

History of the State Education Resource Center

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Issue

Provide (1) background information on the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and (2) explain whether local boards of education are required to follow SERC policies.

State Education Resource Center (SERC)

SERC has existed for more than 50 years, starting out as a resource center focused on special education services. Eventually, through legislative action in 2014, it became a quasi-public agency with a broader mission and a 12-member board appointed by the governor and legislative leaders. It currently has more than 30 staff members with offices on Industrial Park Road in Middletown, according to its [website](#).

According to its 2018-2019 annual [report](#), SERC began in 1969 as a special education resource center housed at St. Joseph's College (now the University of St. Joseph) in West Hartford through a contract between the college and the State Department of Education (SDE). In 1975 the legislature established SERC in statute (PA 75-115), referring to it as the Special Education Resource Center, and committing continued financial support for the center through federal special education funds.

In 2005 ([PA 05-245](#), §§ 23 & 24), the legislature changed the organization's name to the State Education Resource Center and expanded its mission beyond special education to include activities promoting educational equity and excellence, including early childhood education, the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and efforts to close the achievement gap between socio-economic groups. It was also charged with continuing to operate the Special Education Resource Center as part of SERC.

In 2014, the legislature enacted [PA 14-212](#) that reconstituted SERC as a quasi-public agency to assist the State Board of Education (SBE) with essentially the same mission. The legislation was, in part, a response to two Auditors of Public Accounts reports ([2010](#) and [2013](#)) that recommended that SERC's legal status be clarified as either an independent entity, such as a non-profit or a quasi-public, or a part of SDE (for example, its employees were not state employees and a private entity, the Rensselaer Hartford Graduate Center, served as its fiduciary for payroll and other administrative functions).

[PA 14-212](#) transferred the responsibilities of the former center of the same name to the newly reconstituted one and gave SERC the same rights, duties, and responsibilities as other quasi-public agencies (codified at [CGS §§ 10-357a to -357g & 1-120](#)). The law permits the education commissioner to allocate funds to the reconstituted SERC to provide professional development services, technical help and evaluation activities, policy analysis, and other forms of assistance to boards of education, SDE, charter schools, state technical high schools, and other education providers.

SERC Policy and Local Boards of Education

SERC has no authority to impose policies on local or regional boards of education. Although on occasion, the legislature has given it tasks to complete that, through legislation, became mandates on boards of education. [PA 19-12](#), for example, required SERC to develop a high school course in Black and Latino studies to submit to the SBE for review and approval (SBE [approved](#) it in December 2020). Under the law, all school districts must offer the approved course in the 2022-23 school year. Thus, the authority to require the course came from the legislature enacting a law and not from SERC.

JM:kc