

The Bureau Bulletin

From the Bureau of Special Education

Brief from the Chief



It is a busy and exciting time of year here in the Bureau of Special Education (BSE). In the midst of the holiday season, we can only imagine how fast-paced it must be in your districts as the close of 2010 quickly approaches.

For our November *Bureau Bulletin*, we have brought together a collection of articles written by the Department's consultants offering important and timely information to assist you in your day-to-day activities and decision-making in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. While the bulletin is host to articles on a range of topics, this edition is also designated as having the theme of Accountability and Assessment.

As you know, Connecticut has committed to improving student learning through holistic accountability. In order to support districts in this process of continuous improvement, the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) was developed. CALI professional development workshops are an excellent resource in addressing improved student learning through every aspect of the educational environment from instruction, assessment, and data analysis to school climate and leadership. I would encourage you to view the [CALI Professional Development Calendar and explore registering](#) for an event when you have a moment.

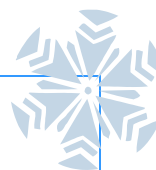
I have no doubt that you have already begun to look forward to March in preparation for both the CMT and CAPT, making sure that testing accommodations for those assessments coincide with each student's IEP accommodations. You have likely taken the opportunity to review the data regarding which of your district's students are appropriate for the MAS or the Skills Checklist and begun your usual organizational process around that. This comprehensive preparation you do each year has resulted in an overall positive, efficient and effective assessment experience for our students, and I would like to thank you as well as commend you for that. Please take a few minutes to visit the [student assessment](#) portion of our Web site to be sure you have the most up-to-date information.

Click [here](#) for more of this article.

Mark Your Calendars...

SEDAC – Oct. 1 Child Count Timely Due Date: December 5, 2010
SEDAC – Oct. 1 Child Count Accurate Due Date: December 15, 2010

Click [here](#) for the updated 2010-2011 Timely and Accurate calendar!



November 2010



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Indicator 3 – Academic Achievement



At this point in the year, parents, teachers and administrators have pored over the scores from the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). The Bureau of Special Education continues to support and monitor districts in making progress in the academic achievement of students with disabilities. The Department often hears from parents and educators requesting resources to assist them in understanding CMT/CAPT information and how to use it to make improvements at the student, school and district level.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for parents and educators in understanding how the results of statewide assessments can be utilized in the education of a student with a disability:

Statewide Assessments

[Understanding Your Child's Scores on the CMT 2010](#)

It is important to remember that CMT scores are only a snapshot in time of a student's performance and that many variables affect that performance on any given day. However, when looking at a student's academic performance during planning and placement team (PPT) meetings and in planning appropriate special education services, CMT scores should be **one** piece of information for consideration. In addition, teams should be looking at curriculum-based measurements, school- or district-wide assessments, progress monitoring, educational evaluations, parent reports and observations, or any other measures that may accurately describe the student's level of performance. Most often, this information is recorded on the Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance, typically page 4 of the individualized education program (IEP).

[CMT Interpretive Guide 2010](#)

While this document appears somewhat technical, it can answer the questions of parents and educators that address the differences and similarities among the standard assessment, Modified Assessment System (MAS) and the skills checklist, as well as questions about the general characteristics of students who score at certain levels on these tests. This document also addresses the question of how to compare data from one year to the next while discussing the limitations of analyzing CMT data.

[Performance Level Descriptors for the CMT and CAPT MAS](#)

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has published performance-level descriptors to assist in understanding the characteristics of students who participated in the MAS for either the CMT or CAPT, in reading and/or math.

[How Can Parents Tell If Their Children Are Making Progress?](#)

Published by the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), this helpful resource speaks to the multiple sources that must be considered in creating a more complete picture of a child's progress, of which the CMT/CAPT are only one source.

Standards-based IEPs

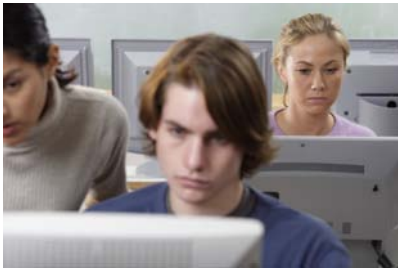
The [Spring 2010 Bureau Bulletin](#) included an article entitled *Indicator 3 Academic Achievement in Special Education: Focus on State Literacy Standards and Curriculum Development*. That article noted that students are required by both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to participate in all large-scale assessments given by school districts and the state, such as the CMT and CAPT. The state's academic standards, also referred to as curriculum frameworks, outline the knowledge and skills in which students need to be proficient that are tested on the CMT and CAPT. These data are also a source of information when considering student performance, which emphasizes the importance of IEP goals and objectives being aligned with the standards.

The spring 2010 article referenced several resources for educators in developing standards-based IEPs. Additionally, CPAC provides some guidance in the article [Aligning the IEP and Academic Content Standards to Improve Academic Achievement](#), available on its Web site at www.cpacinc.org. This document addresses critical issues for parents such as the importance of understanding the state's academic standards, what a standards-based IEP is, and what present levels of performance reflect.



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Curriculum



District-level curriculum is developed based on state standards and is a road map for teachers when developing their instructional topics and themes, in understanding grade level expectations related to content and skill



development, as well as in designing topical assessment materials. Recently, the Connecticut State Board of Education adopted new national academic standards in English language arts and math, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These national standards now represent Connecticut’s own state standards. The CSDE has developed crosswalk documents that demonstrate the similarities between the CCSS and Connecticut’s former standards in English language arts and math, in an effort to assist local education agencies (LEAs) in implementing the newly adopted CCSS. Beyond demonstrating the correlation between the CCSS and Connecticut’s standards, these documents articulate the alignment of the CCSS to the CMT and CAPT. A comprehensive discussion of these resources may be found at the [Common Core State Standards section](#) of the [CDSE Web site](#).

Modified Assessment System (MAS)

The Connecticut Mastery Test Modified Assessment System (CMT MAS) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test Modified Assessment System (CAPT MAS) are alternate assessments for students whose disability precludes them from achieving grade-level proficiency on the standard CMT or CAPT, even when provided with accommodations. Considered as a group, these students may perform significantly better when the statewide assessment is modified to make the assessment more accessible and instructionally meaningful. Students with disabilities who have an IEP may be selected to participate in the CMT/CAPT MAS through the planning and placement team (PPT) process. The CMT/CAPT MAS is designed to assess grade-level curriculum standards. Students may be assessed with the CMT/CAPT MAS in reading and/or mathematics. The CMT MAS and CAPT MAS, then, are designed to measure grade-level, academic content standards but with accommodations, such as a more accessible presentation of text and embedded scaffolding within questions. There are specific criteria and considerations that the PPT must take into account when determining if a student is most appropriate for being assessed using the CMT/CAPT MAS. Updated PPT guidance and MAS fact sheets can be found on the [CMT/CAPT Modified Assessment System \(MAS\) home page](#) of the CSDE Web site.



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Program/Fiscal Compliance Reviews

Last year, the BSE informed school districts that Program/Fiscal Compliance Reviews would commence with the 2010-11 school year. These reviews will be scheduled as desk audits with follow-up on-site visits, if necessary. A requirement of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), these visits are not part of the BSE's focused monitoring system.

The scheduling of these desk audits will follow a three-year cycle:

- School Year 2010-11: LEAs served by CREC and EASTCONN
- School Year 2011-12: LEAs served by ACES and Ed Connection
- School Year 2012-13: LEAs served by CES and LEARN



LEAs included in this year's cycle have already received notification to complete the Desk Audit Form. To review a copy of the form, please click [here](#).

In order to best prepare, LEAs should be aware that reviews will require them to provide detailed information demonstrating their compliance with IDEA requirements. These include:

- a. a policy of tracking equipment bought with federal funds;
- b. a policy to prevent the supplanting of local special education costs with federal funds;
- c. a policy for ensuring the appropriate use of federal funds and an effective tracking system for students served under Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS);
- d. the correct calculation of the proportionate share of IDEA funds for parentally placed private school students with disabilities;
- e. a district process that indicates how the LEA ensures its compliance with NIMAC/NIMAS;
- f. district procedures that demonstrate how the LEA ensures compliance with statewide and district-wide assessment policies/procedures;
- g. evidence of the calculations of district elementary and secondary PPEs for the establishment of excess costs under Section 300.16; and,
- h. if appropriate, the procedures for the distribution of federal funds for students with disabilities attending charter schools.

If you should have any questions, please contact Brian Cunnane at brian.cunnane@ct.gov or 860-713-6919.

Commissioner's Guidance on Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)

On September 15, Commissioner of Education Mark K. McQuillan issued Circular Letter C-2 Revised to Superintendents of Schools and Directors of Educational Service Centers in Connecticut. That communication addressed the topic of the implementation of Scientific Research-Based Interventions in Connecticut public schools. SRBI has significant impact on all students, including students with disabilities. If you have not had an opportunity to read this important document, please be sure to click [here](#) to view it in its entirety. Additional Agency Circular Letters may be viewed at the Connecticut State Department of Education Web site by clicking [here](#). For answers to questions related to this article, please contact Perri Murdica at perri.murdica@ct.gov or 860-713-6942.

CSDE Validity Study on Testing Accommodation

Students who have reading disabilities or have difficulties in decoding often struggle to understand or gain access to questions on standardized tests. How, then, can we reliably assess skills and knowledge being tested? In Connecticut we have offered "read-aloud" options during administration of many of our CMT and CAPT subtests. This accommodation offers oral presentation of directions and test items as a way to give students greater access to our state assessment. For many years now, it has been logistically challenging for schools to adhere to the Connecticut statewide testing policy that requires them to provide a single, certified teacher as a reader for each student with disabilities who may need this accommodation. We have found that the compromises to the ideal testing conditions have not always been ones that benefitted students. Past research has also shown two major problems with this method of delivery. The first is the availability of eligible proctors and the second is readers who may inadvertently provide clues to correct answers. An alternative, computer-based, text-to-speech tool can provide a solution to these problems.

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CSDE Validity Study on Testing Accommodation (cont)

NCLB requires that states offer accommodations on grade-level assessments in order to provide tests that are accessible to as many students with disabilities as possible. In 2006, the CSDE was awarded an Enhanced Assessment Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The primary purpose of the Connecticut Enhanced Assessment Grant (CTEAG) was to conduct research on the impact of test accommodations on the performance of students and to examine the characteristics of test forms as well as test items. Validity was evaluated by comparing their effectiveness for students with disabilities (SWD), who require the accommodation, to their effectiveness for students without disabilities (SWOD), who do not typically use the accommodation. The specific impact of the use of accommodations on test scores was analyzed.

In Connecticut, we examined the *reader of test items* accommodation using a computerized delivery system to determine ways to make the accommodation most effective. With the help of many of our school districts, the CSDE has conducted two separate studies looking at the effectiveness of this accommodation on SWD.

For additional information regarding these results, watch for future material in either the Bureau Bulletin or on the CSDE Web site. For questions regarding testing accommodations for students with special needs, please contact Joseph Amenta at joseph.amenta@ct.gov or 860-713-6855.

CMT/CAPT Accommodations Change as Testing Moves Online

In September, District Test Coordinators (DTCs) were notified of changes in the test accommodations that may be provided for students with disabilities taking the CMT and CAPT. These changes relate specifically to accommodations provided through the Measurement Incorporated Secure System Testing (MIST). Nationally, the use of computers to provide fair and effective access to statewide assessment is increasing, and Connecticut is among the leaders in using online technology. MIST was introduced in 2006 and initially used to administer the CAPT Interdisciplinary Writing test in volunteer districts. Since that time, a number of other tests have been moved to MIST as the state increases the use of online assessment tools to provide accommodations.



Computer-based Text Reader

The most significant changes announced in September relate to the provision of a computer-based text reader in place of having a person read test items and/or directions to the student. Beginning in 2011, for all tests other than the standard CMT math test and all CMT/CAPT supplemental tests, students who are provided with a reader for test items and directions, or for directions only, are required to receive those accommodations through the text reader function in MIST. As an extension of taking the test online, these students will also submit their responses through the MIST application.

Students provided with a reader on the standard CMT math test and/or CMT/CAPT supplemental tests will be accommodated by qualified staff as in previous years.

Submission of Written Responses

Another significant change involves the method by which students submit written responses via computer. For all tests other than the CMT and CAPT math tests (MAS *and* standard), the CAPT science test, and all CMT/CAPT supplemental tests, students who are provided with the “word processor/online computer response” accommodation are now required to submit their responses through the MIST application. Even though the word processor/online computer response accommodation specifically applies to tests that require open-ended responses, students given this accommodation will use the MIST application to take *both* tests in the areas of reading and writing. Specifically, students using MIST for the CMT Reading Comprehension test will also use MIST for the CMT Degrees of Reading Power test, students taking the CMT Direct Assessment of Writing test through MIST will also submit their responses on the CMT Editing and Revising test through MIST, and students given the CAPT Interdisciplinary Writing test through MIST must also use MIST to take the CAPT Editing and Revising test.

Students provided with the word processor accommodation for those CMT and CAPT tests not yet supported through MIST will use word processing software with spelling and grammar checking functions disabled as in past years.

For additional information on these and other CMT/CAPT accommodations, please refer to the current *Assessment Guidelines* document by clicking [here](#). If you have questions, please contact Joe Amenta at joseph.amenta@ct.org, 860-713-6855 or Janet Stuck at janet.stuck@ct.org, 860-713-6837.

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DRA2 Update



Students with special needs are assessed using a wide variety of standardized assessments, one of which is the Developmental Reading Assessment, Second Edition (DRA2). The DRA2 is an individual reading assessment designed to assess students' reading performance in Grades K-3 and Grades 4-8. The DRA2 provides teachers with information that helps determine each student's independent reading level and identify what the student needs to learn next.

The DRA2 provides teachers an opportunity to observe their students' reading behaviors and gather data and information to:

- diagnose students' instructional needs and plan for intervention as needed;
- determine the level at which the student is able to read independently;
- group students effectively to provide appropriate reading instruction and opportunities to practice reading skills and strategies;
- document changes over time in reading performance by monitoring students' ability to use a variety of skills and strategies;
- identify students who may be working below proficiency and need further assessments; and
- inform parents and other educators of students' current reading performance and achievement.

The DRA2 is mandated for all Connecticut Priority School Districts. In addition, a [DRA2 Questions and Answers](#) document is updated annually to provide districts with administration and scoring guidance and protocols. The document also contains supporting materials such as: the Individual Reading Plan (IRP), LAS Links Proficiency Level Descriptors Grades 1-5, Special Education Considerations, and Sample Parent/Guardian Letters in English and Spanish.

If you have questions, contact Amy Radikas at amy.radikas@ct.gov or 860-713-6762.



Federal Focus

Connecticut Strives to Include More Students in NAEP



Beginning January 24 through March 4, 2011, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) will be administered in approximately 275 Connecticut schools to students in Grades 4, 8 and 12. Since NAEP strives to test a representative sample of students, there will be many students with disabilities selected to participate in the assessment. Providing access to NAEP for all selected students is a priority for the NAEP program and the Connecticut State Department of Education. We are asking for your support to increase the rate at which Connecticut's students with disabilities are included in the NAEP. The table below provides historical data related to this effort.

NAEP Inclusion Rates for Students with Disabilities in Connecticut

	Mathematics		Reading	
	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 4	Grade 8
NAEP 2007	90.3%	90.2%	81.8%	85.3%
NAEP 2009	86.2%	85.6%	76.2%	82.9%



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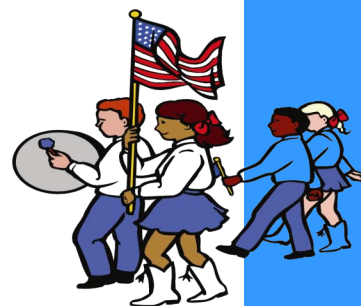
On January 3, 2011, schools participating in the assessment will be provided with a list of students selected for testing. School personnel will begin to make important decisions regarding inclusion and the appropriate use of accommodations for the NAEP. If you are an educator, you may be asked to assist in determining whether your students with disabilities can be included in the assessment. We urge you to consider inclusion for all students. If you are a parent of a student selected to participate, you will be notified that your child has been selected and that student participation is voluntary. We hope that you will consider allowing your child to participate in this assessment with his or her peers.

It is important that everyone involved in the decision-making process understands that the NAEP does not produce results for individual students, schools or districts. All results are summarized at the national and state levels only. Therefore, the NAEP does not impose consequences for students or schools. While the NAEP is voluntary, the program's success depends on student participation to provide an accurate measure of student achievement that will inform improvements in education.

For questions about the NAEP, please contact Renée Savoie, Connecticut NAEP State Coordinator, at renee.savoie@ct.gov or by calling 860-713-6858.

IDEA Turns 35!

On November 29, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law Public Law 94-142, then known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and what we now know as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This landmark legislation paved the way for improved educational outcomes for millions of individuals with disabilities. **Celebrate IDEA!**



Reminders, Resources & Opportunities

Helpful Hints for Student Assessment

Standardized assessments impact many aspects of our students' lives at school. This impact certainly is extended to students with special needs. The following list of student assessment resources offers a wealth of information available to parents, school districts and all stakeholders through the Connecticut State Department of Education. Click on individual items to view those specific materials.

[Student Assessment Web page](#)

[Connecticut's Summative Assessment System](#)

[Testing Schedule](#)

[Connecticut Mastery Test Information for Educators and Parents](#)

[Connecticut Academic Performance Test Resources and Publications](#)

[Assessment Guidelines](#)

[CMT/CAPT Modified Assessment System \(CMT/CAPT MAS\)](#)

[CMT/CAPT Skills Checklist](#)

[Connecticut Benchmark Assessment System \(CBAS\)](#)

Click [here](#) for Bulletin Web Site References

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Web-based Resources from the CSDE

As you conduct the important work that you do, keep in mind that the CSDE Web site has many resources to assist you! Click on any of the following links to view just a few or find them at: www.sde.ct.gov

[Agency Circular Letters](#)

(communications from the Commissioners of Education 1999-2011)

[Approved Private Programs](#)

[Bureau Bulletin Archives](#)

[CMT/CAPT information, forms, etc.](#)

[Connecticut Education Data and Research portal \(CEDaR\)](#)

[Focused Monitoring](#)

[Guidelines](#) *(for varied services as well as the identification of specific disability areas)*

[IEP Manual and Forms](#)

[Legal/Due Process](#)

[Model Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual](#)

[Secondary Transition](#)

Building a Bridge: Transition Manual for Students:

[\[English\]](#) [\[Spanish\]](#)

[Post-school Outcome Goal Statements FAQs](#)

[Summary of Performance FAQs](#)

[Writing Transition Goals and Objectives](#)

[Settlement Agreement](#)

[Staff Directory \(Bureau of Special Education\)](#)

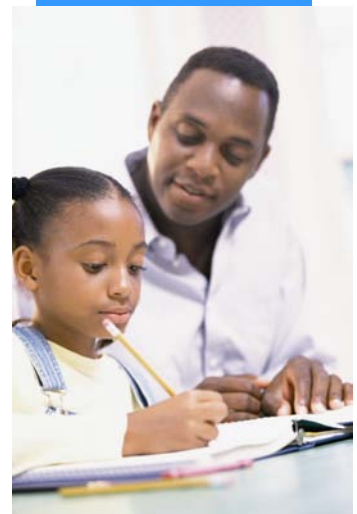
[State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Web site](#)



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Bulletin Web site references**P1**

- a. Brief from the Chief-Complete Document ([attachment](#))
 - CALI Professional Development Calendar and explore registering
 - student assessment
 - Common Formative Assessments
 - CFA overview
- b. Timely and Accurate Data Collection calendar:
ctserc.org/bb/summer2010/p1b%20timely%20and%20accurate%20data%20collection%20calendar.pdf ([attachment](#))

P2 Featured Story

- a. Understanding Your Child's Scores on the CMT 2010
- b. CMT Interpretive Guide 2010
- c. Performance Level Descriptors for the CMT and CAPT MAS
- d. How Can Parents Tell if Their Children are Making Progress?
- e. 2010 Bureau Bulletin
- f. Aligning the IEP and Academic Content Standards to Improve Academic Achievement,
- g. www.cpacinc.org

P3 Featured Story (cont)

- a. Common Core State Standards section
- b. CDSE Web site
- c. CMT/CAPT Modified Assessment System (MAS) home page

P4 State of the State

- a. Desk Audit Form ([attachment](#))
- b. Mark K. McQuillan Circular Letter C-2 P5
- c. www.sde.ct.gov

P5 State of the State (cont)

- a. Assessment Guidelines

P6 Bureau Happenings

- a. DRA2 Questions and Answers

P7 Reminders, Resources & Opportunities

- a. Student Assessment Web page
- b. Connecticut's Summative Assessment System
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- d. Connecticut Mastery Test Information for Educators and Parents
- e. Connecticut Academic Performance Test Resources and Publications
- f. Assessment Guidelines
- g. CMT/CAPT Modified Assessment System (CMT/CAPT MAS)
- h. CMT/CAPT Skills Checklist
- i. Connecticut Benchmark Assessment System (CBAS)
- j. Bulletin Web Site References

P7 Reminders, Resources & Opportunities (cont)

- a. www.sde.ct.gov
- b. Agency Circular Letters (communications from the Commissioners of Education 1999-2011)
- c. Approved Private Programs
- d. Bureau Bulletin Archives
- e. CMT/CAPT information, forms, etc.
- f. Connecticut Education Data and Research portal (CEDaR)
- g. Focused Monitoring
- h. Guidelines (for varied services as well as the identification of specific disability areas)
- i. IEP Manual and Forms
- j. Legal/Due Process
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- p. Settlement Agreement
- q. Staff Directory (Bureau of Special Education)
- r. State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Web site
- s. www.sde.ct.gov