



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Honorable Miguel A. Cardona
Commissioner of Education
Connecticut State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

FEB - 3 2020

Dear Commissioner Cardona:

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), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). I appreciate the efforts of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to prepare for the peer review, which occurred in August 2019.

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's submission, which included several assessments. Based on the recommendations from this peer review and our own analysis of the State's submission, I have determined the following:

- Reading/language arts and mathematics general assessments for grades 3-8 (Smarter Balanced):
Meets requirements of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA.

Congratulations on this significant accomplishment. Assessments that produce valid and reliable results are fundamental to a State's accountability system. Please be aware that approval of CSDE's use of Smarter Balanced for assessments is not a determination that the system complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Also, please remember that, if CSDE makes significant changes in its assessments, the State must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

Regarding the other assessments, the Department found, based on the evidence received, that the components of your assessment system meet many, but not all, of the statutory and regulatory requirements

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

of sections 1111(b)(1) and (2) of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA. Based on the recommendations from this peer review and our own analysis of the State’s submission, I have determined the following:

- Reading/language arts and mathematics general assessments in high school (SAT): **Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA.**
- Reading/language arts and mathematics alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) in grades 3-8 and high school (CTAA): **Substantially meets requirements of the ESEA, as amended by ESSA.**

Substantially meets requirements means that these components meet most of the requirements of the statute and regulations but some additional information is required. The Department notes that while your State met more of the requirements related to State administration of the SAT, as compared to the initial peer review in 2018, *significant* concerns related to test design and alignment with State standards have not yet been addressed. Alignment to the State’s challenging academic standards is critical to having a valid and reliable assessment system. The Department must see that the State has made substantial progress towards improved evidence of alignment of the SAT with the State’s academic content standards in the next peer review or the Department will take additional enforcement action.

Because the concerns related to test design and alignment have not been addressed over multiple peer reviews, the Department is continuing the condition on the State’s Title I grant award related to those components of the assessment system. To satisfy this condition, CSDE must submit satisfactory evidence to address the items identified in the enclosed list. The condition should remain until all of the evidence has been resubmitted and peer reviewed. If the outcome of the re-review by peers indicates full approval, then the condition should be removed. If adequate progress is not made, the Department may take additional action.

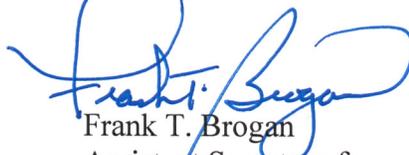
The specific list of items required for CSDE to submit is enclosed with this letter. Within 30 days of receipt of this letter, CSDE must provide to the Department a plan and timeline by which it will submit the additional documentation. If adequate progress is not made in providing this information, 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: OESE.Assessment@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Frank T. Brogan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "F" and "B".

Frank T. Brogan
Assistant Secretary for
Elementary and Secondary Education

Enclosures

cc: Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer

Critical Elements Where Additional Evidence is Needed to Meet the Requirements for Connecticut’s Assessment System

Critical Element	Evidence Needed
2.1 – Test Design and Development	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the State’s test design and test development process is well-suited for the content, is technically sound, aligns the assessments to the depth and breadth of the State’s academic content standards for the grade that is being assessed and includes processes to ensure that each academic assessment is tailored to the knowledge and skills included in the State’s academic content standards, reflects appropriate inclusion of challenging content, and requires complex demonstrations or applications of knowledge and skills (e.g., a plan and a timeline to address and remedy the alignment issues identified in the existing alignment studies, particularly in mathematics).
2.2 – Item Development	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of 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.
3.1 – Overall Validity, including Validity Based on Content	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence in 2.1 will satisfy this critical element.
3.2 – Validity Based on Cognitive Processes	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity evidence that its assessments tap the intended cognitive processes appropriate for high school as represented in the State’s academic content standards.
3.3 – Validity Based on Internal Structure	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that scoring and reporting structures of its assessments are consistent with the sub-domain structures of the State’s academic content standards on which the intended interpretations and uses of results are based.
4.7 – Technical Analysis and Ongoing Maintenance	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of a system for monitoring and maintaining, and improving as needed, the quality of its assessment system, including clear and technically sound criteria for the analyses of all of the assessments in its assessment system.
5.3 – Accommodations	For the SAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the State has determined that the accommodations it provides (i) are appropriate and effective for meeting the individual student’s need(s) to participate in the assessments, (ii) do not alter the construct being assessed, and (iii) 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.

Critical Element	Evidence Needed
<p>6.3 – Challenging and Aligned Academic Achievement Standards</p>	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of how the academic achievement standards are challenging and aligned with the State’s academic content standards such that a high school 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 graduate from high school in order to succeed in college and the workforce. <p>For the CTAA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the alternate academic achievement standards (AAAS) ensure that students are on track to pursue postsecondary education or employment, as specified in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA. The SEA should provide this evidence by December 15, 2020.
<p>6.4 – Reporting</p>	<p>For the SAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of reporting that facilitates timely, appropriate, credible, and defensible interpretations and uses of results for students tested by parents, educators, State officials, policymakers and other stakeholders, and the public, including the production and delivery of individual student interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports after each administration of its assessments that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Report the student’s achievement in terms of the State’s grade-level academic achievement standards (including performance-level descriptors). ○ Are available, to the extent practicable, in a native language that parents can understand.