



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JAN 08 2009

The Honorable Mark K. McQuillan, Ph.D.  
Commissioner  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06145

Dear Commissioner McQuillan:

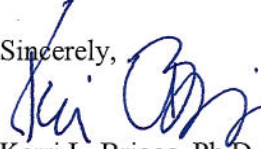
As we approach our seventh year of implementing the accountability provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, I want to take a moment to thank you and your colleagues for all your hard work to help realize the goals of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which has led to real and meaningful improvements in student achievement. These outcomes are due, in no small part, to the efforts of the dedicated educators in your state. We have seen an increased attention on high expectations for every child, an improvement in student performance across the board and a decrease in achievement gaps.

As Secretary Spellings is fond of saying, "what gets measured, gets done." With that in mind, I want to take this opportunity to update you on the status of some NCLB cornerstones with respect to Connecticut. Detailed information on specific components of your state's assessment and accountability system is contained in an attachment to this letter.

- Assessment system: An assessment system that produces valid and reliable results is fundamental to an accountability system that holds schools and districts accountable for educating all students. Information regarding both the reading/language arts and mathematics assessment system used in determining adequate yearly progress for schools and districts in your state as well as details of the 2007–08 administration of science assessments are attached.
- Accountability components: The Department's new Title I regulations provide for greater scrutiny to states' accountability systems, including establishing a uniform and more accurate measure of calculating high school graduation rates that is comparable across states and requiring that states ensure that statistical measures maximize the inclusion of students and student subgroups in accountability determinations. Hence, the regulations also require that all states submit portions of their Accountability Workbook for peer review. In the attachment to this letter you will find information on Connecticut's minimum group size, annual measurable objectives, confidence interval, full academic year definition, and graduation rate.
- Departmental flexibilities: Over the past several years, the Secretary has offered several flexibilities to states, such as growth model and differentiated accountability pilots, assessing students with disabilities, and discretionary grant programs, such as the Teacher Incentive Fund, Enhanced Assessment Grants, and State Longitudinal Data System Grants. I am pleased to note that Connecticut is participating in several of these endeavors.
  - In 2006, Connecticut received an Enhanced Assessment Grant of \$758,052.
  - Connecticut received a Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant of \$1,500,714.
  - General Supervision Enhancement Grant: Connecticut, along with DC, Kentucky, Georgia, and Puerto Rico, is working towards the development of an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. (Year 1: \$1,999,997; Year 2: \$1,499,997; and Year 3: \$1,499,997)

400 MARYLAND AVE. S.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20202  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

In addition, for your information, I am enclosing a file that provides information across all states on the current assessment status, participation in flexibilities offered by the Department, AYP information, and discretionary grants. I wish you continued success in raising the achievement in Connecticut. NCLB has focused our attention on closing achievement gaps and increasing the awareness of those students who have often been left behind: economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with you and all your colleagues across the country on such important issues.

Sincerely,  
  
Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.

Enclosures

cc: Governor M. Jodi Rell  
George Michna

## Assessment System

Your assessment system met the requirements to be considered *Fully Approved with Recommendations*. This means that Connecticut's assessment system includes assessments in grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. I encourage you to consider whether there are any areas in which the Department can provide or facilitate technical assistance to Connecticut in meeting the statutory or regulatory requirements or as you consider changes to your current assessment system.

- Connecticut's science assessments are not yet fully compliant.
  - In 2007–08, the Department required that the state meet four minimal criteria related to the content area of science: have science content standards; have a general and alternate science assessment; include all students in one of the science assessments (i.e., either the general or alternate); and report the results of the science assessments. Connecticut has not yet met these requirements.
  - Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, science assessments will be included in the states' assessment status. For additional detail, please see the enclosed fact sheet.
- I know that Connecticut submitted evidence regarding your general and alternate science assessments for review from October 25 through November 2. My staff will be sharing additional information from the peer notes and formal feedback as soon as possible.
- Connecticut is developing an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAAS).

## Accountability System

- Minimum group size (the state-defined minimum number of students necessary to have valid and reliable AYP determinations): Connecticut's minimum group size is 40. (The average across all states is approximately 30 students.)
- Annual measurable objectives (AMO) (the yearly target for the percentage of students required to be proficient or above for a school to make AYP):
  - 2008–09: Connecticut's goal for this year is 79 percent of students scoring proficient in grades 3-8 and 81 percent in high school in reading/language arts and 82 percent for grades 3-8 and 80 percent for high school in mathematics.
  - AMO type: Connecticut set its AMOs consistent with the statutory requirements, using a stair-step method. This means that AMOs increase in equal increments every three years.
- Confidence interval: The state uses a confidence interval of 99%. It also uses a standard error of measure for small group calculations.
- Full academic year definition (for purposes of determining whether a student's score must be included in AYP determinations): In Connecticut, a student must be enrolled from October 1<sup>st</sup> to test administration in order to be included in AYP determinations.
- Graduation rate:
  - Currently, Connecticut is using a graduation rate that can be described as a completer rate, which means Connecticut divides the number of graduates by the number of graduates plus the dropouts from each of the previous four years.
  - As required by the recently issued Title I regulations, states must report graduation rate data, in the aggregate and disaggregated by subgroup, using the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate beginning with report cards providing assessment results for the 2010-11 school year.
  - The graduation rate target Connecticut requires for the district or school to make AYP is 70 percent or some improvement over the previous year.
  - According to the National Governor's Association 2008 report *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*, Connecticut should have capability of calculating the NGA Compact 4-year graduation rate in 2010.

## **SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT CONNECTICUT MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR SCIENCE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS**

### **2.0 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS**

1. Documentation of the standard setting process, including demonstration of involvement of diverse stakeholders, for the CMT and Skills Checklist.
2. Documentation reporting separately the number and percent of students with disabilities: assessed against alternate achievement standards; assessed on alternate assessments against grade-level standards; and included in the regular assessment with and without accommodations.

### **3.0 FULL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

1. Evidence documenting the CAPT and Skills Checklist measure higher order thinking skills and students' understanding of challenging academic content.

### **4.0 - TECHNICAL QUALITY**

1. Evidence demonstrating test and item scores for the CMT, CAPT, and Skills Checklist are related to internal and external variables as intended.
2. Documentation of the standard setting process for the CMT and Skills Checklist.
3. Documentation of assessment reliability for the CMT and Skills Checklist.
4. Reports providing the conditional standard error of measurement and student classification at each cut score for all science assessments.
5. Evidence documenting generalizability for all relevant sources for the CMT and Skills Checklist.
6. Documentation of a system for monitoring and improving the on-going quality of each science assessment.
7. Evidence of a plan to evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of each science assessment.
8. Evidence indicating that the scores of students with disabilities and limited English proficient students that are based on accommodated administrations allow for valid inferences of student knowledge and skills, and that the scores can be combined meaningfully with scores from non-accommodated administrations.

### **5.0 - ALIGNMENT**

1. Evidence documenting the alignment of the CMT, CAPT, and Skills Checklist to the State's academic content and achievement standards.
2. Evidence demonstrating that CAPT items reflect the same degree of cognitive complexity as the academic content standards.
3. Evidence of ongoing processes or procedures to maintain and improve the alignment of the assessments and standards over time.

### **6.0 INCLUSION**

1. Documentation demonstrating the participation of all students in the CMT and Skills Checklist.

2. Documentation demonstrating the participation of all required subgroups, including the migrant student subgroup, for the CMT, CAPT, and Skills Checklist.

## **7.0 - REPORTING**

1. Evidence documenting that the State's reporting system facilitates appropriate, credible, and defensible interpretation and use of science assessment results.
2. Documentation demonstrating the participation of all students in the CMT and Skills Checklist science assessments.
3. Participation data and assessment results for the subgroup of migrant students.
4. Student reports for each assessment that express results in terms of the State's achievement standards in science.
5. Evidence demonstrating individual student reports are delivered to parents, teachers, and principals as soon as possible after the assessment is administered.
6. Evidence documenting the production of itemized score analyses by subdomains or standards so that parents, teachers, and principals can interpret and address the specific needs of students.