

**SERIES: 2000-2001**  
**CIRCULAR LETTER: C-20**

**TO:** Superintendents of Schools  
Elementary and Middle School Principals  
Directors of Special Education  
CMT District Test Coordinators

**FROM:** Theodore S. Sergi  
Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** March 22, 2001

**SUBJECT:** Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT): Looking Backward and Forward

**Year 2000-2001 Testing**

**Thank you for your efforts.** It was a very challenging task this year to adapt to a new generation CMT, to provide additional specific demographic and program information for each student, and to increase the number and value of local and state reports. In spite of this, statewide we did very well in this transition year, and we thank each of you.

We were somewhat naive in believing that we could change 20 years of philosophy and behavior about assessing special education students, and change it statewide in less than a year. Yet, 125 of 163 districts (76%) were able to meet, exceed or come within reach of the 80 percent participation goal. We commend those who have upgraded their policy and practice, in the interests of not leaving any child behind.

Given the complexity of the new coding requirements, some of the student coding was inaccurate; in particular, the coding of special education and bilingual education students.

**Based on the information you have received, if you would like to re-code your special education students or correct any other demographic data, please call Dr. Abigail L. Hughes at 860-566-2092. You must contact Dr. Hughes by March 30 if there is a need to re-code students. After corrections are made, we will send you the corrected data, update our state database and use the revised data in next year's report.**

**Year 2001-2002 Testing**

1. Participation of Special Education Students

To further clarify our expectations for next year, please note: No part of the Year 2000 instructions (see Guidelines for Assessment at [www.state.ct.us/sde](http://www.state.ct.us/sde)) uses the term "absolutely required" to assess 80 percent or more of special education students. We would not and do not want any district to force a student into the standard CMT just to meet the target of 80 percent. On the other hand, districts that fall significantly below the 80 percent goal are denying their special education students the same educational opportunities as their peers.

Unfortunately, some districts used the out-of-level test (Alternate #1) for the majority of their special education students, including those who are learning disabled and receiving most of their instruction in the regular classrooms. This practice reflects an outdated philosophy and practice which is unacceptable in 2001, by federal guidelines and state policy. More important, all Connecticut students are entitled access to on-grade-level instruction and curriculum and, therefore, to the same assessment as their peers. This provides comparable information about their demonstration of skills.

I am attaching two memoranda of last year – March 17, 2000, and July 25, 2000 - for your review.

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 that no more than 5 percent will participate in Alternate Assessment Option #2 – the CMT/CAPT Skills Checklist.

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 (Alternate Assessment #2); 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 (Alternate Assessment #1).

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 identified as being noncomparable, and their scores may be adjusted to account for missing students.

**I urge all superintendents to receive written assurances from their special education and administrative personnel prior to the beginning of IEP preparation for 2001-2002, and again prior to the close of schools in June, that the IEPs for each special education student have been reviewed and that the district will be meeting the guidelines, as appropriate for each student, on inclusion in the standard assessment.**

I believe that the few individuals still arguing this issue are well intentioned, but the results of their compassion are low expectations for children with special needs. To see the wisdom of the new approach, all one needs to do is speak with the many special education directors, superintendents and principals who are very satisfied that they did the right thing by assessing more special education students with the standard assessment.

## 2. Absent Students

The testing schedule provides a two-week window and three additional days for students to make up any part of the CMT for which they were absent. We ask you to make every effort to provide your students the opportunity to make up any tests that were missed due to absences. Please note: Because the Writing Goal and Reading Goal are based on the results of two tests, both tests have to be taken for a student to receive a score in writing and a score in reading. For the 2001 CMT testing, an inordinate absence rate may result in district scores being adjusted for missing students.

## 3. Testing Schedule

We were all disappointed in the reporting schedule of CMT results for the fall 2000 testing. The transition to a new test and increased reporting requirements contributed to this situation. Our goal is to deliver the 2001 CMT results before the holiday break. To assist with meeting this goal, we are moving the testing window up by three days. The testing window will, therefore, encompass Wednesday, September 19, through Friday, October 5, which includes time for make-up testing. The Direct Assessment of Writing will be scheduled for Thursday, September 20, 2001. This schedule still provides adequate time for student review prior to the test administration

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any of the above information, please contact Abigail L. Hughes, Associate Commissioner, Division of Evaluation and Research, at 860-566-2092, or e-mail: [abigail.hughes@po.state.ct.us](mailto:abigail.hughes@po.state.ct.us).

Thank you.

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Attachments