

NEWS

Connecticut Department of Education

Dr. Betty J. Sternberg, Commissioner

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EMBARGOED
Monday, March 28, 2005 @ 5PM

State Department of Education Reports CMT Results

(Hartford, Connecticut) Results of the fall 2004 administration of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) to students in Grades 4, 6 and 8 – the fifth and final administration of the CMT’s third generation – show two trends.

First, over the period from 2000 through 2004, the participation rate of students on the CMT assessment significantly increased statewide. For two subgroups of students, the increases were dramatic. Participation of students with disabilities increased by 29 percentage points and of English language learners (ELLs) by 60 percentage points. These increases are a result of longstanding efforts by the State Department of Education and school districts to have more students take the CMT and requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

“The increases in participation rates are positive,” said Commissioner of Education Betty J. Sternberg. “We want more of our students to have access to the CMT and to take the test, because results help us learn – on the student, classroom, school and district levels – what our students know and can do and how curriculum and instruction can be changed to address weaknesses.

“There is a caveat, however. NCLB mandates us to test our students with disabilities at their grade level; we believe that testing them at their *instructional* level is more appropriate, and consistent with Connecticut’s commitment to testing what is important, reasonable and challenging for all of our students,” Dr. Sternberg added. “I have requested this change, but have been consistently denied it by the U.S. Department of Education.”

Second, when analyzing the results of the total population of students taking the tests over these past five years, there has not been a consistent pattern of either increased or decreased achievement across all subject areas and grade levels. This is not surprising, because the composition of the students taking the test has changed significantly from

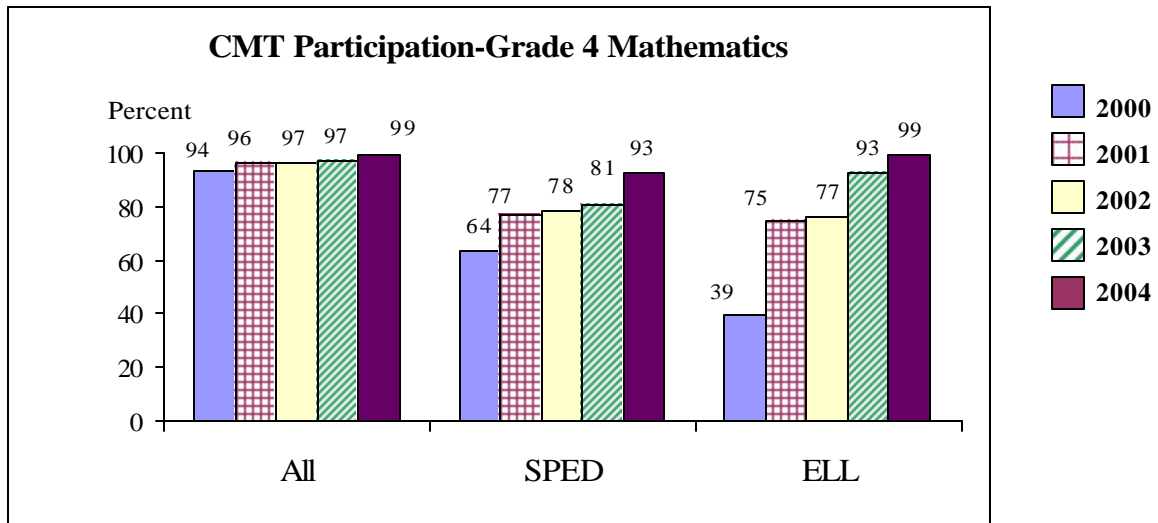
year to year due to NCLB requirements. Students who traditionally have a more difficult time taking a test were recently required to participate. “While we are pleased with our overall participation rate, it is hard to draw conclusions about growth in achievement because the composition of the group of youngsters taking the test has changed dramatically over time,” Dr. Sternberg said.

“In order to draw valid conclusions about student achievement over time, both the number of students taking the CMT or any test and the composition of the student group must remain relatively constant. However, it is important to draw some conclusions about how well we have addressed the gaps in student achievement. Therefore, we reluctantly disaggregated the data in order to compare the same populations over time and draw valid conclusions about the achievement gaps,” Dr. Sternberg added. These conclusions appear in the section “The Achievement Gaps” on page 4.

The next generation of the CMT will be administered beginning in spring 2006 to students in Grades 3 through 8. NCLB requires that Connecticut add testing in Grades 3, 5 and 7. To do so, Connecticut will spend an additional \$8 million over and above what federal funds provide to meet this NCLB mandate.

Participation Increases

The graph below compares the participation rates of all Grade 4 students taking the mathematics portion of the CMT from 2000 to 2004 and Grade 4 students with disabilities (special education students) and Grade 4 English language learners. Similar trends demonstrating increases in participation are found in Grades 6 and 8 mathematics and in reading and writing across all grade levels.



Statewide, 99 percent of Grade 4 students took the standard grade-level mathematics test in 2004, an increase of 5 percentage points since 2000 and 2 percentage points over the previous year. The only students not administered the grade-level test were students with the most severe cognitive disabilities (who take an alternate assessment, the Skills Checklist). They account for 0.7 percent of the total Connecticut student population tested. English language learners who have attended a U.S. school

for less than one school year participated in the mathematics test but were allowed to be exempted from the reading and writing tests.

In addition to the dramatic increases in participation by students with disabilities and English language learners over the five-year period, the participation gap between Education Reference Group (ERG) I districts and other districts in the state has nearly vanished. For example, the participation rate of ERG I Grade 4 students on the mathematics test increased from 85 percent in 2000 to 98 percent in 2004.

Mathematics, Reading and Writing Performance on the CMT from 2000 to 2004

Table 1 compares the percentage of students scoring at or above the state goal and at or above proficiency (the NCLB standard) from 2000 through 2004. From 2000 to 2004, the percentage of students meeting the state goal increased in mathematics for students in Grades 6 (3.4%) and 8 (0.9%) and in writing in Grade 4 (5.8%), Grade 6 (0.2%) and Grade 8 (0.3%), while it decreased in mathematics for Grade 4 (-3.4%) and reading in Grade 4 (-4.1%), Grade 6 (-1.6%) and Grade 8 (-1.5%). In each case it should be noted that the increases in participation by all students and subgroups of students may camouflage actual gains and that none of the decreases is as large as the increases in the participation rate.

Table 1 - Comparison of the Performance of Grade 4, 6 and 8 Students on the CMT in 2000-2004

	Percent At/Above Goal			Percent At/Above Proficient		
	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 8	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 8
Mathematics						
2000	60.2	57.5	54.8	82.0	79.0	76.5
2001	61.0	61.0	55.4	81.5	82.0	76.4
2002	60.4	61.1	56.1	80.8	81.8	76.7
2003	57.6	62.0	56.3	80.1	81.5	76.6
2004	56.8	60.9	55.7	78.9	80.3	75.7
Change 2000 to 2004	-3.4	3.4	0.9	-3.1	1.3	-0.8
Reading						
2000	56.9	62.1	66.4	70.7	74.5	77.1
2001	57.9	63.6	66.3	71.0	74.8	77.0
2002	55.9	64.1	68.1	68.7	74.1	78.2
2003	54.3	61.9	66.7	68.7	74.0	76.8
2004	52.8	60.5	64.9	66.8	72.5	75.2
Change 2000 to 2004	-4.1	-1.6	-1.5	-3.9	-2.0	-1.9
Writing						
2000	57.5	61.1	60.4	79.6	83.3	79.8
2001	61.2	60.0	58.8	82.2	81.4	78.9
2002	61.5	60.8	60.0	81.3	83.1	78.8
2003	65.8	62.2	61.8	82.5	83.6	80.6
2004	63.3	61.3	60.7	81.4	82.5	80.4
Change 2000 to 2004	5.8	0.2	0.3	1.8	-0.8	0.6

The percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency between 2000 and 2004 increased in mathematics for students in Grade 6 (1.3%) and writing in Grade 4 (1.8%) and Grade 8 (0.6%), but declined in mathematics for Grade 4 (-3.1%) and Grade 8 (-0.8), reading in Grade 4 (-3.9%), Grade 6 (-2.0%) and Grade 8 (-1.9%) and writing in Grade 6 (-0.8%). Again, none of the decreases is as large as the increase in population tested between 2000 and 2004. The increase in participation by all students and subgroups of students may disguise actual gains, and none of the decreases is as large as the increase in the participation rate.

Table 1 also allows comparisons between 2003 and 2004. In the three subject areas tested, there were decreases in the percentage of students meeting the goal and proficiency standards across the three grades, from -0.2 percent to -2.5 percent. Participation in the CMT increased from 2003 to 2004 by nearly two percentage points across grades and across subject areas tested, and by approximately 12 percentage points for students with disabilities and approximately 7 percentage points for English language learners.

The Achievement Gap

Table 2 compares the percentages of students scoring at or above proficiency in reading in Grades 4, 6 and 8 for ERGs A-H and ERG I between 2000 and 2004. The scores of students with disabilities and English language learners have been removed to address appropriately the issue of comparability of populations across the CMT generation.

Table 2 - Comparison Between ERGs A-H and I of the Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above Proficient in Reading for Regular Education, Non-ELL Students From 2000 to 2004

ERG A—H	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 8
2000	80.6%	84.3%	86.7%
2001	82.8%	86.3%	87.9%
2002	80.5%	85.8%	88.9%
2003	80.4%	86.6%	88.5%
2004	79.0%	85.6%	87.3%
Change 2000 to 2004	-1.6%	+1.3	+0.6

ERG – I	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 8
2000	42.1%	45.8%	48.2%
2001	44.3%	49.7%	51.4%
2002	43.0%	49.7%	56.6%
2003	47.7%	52.1%	58.9%
2004	43.7%	52.9%	56.3%
Change 2000 to 2004	+1.6	+7.1	+8.1

The table shows three trends in student performance in reading. First, across all three grades tested there was a difference of approximately 39 percentage points in the percentages of students scoring at or above proficient between ERG I and the rest of the state in 2000. By 2004, that difference had declined to approximately 35, 33 and 31 percentage points in Grades, 4, 6 and 8, respectively. The gap in reading performance has narrowed, particularly in Grades 6 and 8, for regular education students who are not English language learners.

Second, the rate of increase in the percentage of students in this group scoring at or above proficient from 2000 to 2004 was more rapid and pronounced as students moved through the grades in ERG I compared to A-H. For Grade 4, there was an increase of 1.6 percentage points in the percentage of ERG I students scoring at or above proficient between 2000 and 2004, while for Grade 6 the increase was 7.1 percentage points and for Grade 8 it was 8.1 percentage points. However, for ERGs A-H, there was a small decline in Grade 4 (-1.6) and small increases in grades 6 (1.3) and 8 (0.6).

Third, the 2000 cohort of Grade 4 students progressed to Grade 6 in 2002 and Grade 8 in 2004, allowing us to estimate growth over time. From Grade 4 in 2000 to Grade 8 in 2004, the percentage of ERG I regular education students who are not English language learners scoring at or above proficient increased from 42.1 percent to 56.3 percent, for a difference of 14.2 percentage points. Over the same period, the performance of their counterparts in ERGs A-H increased from 80.6 percent to 87.3 percent at or above proficient, for a 6.7 percentage point increase. This suggests ERG I districts are making progress in reducing the gap in reading proficiency.

Table 3 compares the change in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient for ERGs A-H and ERG I in mathematics, reading and writing. The table identifies encouraging trends in growth for every grade and subject area in ERG I. The changes in ERG I proficiency scores from 2000 to 2004 exceed those of ERGs A-H in all subject areas and across all grades.

Table 3: Change in the Percentage of Regular Education, Non-ELL Students Scoring At or Above Proficient on the CMT between 2000 and 2004

ERG	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 8
ERG A—H			
Mathematics	-1.4	+3.6	+1.2
Reading	-1.6	+1.3	+0.6
Writing	+3.8	+1.6	+2.1
ERG I			
Mathematics	+2.0	+10.2	+9.2
Reading	+1.6	+7.1	+8.1
Writing	+5.6	+6.1	+10.4

“The decreases in the gaps are heartening, but not enough,” Dr. Sternberg said. “Clearly, more needs to be done. For instance, allocating resources to improve the access to and quality of preschool programs for our most needy students is critical, and providing districts with more comprehensive information about individual student growth over time is central to understanding each student’s academic progress.”

Dr. Sternberg went on to point out that Connecticut continues to publish its testing data showing year-to-year relationships (e.g., comparing 2004 fourth graders to 2003

fourth graders to 2002 fourth graders) because NCLB requires this, “given its rules about identifying schools and districts that have not made adequate yearly progress and/or that are in need of improvement.

“However, both the shifts in the U.S. Department of Education’s requirements about which students are to be tested and how the U.S. DOE has required us to make ‘AYP’ and ‘improvement’ designations have made it difficult, if not impossible, to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction changes on student achievement,” the Commissioner continued. “We have therefore requested that Connecticut be allowed to analyze these test results and make the required designations by looking at the progress students make over time – following the growth in achievement of each group of third graders as it moves through the grades tested.

“Only then would we truly be able to attribute increases and decreases in test results to curriculum and instructional strategies,” Commissioner Sternberg emphasized. “If the federal government does not allow us to apply this form of analysis to developing ‘AYP’ and ‘in need of improvement’ designations, Connecticut will continue the NCLB-required method for making these designations. In addition, the state will analyze the academic growth of students over time. As I have noted, we are committed to implementing growth analysis in our next generation of CMT because it is the right thing to do for our students and teachers. It will provide valuable accountability and instructional information for students, parents and educators.”

CMT Reports Online

This press release highlights some of the outcomes of the 2004 CMT and statewide trends in participation and performance over the course of the third generation of the CMT (2000-2004). More comprehensive state, ERG and district information is available online at www.cmtreports.com.

Please note: Education Reference Groups – ERGs – were developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education to compare groups of districts with similar characteristics such as median family income, level of parents’ education and primary language other than English spoken in the home. In general, ERG A may be considered to include the state’s wealthiest communities, while ERG I includes its poorest (including Connecticut’s largest cities).

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