



NEWS

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DR. DIANNA R. WENTZELL, COMMISSIONER

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State Department of Education announces significant student growth in reading and math

Results of matched student cohort growth analysis show students are rising to the challenge of high expectations, showing grade-to-grade growth on Smarter Balanced test

(NEW HAVEN, CT)—Connecticut students demonstrated significant year-to-year growth in English language arts and math on the Smarter Balanced exam, according to the results from a new matched student growth model released by the State Department of Education Thursday. This is the first year Connecticut has been able to measure student growth on Smarter Balanced, an important indicator for determining whether the state is making good on its promise to kids of preparing them for success.

Across the state, Connecticut students on average achieved 63.8% of their growth targets in English language arts and 65.0% of their growth targets in math. Today's news about student growth, coupled with gains in reading and math achievement announced in August, provide clear evidence that Connecticut is moving in the right direction toward the goal of providing access to high-quality educational opportunities for all students.

Smarter Balanced student growth results can be accessed at www.edsight.ct.gov.

“These growth results demonstrate that when we raise the bar for our students, they rise to that challenge in their learning,” Governor Dannel P. Malloy said. “I could not be prouder of Connecticut educators who are empowering their students to reach their potential. Together, we are making real progress in our mission to close achievement gaps and give every student a shot at success in life. Now we must continue the momentum with great urgency until we ensure all children in the state have access to an excellent education.”

“Year-to-year growth is an important indicator in our accountability system because it helps us understand whether the state is making good on our promise to kids,” Education Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell said. “Our promise to our children is that we will give them an education that prepares them to pursue their own dreams and achieve their own life goals. While we are making progress, we must work to accelerate the pace of change so that all students – especially those from historically underserved groups including students of color and students living in poverty – graduate from our schools with the skills and knowledge to succeed.”

On Thursday, Commissioner Wentzell visited Lincoln Bassett School in New Haven, a Commissioner's Network school that demonstrated strong growth in math. There, Commissioner Wentzell joined New Haven Superintendent Reginald Mayo, Principal Janet Brown Clayton, as well as teachers, parents, and community members for a roundtable discussion about what strategies at the school helped Lincoln-Bassett achieve growth in math.

Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System includes both student achievement on state tests in ELA and math, and matched student cohort growth, among an expanded list of indicators that aims to provide a more holistic picture of how schools are performing. Student achievement is a one-time snapshot measurement of a student's academic performance, an important measure for understanding what a student knows in a subject area. Growth demonstrates the change in that achievement score for the same student over time.

While there are various ways to measure student growth, Connecticut has adopted what is generally considered the gold standard for measuring growth – matched student cohort growth. Connecticut's growth model has two parts. In addition to the growth rate (how many students achieved their growth targets), Connecticut's model also measures how much of the growth target was achieved on average by students. Across the state, 43.1% of Connecticut students met their growth target in ELA, and 43.9% met their growth target in math.

Growth targets were established based on multiple factors, including the actual amount of growth achieved by students from 2014-15 to 2015-16 and whether the target puts students on the path to higher levels of achievement in future years. The targets were set at the level achieved by 40 percent of students.

“We aimed to set ambitious but achievable growth targets, with the goal being that all students should have a path to higher levels of achievement that pave the way for success in college, career, and life,” said Commissioner Wentzell. “It is also important to note that the model expects growth for all students, including students at the highest achievement levels.”

The results show that growth was the strongest at the elementary level (grades 4 and 5) in both subjects, while the middle school level (grades 6 through 8) is where the greatest gaps exist.

In New Haven, students at Lincoln-Bassett, a Commissioner's Network school on average achieved 94.6% of their growth targets in math, with 69.4% actually meeting their targets. Lincoln-Bassett is the number 2 school in the state in terms of growth in math for high needs students. In ELA, students at New Haven's Quinnipiac Real World Math STEM School achieved 86.2% of their growth targets, with 61.5% actually meeting their targets.

“The gains we see at Lincoln Bassett are a direct result of the passion and commitment from the building leadership and teaching staff in the school. The growth in academics can, in part, be attributed to the work Principal Brown-Clayton has been doing to ensure her students' needs are met in and outside of the classroom. They set ambitious goals and they laid out a long-term and comprehensive plan to ensure each student can reach those goals. They've been able to make extraordinary strides for their students through adopting a 'whole child' approach to education and we're proud of the results we're seeing in the school and in that community,” said New Haven Superintendent Reginald Mayo.

In August, the State Department of Education announced significant and important jumps statewide in ELA and math achievement results on the second administration of the Smarter Balanced exams. Overall, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standard statewide increased by 3.2 points to 55.6 percent in ELA, and 3.9 points to 44 percent in math.

The 2016 Smarter Balanced results showed solid improvement in both subjects, across all grades, and for all high-needs student subgroups. All of Connecticut's Alliance Districts showed improvement in ELA and most showed improvement in math, with about half of Alliance Districts improving at a faster rate than the state overall — a testament to the success of targeted support and investment in our highest need districts.

Two years ago, Connecticut transitioned to new Connecticut Core-aligned exams that presented a higher bar for students — with significantly tougher questions intended to test critical thinking ability and real-world skills. The change was part of a broader transition that involved aligning curriculum, standards, and exams to higher-level thinking required for college and career success. The release of the 2015-16 Smarter Balanced results is the first time Connecticut is able to measure student growth, an important indicator for determining whether the state is making good on its promise to kids of preparing them for success. The Smarter Balanced exam is administered to all public school students in grades 3-8. Students in 11th grade take the SAT as their Connecticut Core-aligned state exam, a change Governor Malloy announced last summer.

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