

Series: 2000-2001

CIRCULAR LETTER: C-18

TO: Superintendents of Schools
Directors of Special Education
High School Principals
CAPT District Test Coordinators

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education

DATE: March 12, 2001

SUBJECT: Participation of Special Education Students on the 2001 **Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT)** and Accuracy in Reporting on All Students

Spring CAPT Administration

This letter serves as a follow-up to earlier Circular Letters (C-14, Series 1999-2000, on March 17, 2000, and C-3, Series 2000-2001, on July 25, 2000) in which new statewide testing requirements, expectations and reporting issues, particularly with regard to special education students, were discussed. Three separate issues are important to reiterate.

1. This past fall, Connecticut implemented new federal and state guidelines that all special education students in grades 4, 6, and 8 must participate in the standard administration of the CMT or an alternate assessment. Two alternate assessment options were implemented. These are described in the Assessment Guidelines, 7th edition, 2000, available on the Department web-site (www.state.ct.us/sde).

As you are aware, while most districts increased their student participation rate in CMT, some districts did not reach the expectation of 80% participation of special education students in the standard assessment.

2. The spring 2001 administration of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) will be conducted subject to the same guidelines and expectations regarding student participation. That is, as noted in Circular Letter C-14, the Department's expectation, consistent with federal expectations, is that **80 percent or more of all special education students will participate in each subtest of the standard grade-level version of the CAPT**. More specifically, it is expected that:

- No more than 15 percent of the special education population in any district will participate in Alternate Assessment Option #1 - Out-of-Level Testing, **and**
- No more than 5 percent will participate in Alternate Assessment Option #2 - The CMT/CAPT Skills Checklist.

Please be advised that districts unable to stay within the 15 and 5 percent parameters for participation may be identified for an audit by the Department and will be required to provide an analysis of all exemptions from standard grade-level testing. Districts not meeting the targeted participation rates will be flagged as being non-comparable and their scores may be adjusted to account for missing students.

I urge all superintendents to receive assurances from their special education administrators and test coordinators that these guidelines will be reviewed based on the needs of their special education students.

In order to maximize the number of special education students participating in standard assessments, the exemption of special education students from the standard CAPT must become the exception. The Department is prepared to have its staff work with any district requesting help in achieving the goal of at least an 80 percent participation rate in the standard assessment.

The key to making testing decisions is predicated on the instructional program in which your special education students participate. The vast majority of special education students should be learning and experiencing the same critical skills and concepts that are deemed important for all Connecticut students, but in a different manner and/or in a different timeframe. If a student is severely impaired and enrolled in an educational program which centers on a functional/use skills curriculum, then the checklist is appropriate; if the student has not, as yet, received ANY instruction on the curriculum/content/skills being assessed on the grade level version of the test – then the out-of-level assessment is appropriate. We are urging all superintendents, special education directors and school principals **to ensure the PPT process provides special education students equal access to the standard curriculum and assessments**, while providing appropriate adaptations and modifications for their successful learning.

3. In view of these new requirements, each district must account for every student in grade 10. In order to do this, student information on the appropriate CAPT form must be completed for **every student**, whether tested on the standard or non-standard tests, exempted or absent. **It is imperative that the coding be accurate and complete** since this information will be reported (e.g., race and gender achievement; special education; bilingual and ELL achievement, etc.) in the release of the state and district results.

We continue to strive to include all students in our testing programs. For the upcoming CAPT administration, I am asking that you lead your district's effort **to achieve the lowest possible absentee rate with your students**. Many districts have been successful implementing a variety of procedures, including both rewards and requirements. I encourage you to consider such steps if you have not already done so. **Significant numbers of absent students in a district may require an adjustment of district scores.**

I urge all superintendents to instruct their test coordinators and principals to develop and use a process to ensure: the accuracy of the data submitted on all students, and the full participation of all students.

In order to prepare for all upcoming CAPT and CMT testing, we believe it is critical for you to:

- Review your special education identification procedures,
- Examine the percent of special education students in your schools and district exempted from the standard CMT/CAPT tests in the past,
- Communicate the new 80 percent or more expectation and the revised guidelines to all staff,
- Specifically inform the Planning and Placement Teams (PPT) about these changes, and
- Audit PPT recommendations for 2001-02, to ensure district wide progress.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the federal requirement or reporting of student information, please call Dr. Douglas Rindone, Chief, Bureau of Student Assessment and Research, at 860-566-1684, Dr. Peter Behuniak, Director, Student Assessment and Testing, at 860-566-2201, or George Dowaliby, Chief, Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services, at 860-807-2025.

Thank you.

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CMT-3, Fall 2000 Administration

It was a very challenging task this year to adapt to a new generation CMT, to provide additional specific demographic and program information of each student, and to increase the number and value of local and state efforts. Statewide, Connecticut deserves credit for this transition...and to your efforts.

We were somewhat naïve in believing we could change twenty years of philosophy and behavior about assessing special education students, and change it statewide in less than a year. Yet, 125 of 163 (76%) were able to meet, exceed or come within reach of that participation (80%) goal. We applaud and commend the individuals and districts who have upgraded their policy and practice, in the interests of not leaving any child behind.

Given the complexity of the new coding requirements, not all of the statewide student coding was accurate, in particular, the coding of special education and bilingual education students.