



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell *Dianna R. Wentzell*
Commissioner of Education

DATE: September 22, 2015

SUBJECT: Highlights from Connecticut's Approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Request

On August 6, 2015, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) approved Connecticut's renewal request for flexibility from certain requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Connecticut's approved ESEA Flexibility Request is available online at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2683&Q=334346>. This three-year renewal allows Connecticut to make important changes to the State's accountability system.

One of the most important changes, which has broad stakeholder support, is effectively reducing testing time for high school students. Through Governor Malloy's leadership on this issue, the USED approved the State's request to administer the SAT, a nationally recognized college readiness examination, instead of the Smarter Balanced assessment to assess all Grade 11 students in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics starting with the 2015-16 school year. Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) staff have begun planning for this transition.

The flexibility renewal process presented the CSDE with an opportunity to improve the State's school and district accountability model. The approved "next generation" accountability model moves beyond just test scores and graduation rates. Instead, it provides a more holistic, multifactor perspective of district and school performance and incorporates student growth over time. For two years, the CSDE actively sought feedback regarding the accountability system from district and school leaders, Connecticut educators, state and national experts, CSDE staff, and many others. The "next generation" system is a direct result of this extensive consultation process.

The "next generation" accountability model is a 12-indicator multiple measures system that focuses on:

- academic achievement in mathematics, ELA and science as measured by subject-specific indices valuing scale scores over achievement levels;
- academic growth of the same students over time;
- participation in State assessments;
- attendance (i.e., reduction in chronic absenteeism rates);
- academic readiness for college and careers through course taking and exam performance;
- demonstration of being "on track" for graduation at the end of Grade 9;

- four-year *and* six-year cohort graduation rates;
- participation and performance on the Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment; and
- access to arts courses.

The USED required the CSDE to provide a timetable for the planning, development and implementation of its student growth model. The model will serve as an important component of the statewide accountability system. Extensive feedback on this model will be sought from the State Board of Education, district/school leaders, teachers and other education stakeholders before it is finalized in the summer of 2016.

This growth model will also inform the educator evaluation and support system. The USED approved Connecticut's request to delay the incorporation of student growth from State assessments in the educator evaluation and support system to the 2016-17 school year.

The USED granted Connecticut an accountability "pause." This means that the CSDE will not place all schools into one of five categories in 2015-16. The USED does require Connecticut to identify the lowest performing schools overall (Turnaround) and schools with the lowest performing student subgroups (Focus) by January 31, 2016. However, the "pause" enables the CSDE to hold off classifying all remaining schools statewide until the 2016-17 school year.

The USED granted additional flexibilities with respect to "recently arrived" English learners (ELs). Connecticut has been granted permission to exempt "recently arrived" ELs in Grades 3 through 8, who have attended schools in the United States for less than two years, from the academic achievement (status) measure in the State's accountability system for both ELA and mathematics. Instead, Connecticut must include student growth of "recently arrived" ELs from the first to the second year, in both ELA and mathematics, in school and district accountability calculations in the student's second year. This requires that all "recently arrived" ELs test in all content areas annually. Assessment scores for ELs who have attended U.S. schools for more than two years will be used in the achievement status and growth measures of the accountability system.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ajit Gopalakrishnan at ajit.gopalakrishnan@ct.gov or 860-713-6888 with any questions about the accountability system or the flexibilities received by Connecticut.