



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Charlene Russell-Tucker
Commissioner of Education
Connecticut State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Commissioner Russell-Tucker:

Thank you for your participation in the U.S. Department of Education's (Department's) assessment peer review process under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). I appreciate the efforts of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to prepare for the peer review which occurred in March 2023.

State assessment systems provide essential information that States, districts, schools, and educators can use to identify the academic needs of students, target resources and supports toward students who need them most, evaluate school and program effectiveness, and close achievement gaps among students, including students with disabilities and English learners. A high-quality assessment system also provides useful information to parents about their children's advancement against and achievement of grade-level standards. The Department's peer review of State assessment systems is designed to provide feedback to States to support the development and administration of high-quality assessments.

External peer reviewers and Department staff carefully evaluated CSDE's submission, and the Department found, based on evidence received, that Connecticut's Science general assessments in grades 5, 8, and 11 (Next Generation Science Assessments (Cambium Science Assessments)) meet all statutory and regulatory requirements of the ESEA.

Congratulations on this significant accomplishment. Assessments that produce valid and reliable results are fundamental to a State's accountability system. Please be aware that approval of CSDE's assessments is not a determination that the system complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, Title IX of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The full peer review notes are enclosed. We encourage you to read the full peer review notes for additional suggestions and recommendations for improving your assessment system.

Regarding the other assessments that were peer reviewed, the Department found, based on evidence received, that the following components of Connecticut's assessment system meet some but not all statutory and regulatory requirements of the ESEA. Based on the

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recommendations from this peer review and our own internal analysis of the State’s submission, I have determined the following:

- Science alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) in grades 5, 8, and 11 (Connecticut Alternate Science Assessments (CTAS)): **Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA.**
- Reading/language arts (R/LA) and mathematics general assessments in high school (SAT): **Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA.**
- English language proficiency (ELP) general assessments (LAS Links): **Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA.**

Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA means that these components of the State’s assessment system meet most of the requirements of the statute and regulations, but some additional information is required. The list of items required for CSDE to meet all statutory and regulatory requirements of the ESEA is enclosed with this letter. The Department expects that CSDE will likely be able to provide this additional information within one year.

Because additional evidence is required, the Department is continuing the condition on the State’s Title I grant award related to those components of the assessment system. To satisfy this condition, CSDE must submit satisfactory evidence to address the items identified in the enclosed list. The condition will remain until all required evidence has been resubmitted and peer reviewed. If the outcome of the re-review by peers indicates full approval, then the condition will be removed. If adequate progress is not made, the Department may take additional action.

The full peer review notes from the review are enclosed. These recommendations to the Department formed the basis of our determination. Please note that the peers’ recommendations may differ from the Department’s feedback; we encourage you to read the full peer notes for additional suggestions and recommendations for improving your assessment system beyond what is noted in the Department’s feedback. Department staff will reach out to your assessment director in the next few days to discuss the peer notes and the Department’s determination and to answer any questions you have.

I request that CSDE submit a plan within 30 days, outlining when it will submit all additional required documentation for peer review. Upon submission of the plan, the Department will reach out to CSDE to schedule the next peer review. Resubmission of the State’s documentation for peer review should occur once the State has all remaining evidence for a particular assessment component.

I also want to take this opportunity to review the peer review status of the other ESEA-required assessments administered by the State, based upon our current records:

- R/LA and mathematics general assessments in grades 3-8 (Smarter Balanced): Meets requirements of the ESEA.¹
- R/LA and mathematics AA-AAAS in grades 3-8 and high school (CTAA): Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA.²

¹ <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/04/Connecticut-7.pdf>

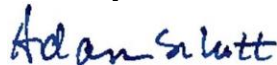
² <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/04/Connecticut-7.pdf>.

- Alternate English language proficiency (ELP) assessment: We understand that a new Alternate ELP assessment was pilot-tested in the spring of 2023 and is operational for the 2023-24 school year. We look forward to working with you to schedule the peer review for this new assessment after the 2023-24 school year administration.

We are currently planning assessment peer reviews for 2025. We look forward to a mutually agreeable time to schedule peer reviews for any of the State's assessment components where additional evidence is needed. Also, please remember that if CSDE makes significant changes to any of its assessments, the State must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students. I appreciate the work you are doing to improve your schools and provide a high-quality education for your students. If you have any questions, please contact my staff at: ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov.

Sincerely,



Adam Schott
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs
Delegated the Authority to Perform the
Function and Duties of the Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Enclosures

cc: Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer

Critical Elements Where Additional Evidence is Needed for Connecticut’s Assessment System to Meet ESEA Requirements

Critical Element	Evidence Needed
1.3 – Required Assessments	<p>For the LAS Links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the State includes ELs with significant cognitive disabilities in statewide ELP assessment, either through the general ELP assessment or an alternate ELP assessment (AELPA). If the State does not have an AELPA, it should provide a timeline for when it plans to implement one.
1.4 – Policies for Including All Students in Assessments	<p>For the LAS Links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As noted in critical element 1.3, evidence that the State has policies that include ELs with significant cognitive disabilities in statewide ELP assessment, either through the general ELP assessment or an AELPA.
2.1 – Test Design and Development	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the State’s test design and test development process is well-suited for the content, is technically sound, aligns the assessments to the depth and breadth of the State’s academic content standards for the grade that is being assessed and includes processes to ensure that each academic assessment is tailored to the knowledge and skills included in the State’s academic content standards, reflects appropriate inclusion of challenging content, and requires complex demonstrations or applications of knowledge and skills (e.g., a plan and a timeline to address and remedy the alignment issues identified in the existing alignment studies, particularly in mathematics).
2.2 – Item Development	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of reasonable and technically sound procedures to develop and select items to assess student achievement based on the State’s academic content standards in terms of content and cognitive process, including higher order thinking skills.
3.1 – Overall Validity, including Validity Based on Content	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence requested in critical element 2.1 will satisfy this critical element.
3.2 – Validity Based on Cognitive Processes	<p>For the CTAS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the assessments tap the intended cognitive processes appropriate for each grade level as represented in the State’s academic content standards (e.g., evidence that shows the relationships of items intended to require demonstrations or applications of knowledge and skills to other measures that require similar levels of cognitive complexity in the content area, such as teacher ratings of student performance, student performance on performance tasks or external assessments of the same knowledge and skills).

Critical Element	Evidence Needed
	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence demonstrating its assessments tap the intended cognitive processes appropriate for high school as represented in the State’s academic content standards.
<p>3.3 – Validity Based on Internal Structure</p>	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence demonstrating scoring and reporting structures of its assessments are consistent with the sub-domain structures of the State’s academic content standards on which the intended interpretations and uses of results are based.
<p>4.7 – Technical Analysis and Ongoing Maintenance</p>	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of a system for monitoring and maintaining, and improving as needed, the quality of its assessment system, including clear and technically sound criteria for the analyses of all the assessments in its assessment system.
<p>6.3 – Challenging and Aligned Academic Achievement Standards</p>	<p>For the CTAS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence that the State’s alternate academic achievement standards in science are aligned to ensure that a student who meets the alternate academic achievement standards is on track to pursue postsecondary education or employment (e.g., follow-up studies that examine proficiency on the high-school assessment and performance in post-secondary education, vocational training or competitive integrated employment). <p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence demonstrating the academic achievement standards are challenging and aligned with the State’s academic content standards such that a high school student who scores at the proficient or above level has mastered what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school in order to succeed in college and the workforce.