

West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Item: State Assessment Update

Meeting date: February 26, 2014

From: Dr. Nancy DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Through: Karen L. List, Superintendent

Background

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (later amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) requires all states to implement “high quality yearly student academic assessments” 20 U.S.C. § 6311(b)(3)(A). Since the mid 1980s, Connecticut had contracted the development of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and later the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) to meet this federal requirement for students in grades 3-8 and 10 respectively. Under ESEA flexibility, the US Department of Education has waived many of the requirements of NCLB, but it has not exempted Connecticut (nor any state) from testing all students. The Connecticut General Statutes also reflect the requirement to annually test “all students in grades three through eight inclusive and grade ten or eleven” Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-14n (b)(1). With the adoption of the Common Core standards in July of 2010, Connecticut needed to revamp or replace its existing state tests (excluding science) in order to align to its new standards.

Rather than create its own new assessments, Connecticut entered into a collaborative partnership with sister states to develop a state assessment aligned to the new standards. Two multistate consortia, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (SBAC) and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) were awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 to develop an assessment system aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by the 2014-15 school year. Connecticut, along with 24 other states and territories, joined Smarter Balanced and acting as a governing state, we have helped to lead and shape the work of the consortia.

In preparation for the change from CMT and CAPT to Smarter Balanced (SBAC) assessments, Connecticut petitioned the US Department of Education to allow local school districts flexibility to administer the SBAC (field test) assessments in lieu of the CMT and CAPT in 2013-14. West Hartford, along with approximately 90% of all other Connecticut districts chose to take advantage of this flexibility to avoid “double-testing” students and to better prepare our students for the operational SBAC assessments in 2014-15. All Connecticut school districts will be required to give the SBAC assessments as the mandatory state assessment in 2014-15, marking the end of the CMT and CAPT.

This year, all students in grades three through eight and eleven will participate in the Smarter Balanced Field Test (large scale trials). Testing is computer based but will not be computer adaptive until the 2014-15 administration. Testing for both mathematics and literacy is broken into two major components, the content area computer based test and the content specific performance task.

**Agenda Item:
VI.B.3.**

The design of tests differs from the CMT and CAPT in which individual questions were specifically aligned (one-to-one) to individual standards. The Smarter Balanced assessments utilize a more holistic evidence based approach in which questions are aligned to a shorter set of specific learning targets that encapsulate several standards into a cohesive area of focus. This design provides teachers a better schema to address depth of understanding and critical areas of focus within courses and grades. Test feedback will follow test design with feedback disaggregated across the four major claims for each content area:

English Language Arts/Literacy

- Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.
- Students can produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences.
- Students can employ effective speaking and listening skills for a range of purposes and audiences.
- Students can engage in research/inquiry to investigate topics, and to analyze, integrate, and present information.

Mathematics

- Students can explain and apply mathematical concepts and interpret and carry out mathematical procedures with precision and fluency.
Students can solve a range of complex well-posed problems in pure and applied mathematics, making productive use of knowledge and problem solving strategies.
- Students can clearly and precisely construct viable arguments to support their own reasoning and to critique the reasoning of others.
- Students can analyze complex, real-world scenarios and can construct and use mathematical models to interpret and solve problems.

Test items are drawn from an expansive pool eliminating many of the test security constraints that existed with a static form test. This provides schools with greater flexibility when scheduling testing and providing accommodations such as extended time. The testing window for 2013-14 opens in mid-March and runs through early June; our schools will begin testing at the beginning of the window with aims of having testing completed by the end of April. Testing will be structured to keep grade levels in synch relative to the test taken (i.e. ELA grade 3 testing occurs during the same relative period of time), however schools will conduct testing by classroom, team or grade based on available computers. The nature of the test design eliminates the need to test all students at a grade level at the same time as well as the requirement to conduct all testing in a single sitting. In fact, the expectation is for schools to devise schedules that address state testing differently than in the past; essentially to provide students a testing experience that tackles the volume of required testing in shorter more management chunks that also doesn't interrupt the typical instructional schedule for the entire school.

The Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment is working closely with Information Technology to monitor our technology infrastructure and readiness for testing. We are confident that we are well poised for testing based on the length of the testing window and all of the improvements to our network over the past two years. Middle and high schools have adequate numbers of machines that will enable testing large groups of students. Elementary schools have sufficient technology to test up to two classrooms at one time (on average) and most will run two test sessions (servicing four classrooms) in a single day. Testing periods are shorter by design prolonging the total number of days in the testing window for the school, but the number of days for a single classroom will be more manageable and provide a much better assessment experience for the student. All schools have provided some level of professional development on the new assessments for

their staff and are in the throes of planning or implementation of practice testing with students to familiarize them with the computer based testing format.

Qualities of the Student Experience

While total testing time remains approximately the same, students will take tests in shorter segments spread out over a longer period. This change and flexibility within scheduling should improve the testing experience for all students. Testing is computer based and will be adaptive in the operational years (2014-15 and beyond) enabling all students to enjoy the same level of success or frustration as well as providing more detailed feedback on student performance at the two extremes. Tests contain both selected and constructed response items and may feature the use of embedded technology tools. Test accommodations and designated supports are available to a broader range of students, beyond students with an individualized education or 504 plans. Through the use of both embedded and non-embedded universal tools, the assessment takes a universal design for learning approach to provide all students with access to processes and supports to maximize their performance (untimed testing, dictionary for essay composition, etc.).

The English Language Arts/Literacy test will assess students' reading, writing, listening and language skills (appropriate to grade level expectations as outlined within the content standards). Students should expect to respond to reading passages in a variety of response formats, including selected response, short answer, and brief writing assignments that require they cite evidence from the source text(s). Questions range from basic comprehension, main idea and key detail, author's craft, to interpretation and analysis. Students may be asked to write the ending of a story, explain how the author's use of a flashback scene impacts the story, identify a story's theme or moral, or possibly attend to grammatical conventions. Students may navigate multiple text selections and be asked to compare and contrast perspectives presented within the pieces. Text selections will include both literary and informational pieces targeted at the interest and reading levels of the student. A longer performance task will assess a student's writing ability based on a fully developed prompt that identifies the context, audience and purpose for the writing. Performance tasks are scored on a 10-point rubric for elaboration/evidence, organization/structure, and conventions. Rubrics are published and teachers make use of these during instruction to ensure students understand the expectations for quality writing.

The mathematics test will assess students' understanding of both skills and content as well as their ability to communicate their reasoning and problem solve. The test is designed to emphasize the 2-4 critical areas of focus identified for each grade level within the standards. Students will see a range of questions that ask them to compute, apply procedures and skills in mathematical and real world settings. Questions include selected and constructed response and may feature graphing, use of tables, writing equations and expressions, or other dynamic tools. For grades 6-8 and 11, an embedded calculator allows students access to basic calculation, scientific calculation, or advanced graphing and statistical calculator interfaces for designated sections of the test. The math performance task provides a set of approximately six problems connected by a singular theme (e.g. trip to a carnival). The theme determines a real-world context for application of the mathematics and questions may be scaffolded or layered so as to be interdependent. The performance task is one of the primary sources for feedback regarding the students' ability to model, problem solve, and communicate their reasoning.

Summary

Our combined vertical efforts across curriculum revision and renewal and professional development as well as our strategic improvements to infrastructure and resources have ensured successful progress relative to the transition to the new curriculum and assessment systems and left us well positioned for computer based testing this spring.

Dr. DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Kerry Jones, Director of Elementary Education, and Paul Vicinus, Director of Secondary Education will be available to answer questions.