



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Improving Participation Rates on State Assessments

February 29, 2016

Goals of the Roundtable

- Review the importance of test participation
- Review participation requirements (state and federal)
- Identify the influences upon participation
- Explore existing resources
- Share and discuss promising practices
- Discuss short term and long term strategies

Why is Participation Important?

Participation in state assessments is a matter of educational equity.



Why is Participation Important?

Full participation in the assessment program is an important means to ensure that the public education system is delivering on the promise of high academic expectations and college and career readiness for each and every student.



Why is Participation Important?

The validity of conclusions one can derive from assessment results is partially dependent on the percentage of students who participated in the assessment.



Why is Participation Important?

Federal legislation: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires all states to:

- implement “high quality yearly student academic assessments.” 20 U.S.C. § 6311(b)(3)(A)
- provide for... the participation in such assessments of all students.” 20 U.S.C. § 6311(b)(3)(C)
- Each state’s ESEA Flexibility Waiver is in effect until August 2016
- States are transitioning to the re-authorized federal statute (ESSA) and awaiting federal regulations



Why is Participation Important?

Connecticut legislation requires that “each student enrolled in grades three to eight, inclusive, and grade eleven in any public school shall, annually, take a mastery examination...” C.G.S. §10-14n

Both federal and state law require administration of annual assessments in public schools in certain grades and subjects.

These laws do not include a provision for parents to “opt out” their children from taking state tests.

There are consequences for states and districts that do not meet the participation threshold.

There are no penalties for students and families for not participating, however, there may be *unintended consequences* that have an effect on students and families in the school district (i.e. federal funding).



Participation Expectation in Connecticut

Every school and district is expected to have 100% of students participate in a universal annual assessment.

This is the participation rate standard for the ALL Students group **and** the High Needs subgroup in ALL the tested subject areas (i.e., English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science).

Compliance problems arise when participation falls below the federal limit of 95% participation.



Calculation Considerations

- A group is evaluated for participation only if it has at least 20 students who should have been tested.
- At the district level, all students (including those in outplaced facilities) are included.
- At the school level, only those students at that facility are included.
- All tests in the subject area are considered (i.e., the standard and any alternate assessment).



Differentiated System (District)

- All students and High Needs participation rates in all subjects is:
 - Level 1: At least 95%
 - Level 2: At least 90%
 - Level 3: At least 80%
 - Level 4: Below 80% in even **one** rate
- Districts in Level 3 and 4: Funds withheld if participation in 2015-16 fails to meet Level 2 criteria.



School Level

If school fails to meet Level 1 criteria, then:

- School cannot be classified as a Category 1 school (starting with 2015-16 data)
- School cannot be identified as a “School of Distinction”



2014-15 Participation Rate Results

- Level 1 (at least 95%): 127 districts
 - Level 2 (at least 90%): 41 districts
 - Level 3 (at least 80%): 17 districts
 - Level 4 (below 80%): 10 districts
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- Primary challenge was in Grade 11.



Statewide Participation Rates *Exceed* 95%

	All Students	High Needs
English Language Arts	96.1%	96.2%
Mathematics	95.8%	96.0%
Science	98.9%	98.1%



How to Tailor Your Communication to the Needs of Families Regarding Annual Assessment

Family Position on Annual Assessment

Guiding Principles for Communication regarding Annual Assessment

Families who support and are comfortable with annual assessment

Percentage of Families

- Provide year round factual information
- Offer large group learning opportunities
- Be available for discussion or questions

Families who may be new to, uncertain, or concerned about annual assessment

- Provide year round factual information
- Seek out families and identify concerns
- Offer large, small, or 1:1 group learning opportunities
- Direct families to resources (people or materials)

Families who are strongly opposed to annual assessment and refuse participation

- Provide year round factual information
- Be respectful of the family's stance on assessment
- Offer large, small, or 1:1 group learning opportunities
- Be open to ongoing discussion

Develop a Communication Plan

Sample Resources

1. [Communication Self-Assessment Rubric](#) From the Reform Support Network & U.S. Department of Education (*Designed for State Education Agencies but equally applicable to schools & districts*)
2. **School or District Communication Plans for Assessment**
(Handout: Slide Deck on Communication Planning)
3. Plan a Yearlong Calendar Of Communication
(Sample: Next Slide)



A Sample Yearlong Communication Plan

<p style="text-align: center;">September</p> <p>Open House Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Teacher Talking Points that tie annual assessment to standards and annual assessment, but annual assessment is just one indicator of performance. • CSDE Parent Guides in six languages http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2748&q=335764 • Include pie chart of school year instructional hrs. & annual assessment hrs. 	<p style="text-align: center;">February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a FAQ about Annual Assessment for local paper. CSDE sample http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/smarter_balanced/reporting_backtoschool_smarterbalanced_faq.pdf • Send annual assessment grade level schedule including days, times • Hold “<u>Let’s Talk It Through</u>” Session #2 (presentation, panel discussion and Q & A) • Contact individual parents and schedule meetings if needed
<p style="text-align: center;">October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter</u>: Emphasize importance of assessment to measure all children and continuously improve on many indicators. Provide facts on federal law (both ESEA and now ESSA) related to participation. • <u>Presentation #1</u>: School performance presentation using annual assessment data as one indicator. CSDE edit-able PowerPoint for presenting last year’s results http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2748&q=335628 • <u>Presentation #2</u>: for parents new to annual assessments (CSDE Back to School PowerPoint) http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2748&q=335628 	<p style="text-align: center;">March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write an update on Annual Assessment for local paper. Include information about technology enhancements and include link to practice test. http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/ • <u>Newsletter</u>: Tips for students and parents (breakfast, good night’s sleep, just do your best) • Contact individual parents and schedule meetings if needed
<p style="text-align: center;">November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter</u>: Overview of annual assessment. Provide parents access to exploring the test http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/ • Survey parents to identify needs for information and concerns about annual assessment and publish survey results. 	<p style="text-align: center;">April</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter</u>: Smarter Balanced Sample Individual Student Reports (will be updated by CSDE) http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2748&q=335628 • Scheduling calls to parents to check in on student experiences
<p style="text-align: center;">December</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter Insert</u>: Provide “right sized” testing times by grade and test component (now 2 hours shorter) http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/smarter_balanced/Student_Assessment_News_November_25_2014.pdf • Having identified concerns from survey, invite parents who are worried or uncertain about annual assessment to “<u>Let’s Talk It Through</u>” Session #1 (presentation, panel discussion and Q & A) • Schedule individual parent meetings if needed 	<p style="text-align: center;">May</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter</u>: Achievement Level Descriptors http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2748&q=335628 • Scheduling calls to parents to check in on student experiences
<p style="text-align: center;">January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter Insert</u>: Provide list of Universal Supports used in assessment • Communication for parents of English learners and students with disabilities – Accommodations • Contact individual parent and schedule meetings if needed 	<p style="text-align: center;">June</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Newsletter</u>: Send links to CSDE Parent Guides in six languages for next grade http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2748&q=335764 • Thank parents and students for cooperation on annual assessment

Use a Variety of Communication Strategies

- Newsletters, announcements, and flyers
- Post assessment information on district and school Web sites
- Remind families via social media or automatic calling systems
- Capitalize on your local communication avenues (newspaper, radio, public access TV, public bulletin boards, town offices, etc.)
- Provide materials to your community partners



Offer Families Group Learning Opportunities

Survey and Identify

- Families' needs for information
- Families' key concerns

Provide Family Learning Opportunities That Match Parents' Needs

- Vary the group size and venues
- Make annual assessment presentations short
 - Focus on the identified families information needs or concerns
- Consider parent and student panel discussions
- Provide experiential learning
 - Include practice tests, sample reports, brochures
 - Show the universal supports available to all students
 - Have older students explain to younger students

Collect feedback at the events

- Use formal evaluations or informal exit tickets



Direct Families To Resources (people or materials)

National research on education stakeholders shows families trust teachers most for information

- Make sure teachers are informed and have or can access parent information on annual assessment

The CSDE provides ongoing communication toolkits that are updated annually

- [Student Assessment Page](#)
- [CSDE Communication toolkits](#)
- [SBAC](#)
- [SAT](#)

Other Resources:

- [Smarter Balanced Practice Test](#)
- [National PTA Parent Materials](#)
- [National PTA Position Statement on Annual Assessment](#)



Direct Families To Resources (people or materials)

Other Resources:

- [Achieve the Core Parent and Community Resources](#)
- [GreatKids State Test Guide for Parents](#)
- [CCSSO messaging toolkit](#)
- [Be A Learning Hero](#)



Educators' Roles in Improving Participation

Administrators

1. Provide staff talking points on purpose of assessment
2. Communicate expectations with school staff about modeling a positive attitude
3. Establish an orderly testing plan and positive testing environment
4. Make state assessment part of the academic culture
 - Employ student voice in this work
 - Collaborate with faculty and celebrate successes with faculty and students before and after testing



Teachers

1. Communicate with students and families about annual assessments
2. Model a positive attitude about the test
3. Encourage students to do their best
4. Ensure students understand the purpose of the test and why it is important
5. Explain how the results are used



Strategies to Improve Participation

Use scores to directly inform parents and students of the benefits of test participation

- Sample report and cover letter to parents who refused the assessment to explain what they would have received
- At the high school level, include how the testing can be used for college admissions

Emphasize specific benefits

- Explain to families and students how the assessment is part of a continuum that helps with preparation for college and career
- Draw actionable insights from the assessments to illustrate curriculum and instructional effectiveness



Strategies to Improve Participation

Link testing to policies that improve education

- Meet with school boards to use the data to help schools improve programmatically and use resources effectively

Partner with community organizations

- Use their trusted voices to help educate the public about the value of the assessments

Invest in groups that reach families and students

- Proactively disseminate information about assessments
- Hold briefings in advance of testing periods to give facts about the assessments



Promising Practices to Increase Participation ...from Connecticut Educators

Some highlights from your colleagues
in other districts.



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