



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

May 4, 2021

The Honorable Desi Nesmith  
Deputy Commissioner of Education  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
450 Columbus Boulevard  
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Deputy Commissioner Nesmith:

Thank you for your participation in the U.S. Department of Education's (the Department) assessment peer review process under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). I appreciate the efforts of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to prepare for the peer review, which occurred in July 2020. Specifically, CSDE submitted evidence regarding the general and alternate assessments for science in grades 5, 8, and 11.

State assessment systems provide essential information that States, districts, principals and teachers can use to identify the academic needs of students, target resources and supports toward students who need them most, evaluate school and program effectiveness and close achievement gaps among students. A high-quality assessment system also provides useful information to parents about their children's advancement against and achievement of grade-level standards. The Department's peer review of State assessment systems is designed to provide feedback to States to support the development and administration of high-quality assessments.

External peer reviewers and Department staff carefully evaluated CSDE submission and the Department found, based on the evidence received, that the components of your assessment system meet most, but not all, of the statutory and regulatory requirements of sections 1111(b)(1) and (2) of the ESEA. Based on the recommendations from this peer review and our own analysis of the State's submission, I have determined the following:

- General assessments for science in grades 5, 8, and 11 (Next Generation Science Standards Assessments (Cambium Science): **Partially meets requirements of the ESEA.**
- Alternate assessments for science in grades 5, 8, and 11 (Connecticut Alternate Science): **Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA.**

The components that **partially meet requirements** do not meet a number of the requirements of the statute and regulations and/or the CSDE will need to provide substantial additional information to demonstrate it meets the requirements. The Department expects that the CSDE may not be able to submit all of the required information within one year.

**Substantially meets requirements** means that these components meet most of the requirements of the statute and regulations but some additional evidence is required.

The specific list of items required for CSDE to submit is enclosed with this letter. I request that CSDE submit a plan within 30 days outlining when it will submit all required additional documentation for peer review. I recognize the unprecedented situation affecting you and your schools due to widespread and extended school closures caused by the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. As a result, if you need more than 30 days to submit your

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plan, please let my staff know at [ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov](mailto:ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov). Upon submission of the plan, the Department will reach out to CSDE to determine a mutually agreeable schedule. Resubmission should occur once all necessary evidence is complete (rather than in multiple submissions). Because the science general assessments only partially met the requirements, the Department is placing a condition on CSDE's Title I, Part A grant award. To satisfy this condition, CSDE must submit satisfactory evidence to address the items identified in the enclosed list. If adequate progress is not made, the Department may take additional action.

The full peer review notes from the review are enclosed. These recommendations to the Department formed the basis of our determination. Please note that the peers' recommendations may differ from the Department's feedback; we encourage you to read the full peer notes for additional suggestions and recommendations for improving your assessment system beyond what is noted in the Department's feedback. Department staff will reach out to your assessment director in the next few days to discuss the peer notes and the Department's determination and to answer any questions you have.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students. I look forward to our continued partnership as we move ahead with this critical work. I appreciate the work you are doing to improve your schools and provide a high-quality education for your students.

If you have any questions, please contact my staff at: [ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov](mailto:ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov).

Sincerely,

/s/

Ian Rosenblum  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs  
Delegated the Authority to Perform the  
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary

Enclosures

cc: Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer

**Critical Elements that Require Additional Evidence for Connecticut’s Assessment System**

<b>Critical element</b>	<b>Additional Evidence Needed</b>
<p><b>1.4 – Policies for Including All Students in Assessments</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of policies which state that all students with disabilities in the State, including those children with disabilities publicly placed in private schools as a means of providing special education and related services, must be included in the assessment system.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.1 – Test Design and Development</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State’s test design and test development process includes statements(s) of the purposes of the assessments and the intended interpretations and uses of results, (e.g., evidence of an explicit rather than implicit description of the purposes and interpretations of the uses of assessment results).</li> <li>• Evidence that the State’s test design and test development process includes test blueprints that describe the structure of each assessment in sufficient detail to support the development of assessments that are technically sound, measure the depth and breadth of the State’s grade-level academic content standards, and support the intended interpretations and uses of the results, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that guidelines given to States on developing test blueprints include specific rules, constraints, and parameters for building test blueprints; and evidence of a procedure for reviewing each State’s test blueprints.</li> <li>○ Evidence that the State’s test blueprints consider the full range (all three dimensions) of the science standards rather than just the disciplinary core ideas dimension.</li> <li>○ Evidence that shows the full range (all three dimensions) of the science standards play a role throughout the test design and development process such as with test blueprints, scoring, and results; or give a rationale for why the test blueprints do not consider all three dimensions throughout the test design and development process.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State’s test design and test development process includes statements(s) of the purposes of the assessments and the intended interpretations and uses of results, (e.g., evidence of a more explicit description of the purposes and interpretations of the uses of assessment results).</li> <li>• Evidence that the State’s test design and test development process includes test blueprints that describe the structure of each assessment in sufficient detail to support the development of assessments that are technically sound, measure the depth and breadth of the State’s grade-level academic content standards, and support the intended interpretations and uses of the results (e.g., evidence of more descriptive test blueprints that meet the requirements for this critical element).</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.2 – Item Development</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State uses reasonable and technically sound procedures to develop and select items to assess student achievement based on the State’s academic content standards in terms of content and cognitive process, including higher-order thinking skills, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that clarifies discrepancies between the expected vocabulary listed in the item specifications and information provided in the science frameworks and Next Generation Science Standards.</li> <li>○ Evidence on demographic characteristics of fairness and advisory committee members for each participating State, especially in terms of their science expertise.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Critical element	Additional Evidence Needed
	<p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State uses reasonable and technically sound procedures to develop and select items to assess student achievement based on the State’s academic content standards in terms of content and cognitive process, including higher-order thinking skills (e.g., evidence on demographic characteristics of fairness and advisory committee members, especially in terms of their science expertise).</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.3 – Test Administration</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has established contingency plans to address possible technology challenges during test administration (e.g., evidence of contingency plans for server difficulties that originate at the vendor delivery level).</li> <li>• Evidence that the State has established procedures to ensure that appropriate staff receive necessary training to administer assessments and know how to make use of appropriate accommodations during assessments for all students with disabilities (e.g., evidence that all test administrators have earned the vendor’s Test Administrator Certificate).</li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has established procedures to ensure that appropriate staff receive necessary training to administer assessments and know how to make use of appropriate accommodations during assessments for all students with disabilities (e.g., evidence that all test administrators have earned the vendor’s Test Administrator Certificate).</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.5 – Test Security</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has implemented and documented an appropriate set of policies and procedures to prevent test irregularities and ensure the integrity of test results, specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of a process for remediation following test security incidents that occur during test development and administration under the consortium’s control, and a process for communicating this information to participating States in a timely manner.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>2.6 – Systems for Protecting Data Integrity and Privacy</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has policies and procedures in place to protect the integrity and confidentiality of its test materials, test-related data, and personally identifiable information (e.g., evidence of provisions for ensuring that each participating State’s data is separated from other States’ data).</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.1 – Overall Validity, including Validity Based on Content</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State’s academic assessments measure the knowledge and skills specified in the State’s academic content standards (e.g., evidence of a plan to address issues identified in the shared item bank alignment report such as the editorial errors and cases where items included expectations beyond grade-level).</li> <li>• Evidence that the State has documentation of adequate alignment between the State’s assessments and the academic content standards the assessments are designed to measure in terms of content (i.e., knowledge and process), balance of content, and cognitive complexity (e.g., evidence of a plan to address the shared item bank alignment study finding that at grade 11, range of knowledge was weakly met for the earth and space domain and not met for the physical science domain).</li> </ul>

Critical element	Additional Evidence Needed
	<p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has documentation of adequate alignment between the State’s assessments and the academic content standards the assessments are designed to measure in terms of content (i.e., knowledge and process), balance of content, and cognitive complexity (e.g., evidence of an action plan to address the recommendations for improvement cited in the external alignment study).</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.2 – Validity Based on Cognitive Processes</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has documented adequate validity evidence that its assessments tap the intended cognitive processes appropriate for each grade level as represented in the State’s academic content standards (e.g., evidence of demographic characteristics for panelists involved in the State’s shared item bank alignment study, especially in terms of their science expertise).</li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has documented adequate validity evidence that its assessments tap the intended cognitive processes appropriate for each grade level as represented in the State’s academic content standards, specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of a cognitive lab study or some other kind of evidence that is sufficient for this critical element.</li> <li>○ Evidence of demographic characteristics for panelists involved in the State’s alternate assessment alignment study, especially in terms of their science expertise.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>3.3 – Validity Based on Internal Structure</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science <u>and</u> Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence the State has documented adequate validity evidence that the scoring and reporting structures of the assessments are consistent with the subdomain structures of the State’s academic content standards (e.g., evidence of a rationale for why the science disciplines of life, physical, and earth and space were chosen as the subdomain structures of the assessments rather than all three dimensions of the science standards).</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.4 – Validity Based on Relationships with Other Variables</b></p>	<p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate validity evidence that the State’s assessment scores are related as expected with other variables (e.g., evidence that the missing subsection “5.2.2 Convergent and Discriminant Validity” has been added to the technical report).</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.1 – Reliability</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has documented adequate reliability evidence for its assessments for the State’s population overall and each student group consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical testing standards (e.g., evidence of a rationale for the low reliability coefficients for limited English proficiency students and a plan to improve their reliability).</li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has documented adequate reliability evidence for its assessments for the State’s population overall and each student group consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical testing standards (e.g., evidence of subgroup results for reliability estimates, conditional standard error of measurement or CSEM, SEM, and classification accuracy and consistency where the sample sizes are sufficient).</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.2 – Fairness and Accessibility</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has taken reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure that its assessments are accessible to all students and fair across student groups in their design, development, and analysis, specifically:</li> </ul>

Critical element	Additional Evidence Needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that the formatting and technology-related issues observed in the Braille cognitive lab study have been resolved.</li> <li>○ Evidence that DIF results are communicated in a manner that allows for ease of interpretation and evaluation (e.g., DIF results are in a table format with the number of items that showed C-level DIF by grade, science discipline, and subgroup like English learner, and indicates what happened to the items).</li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State has taken reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure that its assessments are accessible to all students and fair across student groups in their design, development, and analysis, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that differential item functioning (DIF) results are communicated in a manner that allows for ease of interpretation and evaluation (e.g., DIF results are in a table format with the number of items that showed high “C-level DIF” by grade, science discipline, and subgroups like English learner, and indicates what happened to these flagged items).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>4.4 – Scoring</b>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State has established and documented standardized scoring procedures and protocols for its assessments that are designed to produce reliable and meaningful results, facilitate valid score interpretations, and report assessment results in terms of the State’s academic achievement standards, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that clarifies how paper tests are scored.</li> <li>○ Evidence on the development and implementation of scoring for open-ended items.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State has established and documented standardized scoring procedures and protocols for its assessments that are designed to produce reliable and meaningful results, facilitate valid score interpretations, and report assessment results in terms of the State’s academic achievement standards, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of a clear rationale for the scoring procedures used on the assessments.</li> <li>○ Evidence of more descriptive language used on the scoring rubrics.</li> <li>○ Evidence of inter-rater reliability for scoring performance tasks.</li> <li>○ Evidence of performance levels by subgroup.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>4.6 – Multiple Versions of an Assessment</b>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State followed a design and development process to support comparable interpretations of results for students tested across the versions of the assessments for its paper, Braille, and online versions and its Spanish and English versions.</li> </ul>
<b>4.7 – Technical Analysis and Ongoing Maintenance</b>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State has a system for monitoring, maintaining, and improving, as needed, the quality of its assessment system, including clear and technically sound criteria for the analyses of all the assessments in its assessment system (e.g., evidence to clarify the details for continued item development and replenishment of the item banks).</li> </ul>

Critical element	Additional Evidence Needed
	<p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has a system for monitoring, maintaining, and improving, as needed, the quality of its assessment system, including clear and technically sound criteria for the analyses of all the assessments in its assessment system (e.g., evidence of a plan for ongoing maintenance of the test items and assessments).</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.1 – Procedures for Including Students with Disabilities</b></p>	<p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State has in place procedures to ensure the inclusion of all public elementary and secondary school students with disabilities in the State’s assessment system, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of any effects of State and local policies on a student’s education resulting from taking an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS), such as how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma.</li> <li>○ Evidence that parents of students assessed with an AA-AAAS are informed that their child’s achievement will be measured based on alternate academic achievement standards.</li> <li>○ Evidence that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take an AA-AAAS are not precluded from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>5.3 – Accommodations</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science <u>and</u> Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that accommodations the State provides are appropriate and effective for meeting the individual student’s need(s) to participate in the assessments, do not alter the construct being measured, allow meaningful interpretations of results and comparison of scores for students who need and receive accommodations and students who do not need and do not receive accommodations (e.g., evidence from literature reviews or professional organizations that accommodations provided allow for valid inferences).</li> <li>• Evidence the State ensures that accommodations for all required assessments do not deny students with disabilities or English learners the opportunity to participate in the assessment and any benefits from participation in the assessment (e.g., evidence that these students still have the opportunity to earn a regular high school diploma).</li> </ul>
<p><b>6.1 – State Adoption of Academic Achievement Standards for All Students</b></p>	<p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State formally adopted alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (e.g., evidence of minutes from a State Board of Education meeting).</li> </ul>
<p><b>6.2 – Achievement Standards-Setting</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State used a technically sound method and process that involved panelists with appropriate experience and expertise for setting academic achievement standards (e.g., evidence of the science expertise for the standards-setting panels).</li> </ul>
<p><b>6.3 – Challenging and Aligned Academic Achievement Standards</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the State’s academic achievement standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the State and relevant State career and technical education standards such that a student who scores at the proficient or above level has mastered what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time they</li> </ul>

Critical element	Additional Evidence Needed
	<p>graduate from high school in order to succeed in college and the workforce, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of comparisons between Cambium science scores on the grade 11 assessments and scores on career ready tests like WorkKeys.</li> </ul> <p>For the Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State’s alternate academic achievement standards in science are aligned to ensure that a student who meets the alternate academic achievement standards is on track to pursue postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of follow-up studies that examine proficiency on the high-school assessment and performance in post-secondary education, vocational training or competitive integrated employment.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>6.4 – Reporting</b></p>	<p>For the Cambium science <u>and</u> Connecticut alternate science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evidence that the State reports its assessment results for all students assessed, and the reporting facilitates timely, appropriate, credible, and defensible interpretations and uses of those results by parents, educators, State officials, policymakers and other stakeholders, and the public, specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that User Guides and other documents be updated to include the new assessments.</li> <li>○ Evidence that assessment reports are to the extent practicable, written in a language that parents and guardians can understand or, if it is not practicable to provide written translations to a parent or guardian with limited English proficiency, are orally translated for such parent or guardian.</li> <li>○ Upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), as amended, are provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>