

SERIES 2001-2002
CIRCULAR LETTER: C-6

TO: Superintendents of Schools
Special Education Directors
CMT/CAPT Test Coordinators
School Principals

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi
Commissioner of Education

DATE: August 17, 2001

SUBJECT: Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT)/Connecticut Academic Performance
Test (CAPT) Testing and the Calculation of Participation of Special
Education Students

An Act Concerning Mastery Test Exemptions, Section 10-14, was amended during this year's Legislative session. The new language reads:

The provision of this chapter shall apply to ALL STUDENTS requiring special education pursuant to Section 10-76a, except IN THE RARE CASE when the planning and placement team for AN INDIVIDUAL student determines that AN ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT AS SPECIFIED BY THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION IS APPROPRIATE. The provisions of this chapter shall not apply to any student enrolled for TEN school months or less in a bilingual program pursuant to Sections 10-17e and 10-17f or to any student enrolled for TEN school months or less in an English as a second language program.

This new statute is in effect as of July 1, 2001, and affects our testing in 2001-2002. In the case of special education, we understand the language "in the rare case" to be defined as the goals we adopted last year which are described below. In the case of students in bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) programs, the new law requires that these students must participate in the state CMTs and CAPT if they have been in a bilingual or ESL program for more than 10 months. For many students in bilingual programs, this will replace last year's CMT use for evaluation purposes with a formal CMT.

The 2000-2001 school year was the first year in which all of our special education students participated in some way in statewide testing. Although the goal of having at least 80 percent of all special education students participate in each subtest of the standard grade-level version of the CMT was not met by all districts, a very good effort was made toward reaching this goal. More than three-fourths of the districts met, exceeded or were within reach of the 80 percent goal. The Department's expectations, consistent with federal expectations, are:

- **Eighty percent or more** of all special education students will participate **in each subtest of the standard grade level version of the CMT.**
- **No more than 15 percent** of the special education population in any district will participate in Alternative Assessment Option #1 – Out-of-Level Testing.
- **No more than 5 percent** will participate in Alternative Assessment Option #2 – The CMT/CAPT skills checklist.

Because 2000-2001 was the first year of implementation, each district's participation rate was calculated based on special education student participation in at least one subtest. For the next test administration (2001-2002) of the CMT and CAPT, the special education participation rate will be calculated based on student participation on each subtest, separately and across all three subtests. The expectation should be clear – students should take all three (CMT) or four (CAPT) subtests – **except in rare cases.**

Statewide, we need to continue to increase the number of special education students included in the standard CMT to ensure access and equity, raise academic expectations and enhance achievement. The role of each school district and school is to continue to ensure that special education students have the same opportunities to learn the same curriculum as their nonhandicapped peers.

Fortunately, for most districts in the state, these guidelines do not require new policy and practice. However, for some districts the need to change philosophy, instruction and testing practices is clear. I am hopeful that in the reporting of 2001-2002 test results, we will have achieved the goal of 80 percent participation – statewide; particularly in light of the new state statutory expectation.

In the upcoming 2001-2002 testing, we also urge you to pay more attention to your district's absence rate – particularly if that has been a problem in the past.

As in many other areas of public elementary and secondary education, Connecticut can be proud of its progress in providing more nearly equal access and opportunity to all its students – but we must also be determined to do more.

If you have any questions or concerns about the federal and state guidelines, please contact Dr. Abigail L. Hughes at (860) 713-6800 or e-mail her at abigail.hughes@po.state.ct.us

Thank you and best wishes.

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