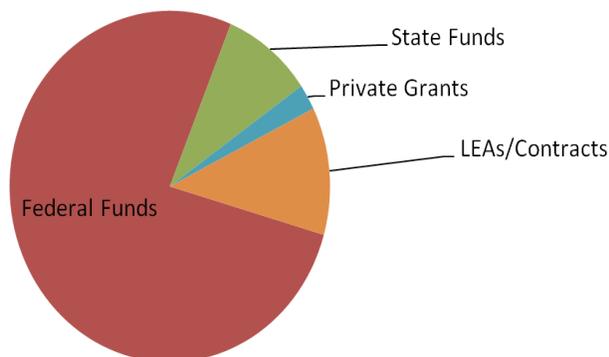
\*\* Unexpended state funding is returned to the state agency.

\*\*\*Federal Funding for the PIRC Grant Ended March 30, 2012.

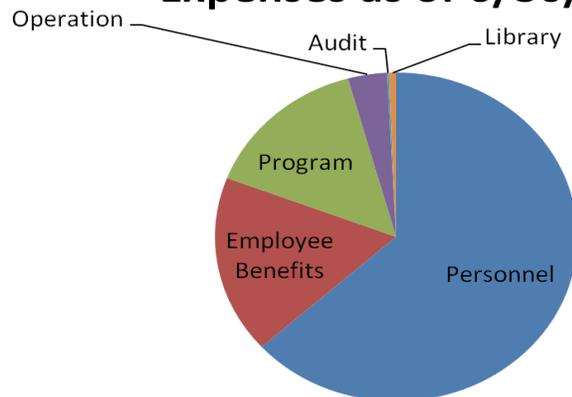
### Expenses Including 5.25% (for budgets over \$100,000) or 2% Indirect Costs to Fiscal Agent

Personnel	\$7,267,254	\$7,340,447	\$6,949,555
Employee Benefits	2,008,596	1,997,026	1,872,874
In-service	664,118	967,684	1,499,047
Other Professional Technical Services	460,613	627,679	1,600,699
Audit	20,000	20,000	20,000
Communications	67,326	67,483	65,903
Travel	24,023	31,996	19,831
Other Purchased Services	560,056	650,381	481,427
Media Supplies	62,538	58,511	52,987
Administrative Supplies	1,342	3,474	8,039
Library	71,525	71,368	74,176
Equipment (Non-Capitalized)	83,984	105,725	108,839
Rent and Other Facility Expenses	185,583	106,641	102,820
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$11,476,958</b>	<b>\$12,048,415</b>	<b>\$12,856,197</b>

## Funding Sources as of 6/30/14



## Expenses as of 6/30/14



Program expenses include in-service activities, other professional technical services, travel, and other purchased services. Operation expenses include communications, media supplies, administrative supplies, equipment (non-capitalized), and rent and other facility expenses.

## STAY IN TOUCH

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