

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hartford

Mastery Examination Task Force

Second Meeting

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

I. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from September 22, 2015, Meeting

Chairperson Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes for September 22, 2015.

Vote: Motion carried.

Resolved: Minutes from the meeting on September 22, 2015, approved with revisions.

Motion to approve minutes by Patti Fusco and seconded by Don Williams

II. Introductions

Present: Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education, Chairperson
Dr. Joseph Cirasuolo, CAPSS
Marcia Ferreira, CEA
Patti Fusco, AFT
Mary Anne Butler, Connecticut State Department of Education
Kathy Greider, CAPSS
Dr. Stephen Hegedus, SCSU
Cathy Hill, CAS
Abe Krisst, Connecticut State Department of Education
Patrice McCarthy, CABA
Dr. Karissa Niehoff, CAS-CIAC
Don Romoser, CT PTA
Allan Taylor, Connecticut State Board of Education, Chair
Jeffrey Villar, CCER
Don Williams, CEA
Stephen Wright, Connecticut State Board of Education
Jim Accomando, CT PTA

Absent: Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Connecticut State Department of Education
Richard Murry, Killingly, CABA
Jan Hochadel, AFT-CT
Kathleen Kennedy, CT PTA

III. Presentation: Purpose of Statewide Assessment Program

- Commissioner Wentzell introduced guest speaker Dr. Scott Norton, the Strategic Initiative Director from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).
Presentation by Dr. Scott Norton:

Varying Purposes of Statewide Assessments

- All states:
 - To serve as indicator of student mastery of academic standards
 - To provide aggregate information about a school's academic performance and to give information about a school's performance relative to other schools.
- Some states assess for the following purposes as well:
 - Growth Measures
 - Program evaluation
 - To provide information for policy related initiatives
 - States may also have legislative requirements for testing.

Federal Requirements

- To meet the needs of NCLB
- To the assessment of the significantly cognitively disabled students
- To assess English Learner (EL) Proficiency

The Case for Comparability

- Presentation of NAEP comparability across states.
- The proficiency standards of many states are not in alignment with the NAEP proficiency standards.
- Proficiency standards are widely inconsistent across states.

Developing Tests

- States led the development of the two consortia tests
 - a. Smarter Balanced
 - b. PARCC

What is a Good Test?

- Tests should align to standards.
- Tests should assess higher order thinking skills and critical abilities.
- Tests should be valid and reliable.

IV. Discussion

- Discussion of Peer Review Process. The current Peer Review Process will be starting up again soon, after it was suspended for 3 years. The U.S. Department of Education recently provided Peer Review guidance. According to this guidance, the outlook is good for states that are in a consortia. Peer Review activities will commence at the beginning of next year.
- Discussion of validity and reliability of test results for students who are EL, Special Education, or who have a 504 plan. Tests often can be difficult and challenging for these students. However, it is important to measure the academic performance of these students. Without any such measure, there will be no accountability. While no measure is "perfect" the tests are improving over time. Is it valid to use scores from these tests for teacher evaluation? Some states use the summative assessment as a tool for teacher evaluation, but it is applied inconsistently nationally.
- Discussion of President Obama's remarks from Saturday October 24, related to state assessment systems. There are many states taking measures to reduce testing. Over testing can be a real problem. States investigating this already are being smart according to Dr. Norton. Commissioner Wentzell commented on the Assessment Reduction Grant offered in 2015. One of the lessons learned from the Assessment Reduction Grants in Connecticut districts was that assessments often were redundant, not related to

standards, and took too much of the school day. Commissioner Wentzell also pointed out that Connecticut's state-mandated tests are already well under the two percent total contact hours suggested as a limit to this kind of testing by President Obama. In Connecticut, state-mandated tests require seven hours of student time, which is 1/180 days.

- Discussion of reduction of test preparation. Test preparation is taking too much class time in many schools. It is potentially taking the place of quality instructional time. A primary concern was preparation for the SAT, and equity of access issue. The consensus of the group, though, is that quality instruction is the best preparation. A high-quality test (aligned to the standards) should not require a great deal of focused test preparation.
- There is a system now in education that promotes the proliferation of testing. Teacher evaluation requirements may be associated with an increase in large-scale student testing. These pressures are most evident in the areas of the state with greatest economic need. The purpose of the assessments should be communicated more clearly than they are at present. Many in the group support this need to define and to clearly communicate the purposes of the various statewide assessments.
- What are other states doing with state-mandated, high-school assessments and how do they tend to predict college success? It is difficult to connect the high-school assessments to the remedial courses offered in the colleges. Nationally, there is a fragmented array of high-school assessments making it difficult to connect performance on these to college success.
- Discussion about the fairest way to include growth in accountability. This speaks again to the purpose of testing. It was determined that this topic must be discussed in more depth at a future meeting.
- Does the CSDE collect information on district assessment practices? At present, this is not done comprehensively. This information could inform future discussion about the amount of testing that should be required of districts.
- It was determined that most of the concerns expressed above are in alignment with what is in the senate bill that mandated the creation of this task force.
- Discussion of the need for assessments to be tied to a common vision at both the state and district level. Often the tools useful for state accountability are not used by districts for student accountability. System alignment should be incorporated into state and district assessments. The concept of a clear state and district assessment plan that is based on a common vision is supported by many of the members.

V. Topics Identified by Members

- Do members need training for interpreting the Smarter Balanced results? Members wanted to understand how to best interpret them.
- One member offered to make a presentation by teachers and their experiences on Smarter Balanced. It was determined that this would be useful. Committee members were also urged to make arrangements for their constituents to express their experiences with Smarter Balanced including input from parent organizations and student groups. These stakeholder presentations will be at December meeting.

IV. Adjourn

- Don Romoser moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:23 p.m. and Karissa Niehoff seconded the motion.