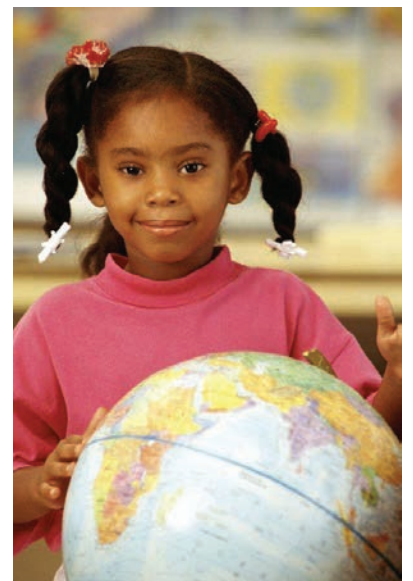


# EQUITY IN EDUCATION

A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH

**SERC**  
EQUITY. EXCELLENCE. EDUCATION.

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. He is looking down at a notebook and writing with a yellow pencil. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom furniture.



Equity. Excellence. Education.



State Education Resource Center

25 Industrial Park Road

Middletown, CT 06457-1516

(860) 632-1485

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

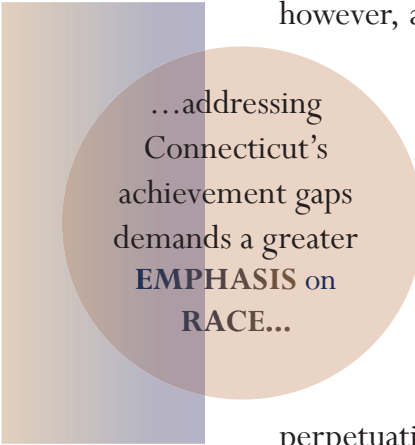
December  
-2011-

*NOTE: All terms highlighted in **boldface** throughout this document are defined in the glossary at the end of this document.*

# PREFACE

The State Education Resource Center (SERC), established in 1969<sup>1</sup>, provides resources, professional development, and a centralized library to educators, families, and community members, in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and other partners. For more than 40 years, SERC has been dedicated to ensuring equal access and opportunity for students often disenfranchised from the public education system.

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind law (2001) required educators to disaggregate educational data by various subgroups, which has brought educational disparities further to the forefront. Over the last ten years, however, achievement gaps have not only persisted, but also widened. At SERC, our commitment is to improving the achievement of all of Connecticut's children and youth and to eliminating the **racial predictability** of our state's achievement gaps.



...addressing  
Connecticut's  
achievement gaps  
demands a greater  
**EMPHASIS** on  
**RACE...**

Since 2003, SERC has worked to shed light on **race** and **racism** in education, studying the intersection of race and culture with educational achievement, special education, and student outcomes and success. SERC staff members have explored **institutionalized racism** and how the maintenance and perpetuation of differential distributions of power and privilege in schools result in significant disparities in educational outcomes between students of color and their White peers.

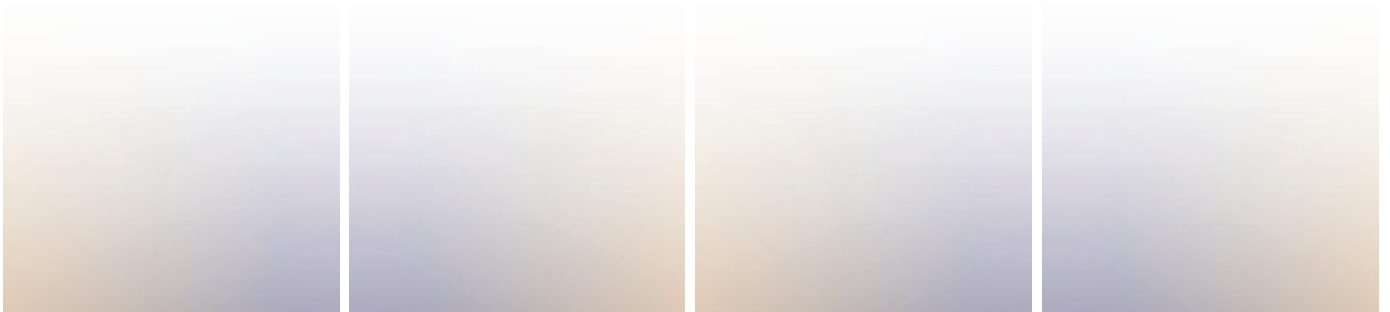
We have produced “Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach” to explain why addressing Connecticut's achievement gaps demands a greater emphasis on race and culture. The document examines the racial achievement gaps; includes data showing racial disparities in student outcomes; discusses why we believe a focus on the **intersectionality** of race and education is important; proposes potential solutions to eliminate disparities; and describes SERC's own transformational approach to achieving **equity** from within. This document is organized into three major sections:

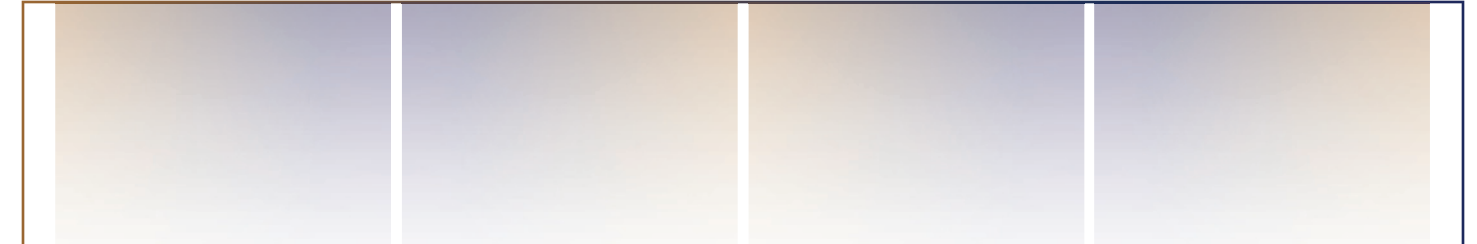
- *Race, Disparities, and the Connecticut Achievement Gaps*
- *What Schools and Districts Can Do: Discourse and Action to Eliminate Systemic Inequities*
- *SERC's Journey: A Reflection*





This is a living, fluid document. We will continue to learn and expand upon our current understandings and experiences. As an agency, SERC will continually refine its approach as we learn from additional research and from the children, families, communities, and educators of Connecticut.





**“We believe we cannot begin to close Connecticut’s achievement gaps unless we begin to address the institutionalized, racist practices that work, intentionally or unintentionally, to perpetuate them.”**

**-Marianne Kirner, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, SERC**

## **Race, Disparities, and the Connecticut Achievement Gaps**

**I**nequity in our public education system has dominated national, state, and local discourse for decades, if not for well over a century. Such discourse has been propelled further by recent movies and books, the Internet, and traditional news media. Our state has often been highlighted for our inauspicious status as having some of the largest “achievement gaps” between our students of color (in particular, our Black and Brown students) and their White peers and as having the largest achievement gap in the nation between our students from lower-income backgrounds and their peers from higher-income backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> Whether Connecticut’s gaps are the worst in the nation or among the highest in the nation is inconsequential. Our children, their families, and their allies know only that too many of our children are not succeeding.

While it has been evident for some time that students in our urban centers have been struggling to demonstrate achievement on both national and statewide tests, recent reports now illustrate that our gaps in performance on these tests are pervasive regardless of overall state performance and overall district-level performance.<sup>3</sup> In fact, students who are educated in some of our most heavily resourced districts demonstrate some of the widest gaps in performance.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that what is missing from the discourse about these gaps is serious and deep conversation about the role that race and culture and, more specifically, institutionalized racism play in the creation, predictability, and perpetuation of such gaps. We contend that such conversations could allow for transformational change: change that results from the continual questioning and challenging of beliefs, assumptions, patterns, habits, and paradigms<sup>5</sup>. As one of the most racially and economically segregated states in our nation, Connecticut cannot afford to ignore or discount the impact of race and institutionalized racism on our schools, instructional practices, and student performance. In fact, our state’s history and data suggest that ignoring institutionalized racism may work only to perpetuate the problem.

## *Racial Disparities*

Connecticut’s racial and economic isolation and its impact on education were highlighted in its landmark desegregation case, *Sheff v. O’Neill*, which commenced in 1989 and was ruled on in 1996.<sup>6</sup> In *Sheff*, the Connecticut Supreme Court found that students of color in Hartford’s schools were being denied their constitutional rights to equal educational opportunity due to racial and economic isolation. The CSDE and its Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) have taken great efforts to remedy the isolation/segregation of Hartford’s students of color through various “choice” programs<sup>7</sup> and magnet school options. Approximately 1,250 Hartford region students participate in “Open Choice” programs. However, much still needs to be done to fulfill the court’s mandates<sup>8</sup>: overall, Connecticut’s children remain highly segregated by race and income in its capital city, as well as across the state.

Policy makers and school leaders must consider any educational issues – from graduation rates to achievement test scores – in the **CONTEXT** of **RACE** and **CULTURE**.

National and Connecticut reports on everything from education (including, but not limited to, academic achievement, discipline, suspensions, expulsions, dropout rates, and graduation rates), juvenile justice and incarceration, health and health care, housing, employment, income and wealth, and opportunity show alarming and unacceptable disparities by race.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Connecticut’s educational disparities, once examined by *both* race *and* income, show predictable trends by race that indicate that income alone is not sufficient in explaining Connecticut’s achievement gaps.

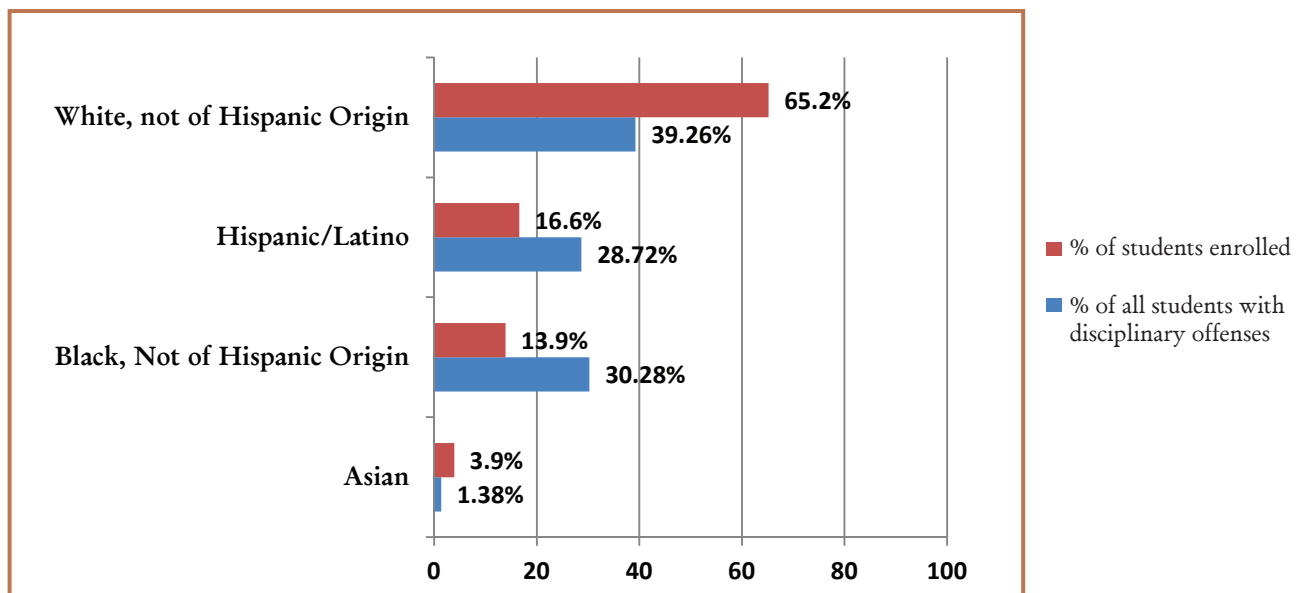
In Connecticut, children of color not only lack access to equitable educational opportunities, as mentioned in the 2010 report by the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, but to many other opportunities as well. It is for these reasons that policy makers and school leaders must consider any educational issues – from graduation rates to achievement test scores – in the context of race and culture.

## Discipline Gaps

While juvenile crime and detention rates have fallen in the state overall, the data for children of color remain alarming. The consequences for children of color tend to be more punitive, even for the same offenses, and the juvenile justice system makes it more difficult for children of color than for White children to reintegrate into their communities without further participation in the criminal justice system.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the influence of race and culture within the juvenile justice system seems to occur at every level of the decision-making process, resulting in the inequities in consequences between children of color and other youth.<sup>11</sup>

The same biases that contribute to the arrests of juveniles, especially for non-criminal acts, are operating in our classrooms. For example, Dr. Russell Skiba and his colleagues at Indiana University have found that students of color receive office discipline referrals for subjective behavioral infractions (e.g., disrespect) at a higher rate than White students. This disproportionate response, however, is not evident for more objective behavioral concerns, such as fighting.<sup>12</sup>

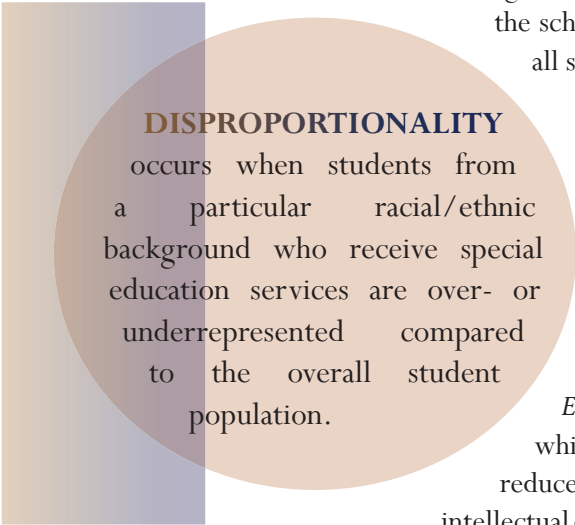
FIGURE 1: STATE-LEVEL DISCIPLINE DATA 2008-2009



**Disciplinary Offenses<sup>13</sup>:** Disciplinary offenses committed by students include all serious offenses, offenses involving drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, and all incidents resulting in suspension or expulsion. The count of students responsible for these incidents is unduplicated; that is, a student responsible for multiple incidents was counted only once. An unduplicated count of students reported as enrolled in the school in October, January, and June was used to estimate the total number of students who attended the school during the school year. The number of responsible students divided by this estimate yielded the percentage of responsible students.

## *Special Education*

National-level data reveal the over-identification of children of color in special education, particularly in the category of emotional disturbance (ED). African American and Native American children are 1.92 and 2 times, respectively, more likely to be labeled ED than White children.<sup>14</sup> To put these numbers in perspective, the U.S. Department of Education reported in 2000 that although African American children account for 14.8% of the school age population, they account for 26% of all students identified by the label ED.<sup>15</sup>



**DISPROPORTIONALITY** occurs when students from a particular racial/ethnic background who receive special education services are over- or underrepresented compared to the overall student population.

Historically in Connecticut, African American students were up to four times more likely to be identified as having mental retardation (i.e., an intellectual disability) than their White peers.<sup>16</sup> This significant disproportionality was addressed in the *P.J. et al. v. State of Connecticut, Board of Education, et al.* Settlement Agreement goals, which required Connecticut school districts to reduce the disparate identification of students with intellectual disability by racial and ethnic group. Similarly, as late as 2008, African American children in Connecticut were 1.8 times more likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed.<sup>17</sup> More recently, students have not been disproportionately identified for special education at the state level, according to recent annual performance reports (APRs). However, for certain districts, disproportionality across special education categories continues to be a persistent problem.

The consequences of this are enormous. Nationally, it has been found that somewhere between 42% and 60% of juvenile offenders have been identified as having a disability. This is at least three to six times the percentage in the public school population. And as noted earlier, African Americans and Latinos are overrepresented in the judicial system at both the juvenile and adult levels.



## *Graduation Rates*

In Connecticut, students who do not graduate from high school have higher incarceration rates and poorer outcomes than graduates in lifetime earnings, health, civic engagement, participation in the labor market, home ownership, and a host of social indicators.<sup>18</sup> The outcomes for students of color who drop out are even worse. When Black and native-born Latino students do not complete high school, employment rates among 16-24 year-olds are 33.7% and 43.5% respectively, compared to 46.5% for White high-school dropouts.<sup>19</sup> This is particularly troubling when the latest report of graduation rates in Connecticut indicates that Black, Latino, and English Language Learner dropout rates are over 20% (22.7%, 32%, and 39.1% respectively).<sup>20</sup>

Disparities in juvenile justice populations, identification of emotional disturbance, and graduation rates are simply a few examples that show the pervasiveness of racial disparities. The range of disparities in the data indicates that children in Connecticut and around our nation have very different experiences based primarily on the color of their skin. We believe that the root cause of this problem is largely adults and/or systems, demonstrating how attitudes at both individual and macro levels influence important life outcomes for all children – beginning with academic achievement.

## *Student Achievement*

While student performance rates on our state achievement tests (CMT and CAPT) tend to increase with income across racial/ethnic subgroups of students, performance also increases in a racially predictable pattern within each income bracket or subgroup. In addition, higher-income Black students are still sometimes outperformed or performing similarly to their low-income, White peers. (See Figures 2 through 5.) Although income and free and reduced lunch status are only proxies for wealth and socioeconomic status, the pattern should not be ignored.

Children  
in Connecticut  
have very different  
experiences based  
primarily on the  
**COLOR** of  
their **SKIN**.

# CONNECTICUT: Percent Proficient or Better on CMT Math and Reading by Race and Eligibility for Free or Reduced Price Meals, 2010

FIGURE 2-READING

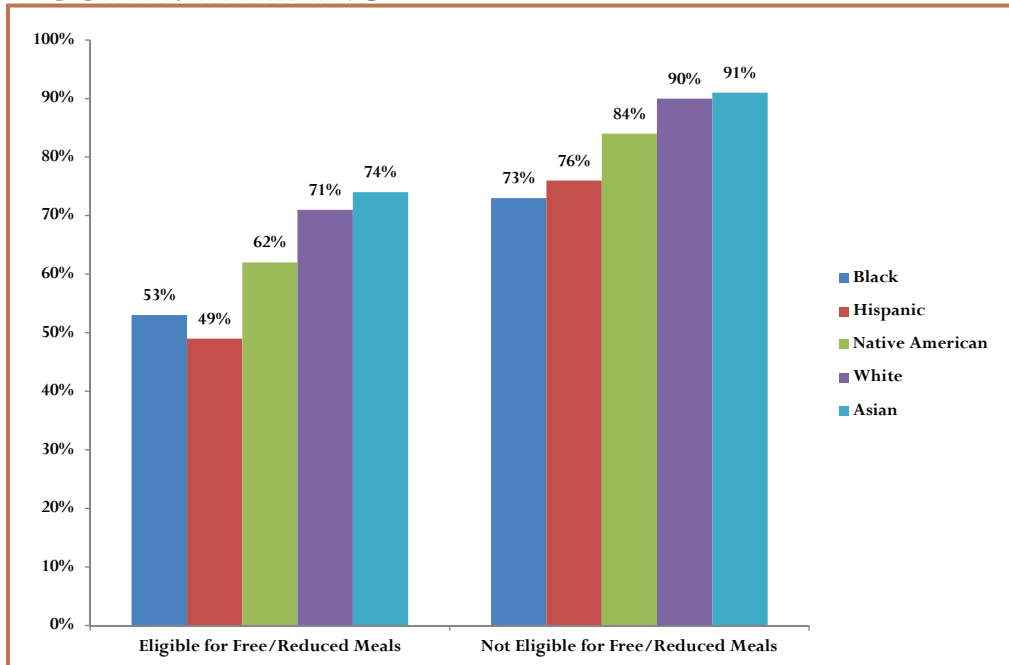
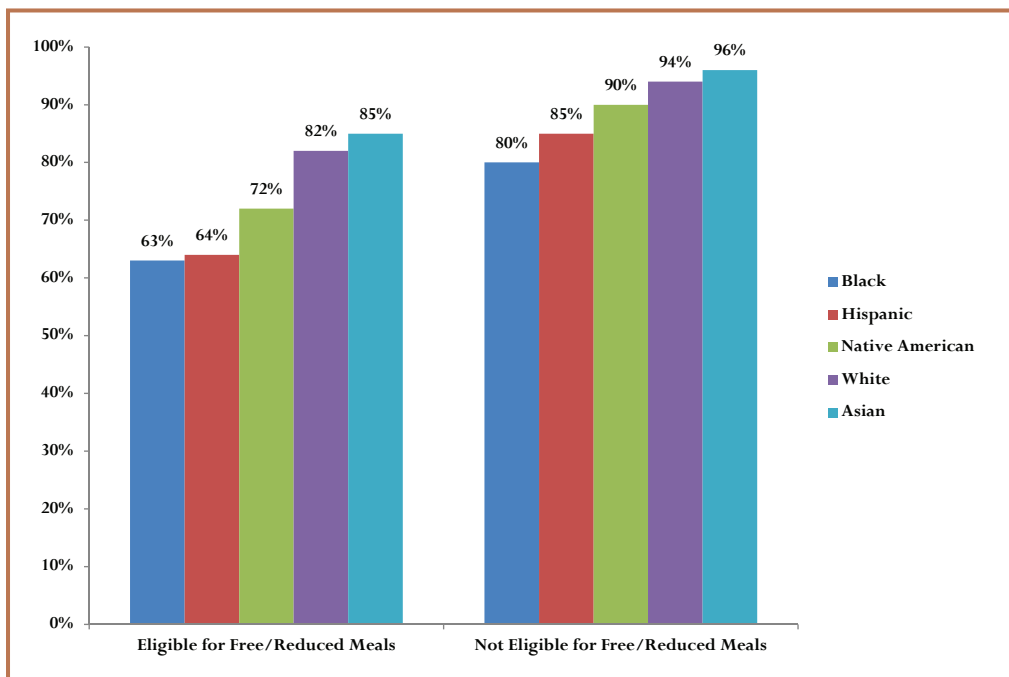


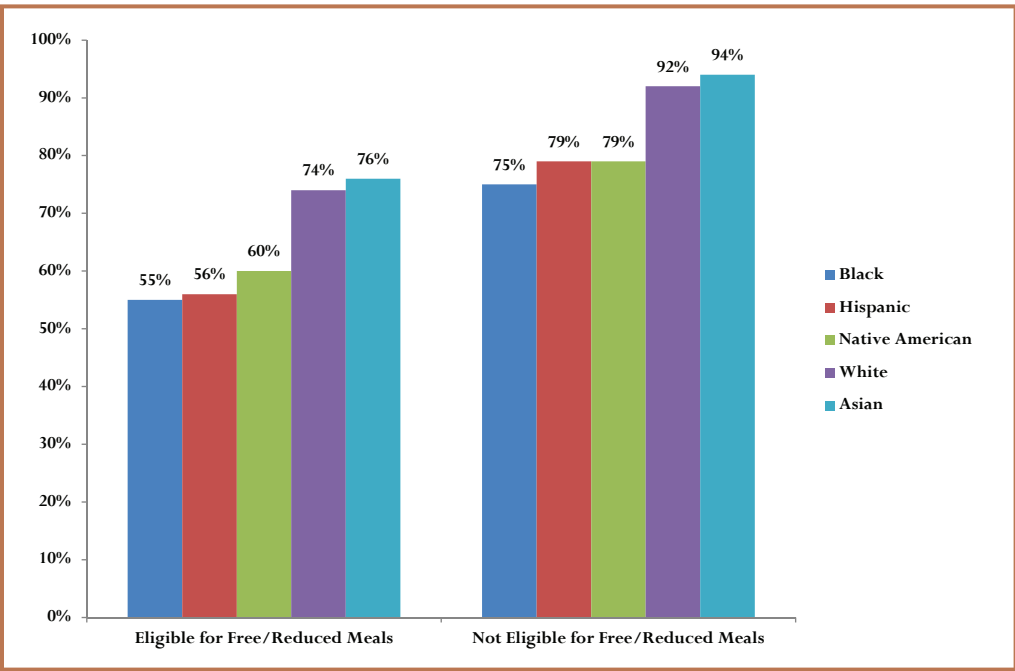
FIGURE 3-MATH



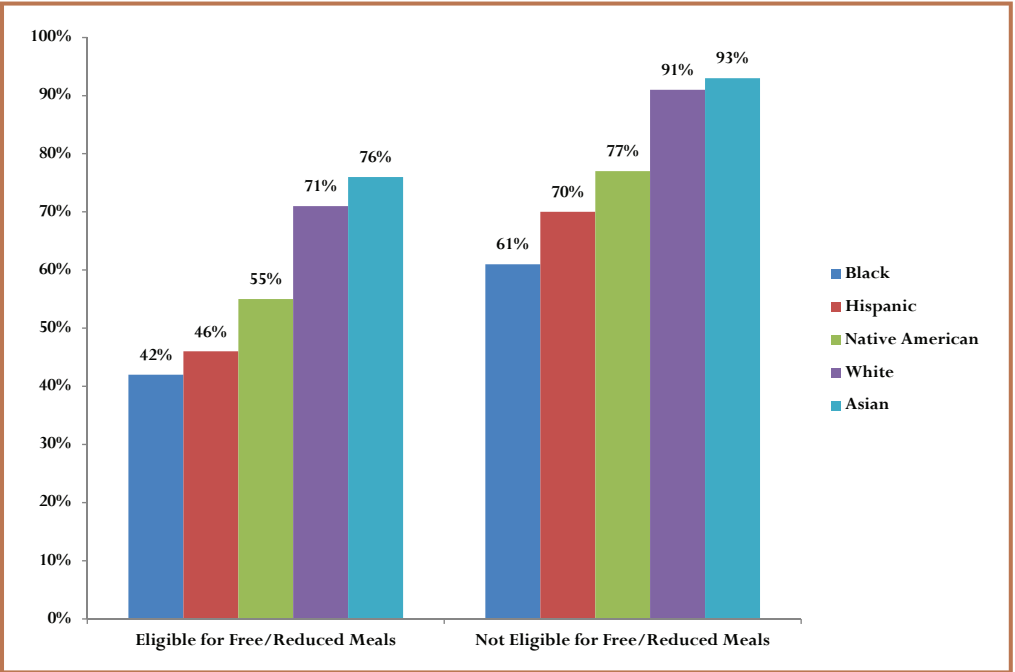
Given that race is a socio-political construct, that is, it has no biological or genetic basis<sup>21</sup>; given that there are no inherent cognitive differences amongst people of different races; given that, as educators, we are legally obligated to provide equal educational opportunities for all students; given that we claim to have district and school missions to produce equity in education in both the learning environments and student outcomes; and given that as educators, we so often – and usually very passionately – state that we believe all students can learn, such racial disparities in achievement data should not exist. We must ask ourselves then: How is it that we **CONTINUALLY REPRODUCE PATTERNS OF RACIAL INEQUITY** in Connecticut schools?

**CONNECTICUT: Percent Proficient or Better on CAPT Math and Reading by Race and Eligibility for Free or Reduced Price Meals, 2010**

**FIGURE 4-READING**



**FIGURE 5-MATH**



Source: Connecticut State Department of Education, February 2011.





### *More Than 'Achievement Gaps'*

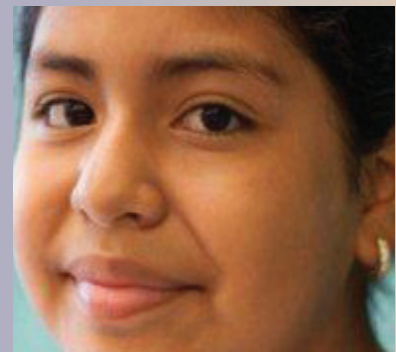
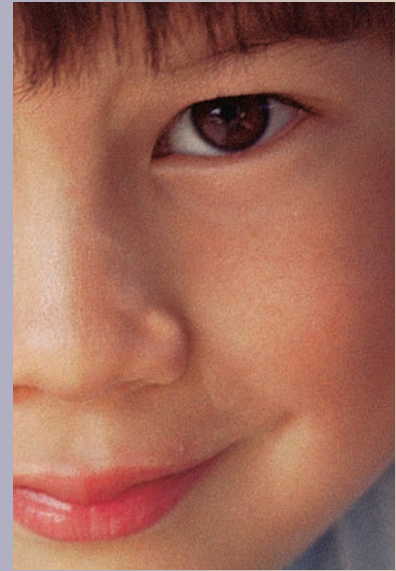
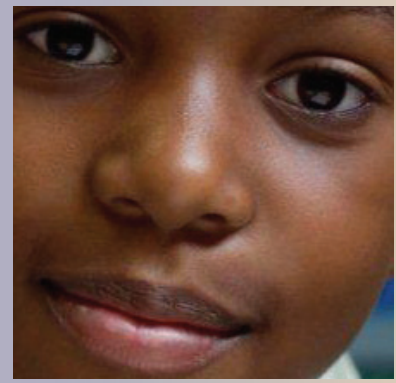
While the field of education tends to concentrate on achievement gaps, such a focus is often “wrong-headed and disingenuous,” according to some **critical race theorists**.<sup>22</sup> The concept of an “achievement gap” can be flawed because the groups being compared never begin at equal starting points.<sup>23</sup> While various gaps, such as income, health, and achievement are important to acknowledge and close, we should refer instead to opportunity gaps. Gloria Ladson-Billings and others urge us to look at larger, systemic disparities facing families and students of color, such as opportunities to lead healthier lives rather than health gaps; opportunities to accumulate greater wealth rather than income gaps; and opportunities to receive an education commensurate with their needs and cultural experience rather than achievement gaps.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that so many of our families and students of color in Connecticut are in our “poor” or “low income” subgroups and our lower achieving subgroups should be interpreted as the cumulative effects of systemic, societal racism. Any reports aimed at improving life outcomes for children, youth, and their families in Connecticut must examine data by both race and income. Systems and communities endeavoring to close “gaps” must delve deeply into the intersection of race and class, not to mention other aspects of identity.

**OPEN  
DIALOGUE**

allows educators, families, and community members to challenge long-held assumptions about students and families of color.

How do we eliminate the predictability of student outcomes by race? Answers run the gamut from more resources to more testing, to greater teacher accountability and better training. These solutions and many more have been touted and then implemented in the educational arena for decades. However, we believe that what is not being discussed – race and the impact of institutionalized racism on our educational system – is key to eliminating our racially predictable gaps. Open dialogue allows educators, families, and community members to challenge long-held assumptions about students and families of color. It supports understanding of why certain perceptions continue to exist, and it results in informed actions to deconstruct these perceptions in order to change teaching and learning.



**“We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.”**

**-Ronald Edmonds  
Educational Leadership, October 1979**

## **What Schools and Districts Can Do: Discourse and Action to Eliminate Systemic Inequities**

**W**E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1903 that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>25</sup> Over 100 years later, we continue to see that problem of the color-line in our schools today: incredible disparities between the educational outcomes of children of color and their White counterparts. “In nearly every category associated with positive academic outcomes,” according to Pedro Noguera of New York University, “students of color typically are underrepresented, and in categories associated with negative outcomes, they are overrepresented.”<sup>26</sup>

The state of Connecticut and the nation as a whole are currently confronted by what is being called the civil rights crisis of our time: the loss of our students of color to the racial predictability of the achievement gaps. But students of color in Connecticut are not failing; our educational system is failing them.

For centuries, we have avoided discussing institutionalized racism and its detrimental effects on our students of color as well as their White peers. Such avoidance is mainly due to the uncomfortable feelings and reactions brought about by racial discourse. Feelings of resentment and guilt are some of the most common emotions experienced by people who engage in racial discourse. Conversations about race and culture are not meant to be easy, but without them we will never begin to understand the root causes of our racial disparities and challenge our current thinking.



Educators within our school systems ask repeatedly for prescriptive strategies that will help them improve the academic achievement of students of color on high-stakes tests. What we need is a pedagogical approach that focuses not on racialized instructional strategies but on creating an educational environment that is culturally relevant and respectful. Based upon the work of researchers and practitioners in the field, SERC defines a culturally relevant and respectful environment as having the following elements:

- 1) *teachers who are highly aware of their own beliefs, attitudes, and biases and those of others;*
- 2) *students who are empowered to use their own cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives for academic success; and*
- 3) *a curriculum that engages and affirms both students' and teachers' identities, cultural and experiential reference points, and world views in the process of learning.*<sup>27</sup>

Only when instructional strategies are implemented in a context of mutual respect will we begin to see the impact of our efforts. A culturally and racially relevant approach allows educators to relate to students and allows students to connect to the curriculum and demonstrate their knowledge in meaningful ways.

## *Potential Solutions to Addressing Systemic Inequities*

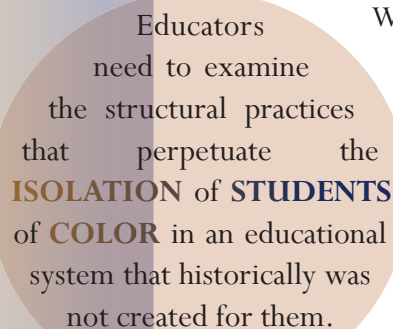
Creating equity at the district, school, and classroom levels requires this systemic and culturally relevant approach. The literature is replete with information on the essential elements of educational reform. SERC has considered five critical elements: Leadership, Professional Capacity, **School Climate**, School-Family-Community Partnerships, and Teaching & Learning.<sup>28</sup> These elements are essential in order to achieve systemic transformation in Connecticut education and ensure an equitable education for all Connecticut children.



## *Leadership*

In order to eradicate the racial predictability of the achievement gaps, leaders must have the skill, will, and knowledge to uproot the underlying factors that contribute to them – qualities that are often overlooked.<sup>29</sup> Educators need to examine the structural practices that perpetuate the isolation of students of color in an educational system that historically was not created for them. This requires leadership positioned to provide the necessary pressures and supports for the development of this skill, will, and knowledge.

Almost every approach to educational reform acknowledges the role of leaders in directing efficient and sustainable change. Therefore, educational reform efforts must begin with leaders who demand high expectations for all students. Any tendency of a district, school administration, faculty, and/or staff to rationalize the failure of students of color as “normal” must not be tolerated.



Educators need to examine the structural practices that perpetuate the **ISOLATION** of **STUDENTS** of **COLOR** in an educational system that historically was not created for them.

Whether that rationalization is one of complacency because of a history of persistent and pervasive failure, or abdication of responsibility because of poverty, or a misperception that certain families do not value education, does not matter. Leaders must challenge any attitudes and beliefs, including their own, that accept the failure of students of color.

To move to a climate of high expectations and achievement for all students, leadership must focus on assessment and instruction that are effective for all students and ensure that results are continually monitored against the goals set forward to improve academic outcomes. Leaders must facilitate opportunities for members of their staff and community to courageously dialogue about the intersection of race and education. The understandings generated by such dialogue will serve as the platform to develop structural systems, policies, and practices that lead to higher student achievement.

Leaders must assist school personnel and community members to clarify their understanding of the “forces that maintain the racial disparity status quo and constrain the potential success of strategies for change.”<sup>30</sup> We refer to this understanding as professional capacity.

## *Professional Capacity*

The need for highly qualified teachers is clear and legislatively mandated, and educators must master educational content and techniques. Professional capacity includes the attitudes and practices that are considered by many to be “just good teaching.” However, racial and cultural differences can impact the application of good teaching, since “we can’t teach what we don’t know.”<sup>31</sup> In his book by the same title, Gary Howard suggests that educators engage in deep and sustained self-reflection in order to become effective at implementing these practices.

To maximize professional capacity, these educators must be willing and able to reflect on the impact of their cultural and racial identity on their practice.<sup>32</sup> Educators should work collaboratively to:

- *identify the role race and culture play in driving the systems, policies, and practices that educators use to inspire student performance (instruction, assessment, and intervention);*
- *heighten their awareness of how cultural and racial identity underscore their own behavior and the behavior of their students and how both impact student performance; and*
- *develop the skills to engage in racial discourse that challenges traditional norms, traditions, and dispositions.*

This cannot happen in isolation. Educators must develop a deeper level of racial consciousness to challenge not only their own practices but also school practices and instructional decision-making. They must have the support of a school community that provides the structures, resources, and tools necessary to allow everyone to engage in this reflection and critical thinking about the impact of the adult mindset on student performance.

## *School Climate*

Central to systems change is climate. Absence of relationships in school may prompt students to redirect their attention toward seeking out people and places where they can connect. Noguera states that “[g]enerational differences, especially when compounded by difference in race and class, often make it difficult for adults to communicate effectively with youth.”<sup>33</sup> It has become increasingly important for educators to construct learning environments that provide for a variety of connecting points for all students, and especially for students of color where the links don’t already or obviously exist.



When relationships develop reciprocally, when there is a mutual knowing of and respect for one another, the core identity of both teachers and students remains intact and their talents are valued. The lack of response, conscious or unconscious, to racial and cultural differences can present a barrier for recognizing students' strengths, and therefore a barrier to relationship building. By examining and enhancing the relationships between educators and students, educators and families, and students and students, educators will be able to:

- *get closer to students' realities and better understand their needs;*
- *collaborate with the students and their families to develop a network of supports; and*
- *establish norms and systems whereby all stakeholders use efficient routines, common language, and a vision for success to meet agreed-upon performance goals.*



## *School-Family-Community Partnerships*

A positive school climate – which values and honors the students and families served – establishes the foundation for well-defined school-family-community relationships. These partnerships begin with the understanding and awareness that families from all races and all cultures have strengths and play a critical role in their children’s educational success. Families are their children’s first mentors, educators, and support system. Effective school-family-community partnerships are grounded in these understandings, mutual trust and respect, and shared responsibility for the educational success of children.

Research demonstrates that “culturally responsive,” “culturally appropriate,” and “culturally congruent” and effective schools have high levels of parental engagement and improved academic achievement for all students regardless of the racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic background of students.<sup>34</sup> Quite simply, families and communities are at the heart of students’ identities and experiences. A school or organization will not achieve equity and excellence for all of the students in its care if it does not acknowledge, understand, and include the families and communities of all students.<sup>35</sup>

There are three elements critical to building mutual trust, respect, and shared responsibility for education among home, school, and community that have a direct positive impact on student motivation, participation in programming, and success across subjects:

- 1) *intentional actions to engage families to strengthen student learning;*
- 2) *teacher efforts to become knowledgeable about students’ cultures and the local community that are employed in their lessons; and*
- 3) *endeavors to strengthen the network among community organizations to expand services for students and their families.*<sup>36</sup>

...well-defined school-family-community relationships...begin with the **UNDERSTANDING** and **AWARENESS** that families from all races and all cultures have strengths and play a critical role in their children’s educational success.

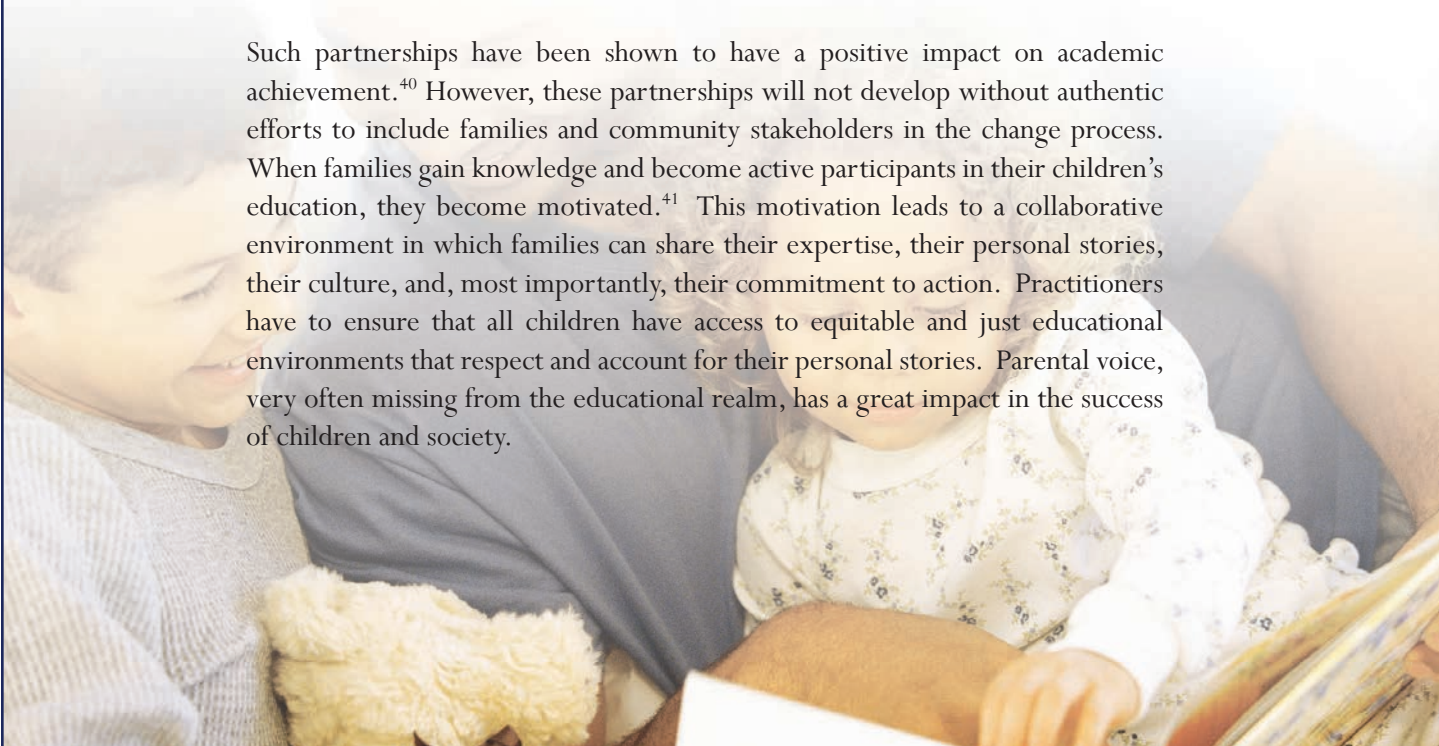
The relationships among schools, families, and communities are to be transformative and reflect the contributions of all races in a co-responsible community of support with a richly diverse group of peers, mentors, and allies, who ensure that children succeed in school.<sup>37</sup> Creating these relationships among families, schools, and communities is not always easy. It requires honesty, true commitment, and time.

To achieve the results of these partnerships among families, schools, and communities, partners must ensure that:

- 1) *families have access to all educational reform decisions that affect their children's success;*
- 2) *families become collaborative partners within the educational decision-making process;*
- 3) *educational systems acknowledge the valuable contributions and multiple perspectives of the families; and*
- 4) *educational systems create better opportunities and learning for all students.*<sup>38</sup>

The outcomes of these efforts – highly achieving students and successful schools – can be significant. Research shows that when families understand the educational system and its challenges, they become a source of support, understanding, and advocacy that education must not undervalue.<sup>39</sup> Families and community members are “**funds of knowledge**” about children, and building strong school-family-community partnerships allows educators to access the information that family and community members possess.

Such partnerships have been shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement.<sup>40</sup> However, these partnerships will not develop without authentic efforts to include families and community stakeholders in the change process. When families gain knowledge and become active participants in their children's education, they become motivated.<sup>41</sup> This motivation leads to a collaborative environment in which families can share their expertise, their personal stories, their culture, and, most importantly, their commitment to action. Practitioners have to ensure that all children have access to equitable and just educational environments that respect and account for their personal stories. Parental voice, very often missing from the educational realm, has a great impact in the success of children and society.



## *Teaching & Learning*

Instructional guidance systematically organizes curriculum content for students in a scope and sequence that is aligned across grade levels. The three elements of instructional guidance – (1) subject matter and pacing, (2) intellectual depth expected of students as they engage in learning experiences, and (3) pedagogical strategies, materials, and tools – are necessary for fostering and sustaining high student achievement.<sup>42</sup>

Most strategies to close gaps in achievement for students of color are short-lived or ineffective without a strong system of instructional guidance. Comprehensive reforms are necessary to transform schools and support the teaching strategies implemented in the classroom.

James A. Banks describes systemic reforms needed to create a school culture that empowers all students. Variables that need to be examined are grouping practices, the social climate of the school, assessment practices, extracurricular activities and participation, and staff expectations and responses to students from diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, and income groups.<sup>43</sup>

Educators must create an educational system that will foster a just and inclusive pluralistic society that all students and groups will perceive as legitimate. An important aim of the school curriculum should be to give students the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to help construct and to live in a public community in which all groups can and will participate:<sup>44</sup>

a curriculum that incorporates only the knowledge, values, experiences, and perspectives of mainstream powerful groups marginalizes the experiences of students of color.... Such curriculum will not foster an overarching American identity because students will view it as one that has been created and constructed by outsiders, people who do not know or understand their experience.<sup>45</sup>

By developing a culturally responsive comprehensive system that accounts for each of the five critical elements – Leadership, Professional Capacity, School Climate, School-Family-Community Partnerships, and Teaching & Learning – SERC strongly believes that equity in education can be achieved. To do it requires both talk and action of a transformational nature. Ending institutionalized racism is about the individual and collective commitment of policy makers and school leaders to change the results that systemically impact the lives of our children and families of color. It is essential that race is included in the discourse and that we make a collective commitment to actively deconstruct the practices that would otherwise guarantee that students – both students of color and White students – are educationally ill-prepared to function in a diverse and global society.

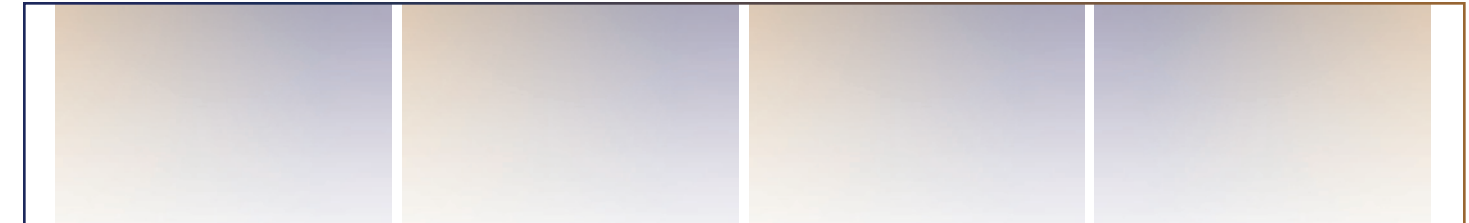




## SERC's Journey: A Reflection

**S**ERC began to focus on racial equity in 2003, after No Child Left Behind subgroup data began to reveal predictable racial disparities among and between subgroups. As we studied institutionalized racism, we understood that deconstructing systemic inequities would require us to engage in both personal and professional-level work and both internal and external professional development. Thus, we began a journey of self-discovery and self-evaluation alongside critical thinkers from the field of social justice, equity, and diversity; we were guided, supported, and challenged by Glenn Singleton, Calvin Terrell, Gary Howard, Pedro Noguera, Dr. Ken Hardy, Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, Dr. Sonia Nieto, Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade, and others. During this time, we learned more about the history of racism in the United States and the impact of institutionalized racism and its devastating effects on our students and their families.

We also understood that we could not ask schools to address race and institutionalized racism if we did not engage in a transformational approach ourselves. SERC understands that its own racial consciousness must continue to evolve in order both to become an equitable workplace and to authentically and effectively support educators and institutions in achieving their goal of equity for all students. For the last eight years, SERC has used a curriculum on racial equity and anti-racist leadership not only in its professional development for schools and districts, but also internally, to examine its own policies and procedures.



SERC has also established in-house professional development and structures to support its employees in their personal and professional journeys. By engaging in conversations about race and racism, employees heighten their awareness and deepen their knowledge about concepts and realities that might remain unconscious and/or about which people usually avoid talking. Both inside and outside the workplace, SERC staff members often find themselves considering their new insights about racial equity in their conversations, interactions, and activities.

As SERC continues on its own equity journey, its staff members, in their roles as resource and professional development providers, use what they have learned to help educators across Connecticut value diversity and affirm the identity of their students. In its partnerships with Connecticut schools, districts, the Connecticut State Department of Education, other organizations, families, and community leaders, SERC supports educators and others in examining their own culture, understanding and including the culture of their students and families, and cultivating environments in which to do so. Similarly, our efforts to improve student outcomes have begun with a commitment to strengthening our relationships with families and communities to ensure that our goals and

practices are culturally relevant and responsive to those we serve.

**“VISION IS NOT ENOUGH.**

*It must be combined with venture.*

*It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must step up the stairs.”*

- Václav Havel

As writer and former Czech president Václav Havel said, “Vision is not enough. It must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must step up the stairs.”<sup>46</sup> SERC acknowledges that we have not taken our transformational

approach alone. We would like to thank the anti-racist leaders who have taken steps alongside us, and invite others to join us. We cannot afford to ignore the impact of race and racism in our schools, in our institutional practices, and on student performance. We must make a deliberate and conscious choice to talk about race and act against racism if we intend to close and eliminate the racial predictability of Connecticut’s achievement gaps and make education equitable for all children.

# GLOSSARY

<b>Critical Race Theory (CRT)</b>	An intellectual and politically committed movement in American legal scholarship that studies race, racism, and power. Originating in American law schools, critical race theory has made its way into ethnic studies, political science, and education, and into a range of scholarly movements outside the United States. <sup>47</sup>
<b>Equity</b>	We define equity in education as the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education. All students and adults have the opportunity to participate fully and to experience success and human dignity while developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to contribute meaningfully to society. (SERC)
<b>Funds of knowledge</b>	The sources of knowledge that students gain, such as from their family and cultural backgrounds. <sup>48</sup>
<b>Institutionalized racism</b>	The differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. Institutionalized racism is normative, sometimes legalized, and often manifests as inherited disadvantage. <sup>49</sup>
<b>Intersectionality</b>	Intersectionality holds that the classical conceptualizations of oppression within society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and religion-based bigotry, do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination. <sup>50</sup>
<b>Race</b>	The concept of race as used by the Census Bureau reflects self-identification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify. These categories are socio-political constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. Furthermore, the race categories include both racial and national-origin groups. <sup>51</sup>
<b>Racial predictability</b>	A foreseeable pattern of achievement between the highest- and lowest-performing students that can be attributed to the group based on their racial identification. (SERC)
<b>Racism</b>	A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. <sup>52</sup>
<b>School climate/culture</b>	The feelings and attitudes elicited by a school’s environment and a “multidimensional construct that includes physical, social, and academic dimensions.” <sup>53</sup>

# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> SERC, created by statute, was established in 1969 as the Special Education Resource Center. In 2005, SERC became the State Education Resource Center, reflecting the belief that schools are most effective when general education and special education function as one system. To this end, SERC offers a broad array of services and programs in areas important to both general and special education.
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- <sup>3</sup> 2009 NAEP results. For example, while overall Connecticut ranked eighth out of 50 states on 4th-grade math (compared to 16th in 2007) and tenth out of 50 states on 8th-grade math (compared to 29th in 2007), rankings for Connecticut’s low income, African American (Black), and Hispanic (Latino) students were much worse: 4th-grade math rankings were 39th, 26th, and 33rd respectively; and 8th-grade math rankings were 38th, 22nd, and 35th respectively.
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- <sup>6</sup> See the ruling at <http://www.sheffmovement.org/pdf/sheff1996decision.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> Retrieved from the Greater Hartford Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) Web page, <http://www.choiceeducation.org/hartford-region-open-choice-program>.
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- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
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