

October 24, 2012

Dear Members of the Achievement Gap Task Force:

I am enclosing our report, "Making Sense of the Vertical Scales: An Alternative View of the Connecticut Mastery Test Results," which I hope will further your work on the Achievement Gap Task Force.

This report looks beyond the standards-based reporting generally used by the state (percent of students at different levels – proficient, goal, etc. – in a given year) to the more nuanced vertical scale scores. Our analysis reveals:

- On average, students are making progress on the vertical scales on the standard CMT in math and reading, even though this growth may not be reflected on the standards-based level reports.
- Racial and ethnic minority and low-income students had lower vertical scale scores, on average, than white and more affluent students in third grade math and reading, the first year that the standard Connecticut Mastery Test is administered to students. Within racial and ethnic groups, children from lower-income families (eligible for free and reduced price meals) tend to score lower on the vertical scale scores in third grade.
- Despite different starting points, black, Latino, English Language Learning students, and students with disabilities on average experienced a comparable amount of growth or improvement on the standard CMT in math and reading from one year (grade 3 in 2009) to the next (grade 4 in 2010) compared to the statewide average.

We conclude that the state should place a greater emphasis on indicators of academic improvement over time rather than simply status measures. We also suggest that the State and districts focus resources on early intervention to support children's learning and family well-being before children reach third grade. Finally, we recommend that policymakers identify more balanced methods, both quantitative and qualitative, of defining school and district success.

As background, I am enclosing our earlier report: "Addition through Subtraction: Are Rising Test Scores in Connecticut School Districts Related to the Exclusion of Students with Disabilities?"

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me or my colleagues if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Robert Cotto Jr.
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