



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools
FROM: Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer
DATE: October 15, 2020
SUBJECT: Assessment and Accountability in 2020-21

State assessments¹ are important guideposts to our promise of equity. They are the most accurate tool available to tell us if all students – regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, disability, or zip code – are growing and achieving at the highest levels on the state standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed caused unprecedented disruptions to public education this year. Six months ago, educators, families, and students rallied admirably as we transitioned to emergency, full-time remote learning. Statewide academic assessments and formal school/district accountability were rightly cancelled in 2019-20 so we could work together to address inequities in terms of access to devices, connectivity, and other necessary resources.

To make the best use of testing time during the year, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) released guidance on [Sensible Assessment Practices](#) in June 2020. This guidance emphasized small-scale, fine-grain assessments coupled with formative assessment practices to monitor student learning and progress on an ongoing basis during the 2020-21 school year. The [Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks \(IAB\) and the Focused IABs](#) are high quality tools that are aligned to our state standards, offered at no cost to districts, and usable with students in Grades 2-11. These assessments can be administered remotely. Most importantly, they provide actionable information for the classroom teacher to adjust instruction and accelerate learning on the grade-level standards during the 2020-21 school year.

Though disruptions to learning due to the pandemic are continuing, it is vital that we reaffirm our commitment to equity and administer all statewide assessments during the 2020-21 school year. Having results in 2020-21 will allow us to monitor long-term trends and evaluate the full impact of the pandemic on student achievement and growth. It will also provide us with accurate data to target support and resources where they are needed the most, so that any negative impact of this pandemic on student learning is short lived. Therefore, as of this writing, the CSDE expects that all districts will administer all state assessments to all students during the 2020-21 school year.

¹ They include the standard academic assessments (i.e., Smarter Balanced, SAT, NGSS), the alternate assessments (i.e., CTAA, CTAS), the English language proficiency assessment (i.e., LAS Links), and other assessments (i.e., Kindergarten Entrance Inventory, Physical Fitness Assessment, K-3 reading).

State assessments, however, do not have to be synonymous with school and district accountability. While the CSDE strongly supports administration of all state assessments to know how our students are doing, the CSDE will be seeking federal approval to not implement formal school and district accountability (big “A” Accountability) as usual in 2020-21. Instead, CSDE is committed to transparency by publicly reporting all available data to the extent feasible and defensible (little “a” accountability); these may be data regarding assessment, attendance, discipline, course participation, graduation, and postsecondary enrollment. These data will help us to understand how student achievement and growth have been impacted by the pandemic, and what strategies are effective in increasing student engagement and success. This position is further articulated in the blogpost entitled [Rethinking School Accountability for the 2020-2021 School Year](#).

I remain confident and hopeful that together with our amazing educators and leaders, Connecticut students will emerge from this pandemic, stronger and better prepared for the future. Thank you for your cooperation. Please reach out to me at ajit.gopalakrishnan@ct.gov if you have any questions. Additional specifics about our state assessments for 2020-21 is contained in subsequent pages.

Thank you.

Student Assessment Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year, October 2020

The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Performance Office oversees the administration of the following state summative assessments:

- Connecticut Smarter Balanced Assessments
- Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessments
- Connecticut SAT School Day
- Connecticut Alternate Assessments (CTAA) for Mathematics and English Language Arts
- Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS) Assessments
- LAS Links English Language Proficiency Assessment
- Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment (CPFA)
- Kindergarten Inventory (KEI)

In light of COVID-19 and the resulting disruption in school configurations, this guidance is being provided concerning the administration of the scheduled state summative assessments for this school year.

As of October 1, 2020, **all** state summative assessments are expected to be administered during the 2020-21 school year. Additionally, as outlined in the [Addendum One](#) of the *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together* guidance, "students participating in remote learning programming will be expected to access statewide assessments in-person, unless the assessments are available remotely." The Performance Office staff is actively exploring the possibility of remote administration of summative assessments for Smarter Balanced, NGSS, and the LAS Links. Given the technical considerations involving test design, security, administration, and student-testing experiences within a remote environment, the CSDE will provide formal guidance concerning remote test administration later this fall.

In preparation for assessments, the CSDE recommends quality instruction informed by refined content such as the [Student Achievement Partners Priority Standards](#). Additionally, the [Sensible Assessment Practices Guidance](#) and associated webinars, and the [Reimagining Classrooms Guidance](#) are tools that should also inform and support district instructional plans for the 2020-21 school year.

Most state summative assessments are scheduled to begin administration after January 1, 2021. However, there are three state assessments that can be administered now: The Connecticut Alternate Science Assessment (for eligible students in Grades 5, 8 and 11), the Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment and the Kindergarten Inventory. Specific guidance for these assessments are included below.

Administration of the CTAS Assessment: The CTAS is designed to assess understanding of science for eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities. This design includes administration by a Teacher Trained to Administer the Alternate (TEA) throughout the year to support the learning needs of these students. The CTAS requires the TEA to follow a script while manipulating required test resources to obtain a score for each item. Due to the varied

disability and communication needs of the students and individualized accommodations, this assessment is administered in a one-to-one manner, allowing students to have breaks as needed over multiple days. As a result, the CSDE is recommending that the CTAS **only** be administered in a school environment. Students who receive hybrid instruction should be administered the assessment on the days in which they are attending school. *When administering the assessment, please ensure that all COVID-19 safety protocols are thoroughly followed.* If a student is a fully-remote student, it would be possible to administer the test **only** if a trained teacher is available to administer the assessment in a one-on-one situation at the remote location.

Administration of the CPFA Assessment: As with the other state assessments noted above, the CPFA assessment is expected to be administered during the 2020-21 school year. Like the CTAS, the CPFA can also be administered throughout the school year. Schools and districts may find it beneficial to delay administering the CPFA until spring, if possible. As a reminder, high school students can be tested in any grade in high school, so if they are not tested this school year, they can be assessed in subsequent years. Additionally, while use of the Physical Education class time may be administratively the easiest approach for assessing students in some schools/districts, the CSDE does not dictate where the assessment is delivered and schools and districts may choose to administer the assessment outside of a student's scheduled Physical Education class.

When administering the assessment, please ensure that all COVID-19 safety protocols are thoroughly followed. The safety of students and staff is paramount.

The CPFA requires students to complete four components, and must be administered by a trained test administrator. As a result, the CSDE is recommending that this assessment **only** be administered in a school environment following safety protocols to restrict the spread of COVID-19.

Kindergarten Inventory (KEI): The KEI is an important rating of kindergarteners on six domains made by the classroom teacher that is due on December 7, 2020. In light of disruptions this past spring, and the varied public school delivery formats in 2020-21, it is especially important to understand what teachers think of this year's entering kindergarten class on those domains. Unlike the CTAS and CPFA where a remote administration is not recommended, a remote administrations of the KEI **may be utilized** since the assessment is a checklist of skills.

As with the CTAS and CPFA, when administering the KEI, please ensure that all COVID-19 safety protocols are thoroughly followed. The safety of students and staff is paramount.

Performance Office staff are continuing to monitor the reopening of schools. Any changes in expectations and/or procedures for districts will be communicated to districts as the year continues. This includes modifications to accountability requirements that may be granted due to any forthcoming federal waiver.

Please contact the Performance Office at 860-713-6860 or ctstudentassessment@ct.gov with any questions.