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STATE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON CORE EDUCATION STANDARDS

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You asked (1) what progress the state has made on the transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for education and (2) what plans the state has to pay for technology needed for new state tests based on the new standards.

SUMMARY

School districts have already begun revising their curricula to match the CCSS, which were adopted by the State Board of Education on July 7, 2010. Although Connecticut districts design their own curricula and instructional programs, they must revise their local curricula to reflect the CCSS because the next generation of statewide mastery tests will be based on those standards. The State Department of Education (SDE) is providing technical assistance and training for school district personnel. The governor's proposed budget revisions include $500,000 in FY 13 for revising curriculum to align with the CCSS and international standards.

The new mastery tests are scheduled to be introduced in the 2014-15 school year. The state is working through a federally funded, multi-state consortium to develop a new computer-based testing system based on the CCSS. These tests will be used as the new state mastery tests.

So far, no state funding has been appropriated to upgrade school districts' technology infrastructure for the new tests. But, according to Barbara Beaudin, associate commissioner of education for assessment, research and technology, the state, through the consortium, will be assessing school districts' technological readiness for the new tests over the next two years.

IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The CCSS are a set of state education standards for English language arts and mathematics developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of State School Officers. The standards, which states may voluntarily adopt, seek to raise student achievement and provide more uniform curricula and instruction among states. They are designed to be clearer and more rigorous than current state standards, aligned with college and career expectations, internationally benchmarked, and based on evidence and research. Forty-three states, including Connecticut, have adopted the CCSS.

Based on a comparison study conducted in May 2010, SDE determined that 80% of the CCSS English language arts and 92% of the CCSS math standards match Connecticut's current standards in those areas. Using this study and further comparisons of grade-level CCSS with school district curricula, SDE has already held professional development sessions for district curriculum writing teams to give guidance on how to start revising district curricula to incorporate the CCSS.

SDE also created technical assistance documents to help districts revise their curricula. The documents show the correlations between CCSS and the state's existing standards and mastery tests and provide additional resources for curriculum development. They are available on SDE's Common Core website. SDE will also develop explicit criteria to help districts choose new instructional materials and textbooks.

To help current teachers and school administrators implement the CCSS, SDE plans extensive training and professional development sessions over the next three years for teachers and school administrators. These opportunities will be offered statewide and regionally through English language arts and math organizations and the Regional Education Service Center Alliance, among others.

More detailed information about state activities to implement CCSS is available in Section 1 of the state's application for a federal waiver of certain Education and Secondary Education Act provisions.

NEW STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

The next versions of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), which will be introduced in the 2014-15 school year, will incorporate test content aligned with the CCSS. The state is working through a federally funded, multi-state consortium to develop a new computer-based student assessment system aligned with the CCSS. Once developed, the system will be shared by all the consortium's members.

During 2012, SDE plans to (1) pilot new test items designed to measure students' learning using the CCSS and (2) remove current CMT and CAPT questions that measure skills not required under the new standards. SDE will use pilot data collected to create questions based on the CCSS to be administered as a supplement to the state tests in 2012-13 and 2013-14. These supplemental questions will not be used for accountability purposes, but will give districts and schools information on how successfully teachers and administrators have implemented the CCSS in classroom instruction. In addition, according to associate commissioner Beaudin, the state will offer districts a small-scale pilot program for online testing between now and 2014.

Regarding school districts' technological readiness for computer-based testing, Beaudin explained that the new computer-based tests will not necessarily require a computer for each student. The new testing system will use computer adaptive testing, which is more accurate, efficient and secure than current paper and pencil tests. The new tests will adjust test questions based on a student's answers to previous questions. By adapting to a student's ability while he or she is taking it, the test will better identify the skills each student has mastered.

Because the tests are different for every student and require fewer questions than current paper and pencil tests, they do not have to be administered to all students at the same time. This allows multiple students to use the same computer to take the test. In addition, the new tests will be administered over 12 weeks compared to four weeks for the current paper and pencil tests. The tests themselves will be accessed via an online platform, to which the state will buy access. There will be nothing to download and the mechanisms that students use to access the test can vary, giving districts additional flexibility and reducing the burden on their infrastructure, according to Beaudin.

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