



# Connecticut's Accountability System: Frequently Asked Questions

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In February 2012, the Connecticut State Department of Education participated in a federal application process for flexibility from certain requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (or *No Child Left Behind*). In May 2012, the U.S. Department of Education approved Connecticut's Flexibility Request (or waiver), allowing the State to establish a new accountability system to assess school performance. The new performance measurement system, initially implemented during the 2012-13 school year, improves the State's ability to provide more accurate and appropriate interventions, support, and recognition to local schools and districts. This *FAQ* addresses issues related to the biggest shifts in Connecticut's accountability system and provides an overview of key components.

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## INDEX SCORES

### 1. Connecticut's accountability system uses an index score. What are the advantages to using an index score?

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), determining overall school performance required consideration of multiple data points, including individual grade and subject-area tests across five performance levels. This made overall school performance assessments and comparisons nearly impossible. Alternatively, calculating an index score, which is a composite of multiple data points, allows the CSDE to assess and compare school performance across more than one tested grade, subject or performance level. Note that index scores allow for appropriate peer comparisons among schools for accountability purposes, but may have limited diagnostic value.

Given the sizeable achievement gaps between student subgroups in Connecticut, it is imperative to utilize indicators that allow the progress of subgroups to be tracked over time. The single value indices used in Connecticut's accountability system allow performance differences between subgroups to be measured in a manner that is more comprehensive and understandable than the system under NCLB.

### 2. How is student performance on state assessments used to calculate an index?

Indices can be calculated at the student-, subject-, school- and district-levels. To calculate an index, a student's achievement level in each subject on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) or the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) must first be transformed into an index score using the tables below.

**Standard CMT/CAPT**

<b>Achievement Levels</b>	<b>Index score</b>
Goal (4) and Advanced (5)	100
Proficient (3)	67
Basic (2)	33
Below Basic (1)	0

**Alternate Assessments**

<b>Achievement Levels</b>		<b>Index score</b>
<b>Modified Assessment</b>	<b>Skills Checklist</b>	
Goal (3)	Independent (3)	100
Proficient (2)	Proficient (2)	50
Basic (1)	Basic (1)	0

A **Student Individual Performance Index (Student IPI)** is calculated by averaging all of a given student's valid and non-excluded subject index scores. For example, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student who attains the Proficient level in Math, Goal level in Reading, and Advanced level in Writing would have a Student IPI of 89 (i.e.,  $67 + 100 + 100 / 3 = 89$ ). Note that a student's IPI may be the average of one, two, three, or four tests, depending upon which tests are valid and not excluded.

A **School Performance Index (SPI)** is calculated by averaging all of a given school's valid and non-excluded Student IPIs.

A **District Performance Index (DPI)** is calculated by averaging all of a given district's valid and non-excluded Student IPIs. Note that students who are enrolled in 'Programs' or are outplaced are included in a given district's DPI.

Subject-level indexes may also be calculated for schools and districts. A **Subject School Performance Index (Subject SPI)** is calculated by averaging all valid and non-excluded Student IPIs for a given subject, for a given school (e.g., Mathematics SPI or Reading SPI).

### **3. How were 2012-2013 School Performance Index (SPI) targets established?**

The State's ultimate target for schools is 88 SPI points on the 0-100 SPI scale by 2024. This target was established because at this value students will have performed at the 'goal' level on the majority of tests they take (e.g., if students in a given school take three tests, on average they will have performed at the 'goal' level on two of the three tests and at the 'proficient' level on one).

To determine annual school-level targets, the CSDE first calculated school-level baselines. Baselines are the mean of 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 SPIs. In instances where schools did not have three years of data, the CSDE used as much data as was available.

Schools with baselines greater than or equal to 88 must maintain an SPI greater than or equal to 88. Schools with baselines less than 88 must progress  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  the distance from their baselines to 88 each year or alternatively stated, they must progress half the distance from their baselines to 88 in six years (2018). For example, if School B's baseline is 76, its distance to 88 is 12 SPI points; therefore, School B's target for 2012-2013 is 77 or a rate of 1 additional SPI point per year.

If a school's baseline is less than 52, its annual target rate exceeds 3 SPI points. Using historical data, the CSDE determined that rates above 3 SPI points per year were difficult to achieve; consequently, the CSDE caps annual targets at 3 SPI points. For example, if School C's baseline is 40, its distance to 88 is 48 SPI points or an annual target increment of 4 SPI points. If the annual target cap did not exist, School C's target for 2012-2013 would be 44. Because of the cap of 3 SPI points, School C's target is actually 43.

#### **4. How 'big' is a School Performance Index (SPI) point?**

For the sake of simplicity, assume that School D is a K-3 school that has 100 students and all students receive a valid score in the three subject areas (i.e., reading, mathematics and writing). If School D's baseline is 33 and its target is 36 (3 additional SPI points), then some combination of 27 tested subject scores with a performance level below "goal" must show improvement by one level, while all others maintain. This can be achieved by 27 different students improving in at least one level in one area where they scored below "goal", or by 9 students improving in all three areas if they scored below "goal" in all three areas, or some combination thereof, while others maintain their performance level.

Note: Student IPIs are calculated to create School and District Performance Indices (SPIs and DPIs). The Student IPI is not designed to serve as a diagnostic measure for an individual student, because, by definition, it is an average of a given student's ability across multiple subjects.

#### **5. How should SPIs be used?**

The SPI alone does not represent as full a picture of school performance as does school classification; thus, school classification should be used when evaluating school performance and level of need.

In the accountability system, schools are classified into categories based not only on their overall SPI but also on other indicators such as subgroup performance and graduation rates. Consequently, there may be two schools with overall SPIs of 90, for example, where one is classified as an Excelling School and the other is classified as a Progressing school due to large gaps in subgroup performance. In this instance, using school classification to gauge school performance, instead of overall SPI, highlights achievement gaps.

In addition, the SPI is a criterion-referenced measurement, not a norm-referenced one. In the accountability system, a school's annual SPI performance targets are set based on that specific school's performance and the improvements that school needs to make to reach the ultimate State target of 88 SPI points. The target is not based on the performance of other schools; therefore, SPI should be interpreted not relative to the performance of other schools but relative to that particular school's ability to make its annual performance improvement targets. A similar customized target-setting approach is also used for graduation rates.

# SCHOOL CLASSIFICATIONS

## 1. What indicators are used to classify Connecticut schools?

Combinations of the indicators listed below drive school classification decisions. Depending on overall school performance on the CMT/ CAPT, the indicators will apply to schools differently.

- Overall School Performance Index
- SPI target attainment
- Percentage of students achieving advanced on CMT/ CAPT
- Subgroup performance (English Language Learners, students with disabilities, Black/ African-American students, Hispanic/ Latino students, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch)
- Four-year cohort graduation rate
- Holding Power Rate (previously referred to as an extended graduation rate)
- CMT/ CAPT participation rates
- School Improvement Grant status

The table available through the link below illustrates how indicators are used in school classifications. A few exceptions/ adjustments should be noted:

- Every year, new schools open and at the end of their first year, those schools will have just a single year of data, which can be used to establish baselines and targets, as well as be used for classification. However, with just a single year of data, a school's progress cannot be determined within this system. Therefore, when classifying new schools, the progress indicator cannot be used.
- Schools that had fewer than 20 tested students in previous years would not have had reportable SPIs or established performance targets for 2012-13. It is possible that the number of tested students could increase in 2012-13 allowing the CSDE to report an SPI based on 2012-13 CMT or CAPT data. For classification purposes, these schools are treated in the same manner as new schools (explained above).
- The U.S. Department of Education expects that all schools, including those without any students in grades tested by either the CMT or the CAPT, will receive a school classification. To comply with this requirement, Connecticut analyzed district-wide data and applied the results of those analyses to schools without tested grades. The same rule was also applied in cases where the total number of reportable students in the tested grades within a school for either CMT or CAPT is less than 20.
- All schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG) from the U.S. Department of Education were automatically classified as Turnaround Schools in 2012 regardless of the indicators listed in the classification table.

**[CSDE School Classification Criteria \[PDF\]](#)**

## 2. Is the school classification system connected to identifying schools that are required to establish school governance councils?

Yes. Category 4 and 5 schools are required by Public Act 12-116, *An Act Concerning Education Reform*, to establish school governance councils. The table below shows the crosswalk of school categories and school classifications.

Category	School Classification
Category 1	Excelling
Category 2	Progressing
Category 3	Transitioning
Category 4	Review (includes Focus Schools)
Category 5	Turnaround

## 3. What is a Turnaround school?

The U.S. Department of Education requires states with approved ESEA Flexibility Requests (commonly referred to as “waivers”) to classify at least 5 percent of Title I schools as Turnaround Schools. Recipients of School Improvement Grants (SIG schools) were automatically classified as Turnaround Schools. In order to ensure that the Turnaround list had a representative balance of high schools to elementary/ middle schools in the State, the CSDE filled all remaining spots on the list with non-SIG Title I elementary/ middle schools with the State’s lowest overall CMT 2011 School Performance Indices (SPIs).

SIG schools have been implementing reform models as a requirement of the federal grant program; this work will continue. All other Turnaround Schools began implementing significant interventions this year (2013-2014) or will do so in 2014-2015. The Turnaround Office is facilitating this process.

Schools identified as Turnaround Schools maintain their classification for three years. In order to exit Turnaround status, a school must demonstrate sustained improvement, which means it must meet overall SPI targets, four-year cohort graduation rate targets and Holding Power Rate targets for three consecutive years.

#### **4. What is a Review school?**

Review Schools are among Connecticut's lowest performing, irrespective of Title I status. All schools with CMT/ CAPT participation rates less than 95 percent, four-year cohort graduation rates below 60 percent, or School Performance Indices (SPIs) below 64 are identified as Review Schools. Additionally, Focus Schools are considered a subset of Review Schools.

#### **5. What is a Focus school?**

The CSDE is firmly committed to closing the State's achievement gap. This includes within-school achievement gaps. The Focus School designation was designed to identify Title I schools with the lowest-performing student subgroups across the State, which previously may have been masked by overall student performance. Focus Schools were identified using CMT/ CAPT 2011 data and 2011 four-year cohort graduation rates.

To identify Focus schools in 2012, the CSDE began by selecting all non-Turnaround, Title I high schools with four-year cohort graduation rates below 60 percent (for the graduating class of 2011). There were six high schools identified based on these criteria.

For schools that administer the CMT, the CSDE used student-level demographic data to create a 'High Needs' subgroup in every school. The 'High Needs' subgroup is comprised of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. A minimum SPI was calculated for every non-Turnaround, Title I elementary/ middle school by selecting the lowest value among each school's High Needs, Black/ African-American, and Hispanic/ Latino indices (using 2011 CMT data). Black/ African-American and Hispanic/ Latino indices were included to ensure that race and ethnic achievement gaps were not ignored. Schools with the lowest performing subgroups were selected such that the total number of elementary/ middle and high schools classified as Focus equaled 10 percent of Title I schools in the State, a U.S. Department of Education requirement.

Focus Schools will maintain this classification for up to three years. Schools can exit if they meet their four-year cohort graduation rate target or the SPI target for the particular subgroup that was the reason for their identification for two consecutive years.

#### **6. What is a School of Distinction?**

Schools of Distinction are identified annually. This category recognizes Title I and non-Title I schools in three different areas: 1) 'Highest Performing Subgroup,' 2) 'Highest Progress' and 3) 'Highest Overall Performance.' Note that schools classified as Turnaround or Review (including Focus) are ineligible for this classification.

The **‘Highest Performing Subgroup’** identifies four schools—one Title I and one non-Title I elementary/ middle (CMT) and one Title I and one non-Title I high school (CAPT)—in each of the following categories:

- Highest SPIs in the State for the subgroup of students with disabilities;
- Highest SPIs in the State for the subgroup of English language learners;
- Highest SPIs in the State for the subgroup of Black/ African-American students;
- Highest SPIs in the State for the subgroup of Hispanic/ Latino students; and
- Highest SPIs in the State for the subgroup of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

There are two types of **‘Highest Progress’** schools and different criteria used for each.

- For schools where the **majority of students have not yet achieved ‘goal’ (SPI < 88)**, but progress is being made, all of the following criteria must be met in order to be designated a School of Distinction:
  - Increase in the SPI that is among the top 10 percent and is greater than 3 SPI points;
  - Gaps between the majority of historically underperforming subgroups (students with disabilities, English language learners, Black/ African-American students, Hispanic/ Latino students, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) and the ‘all students’ group is less than 10 SPI points based on current CMT/ CAPT data;
  - For high schools, the current four-year cohort graduation rate must meet or exceed the school’s four-year cohort graduation rate target; and
  - For high schools, the current Holding Power Rate (HPR) must meet or exceed the school’s HPR target.
- For schools where the **majority of students have met or exceeded ‘goal’ (SPI greater than or equal to 88)** and progress is being made, all of the following criteria must be met in order to be designated a School of Distinction:
  - Increase in the percentage of students who score ‘advanced’ in at least one content area that is among the top 10 percent of schools;
  - Gaps between the majority of historically underperforming subgroups (students with disabilities, English language learners, Black/ African-American students, Hispanic/ Latino students, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) and the ‘all students’ group is less than 10 SPI points based on current CMT/ CAPT data;
  - For high schools, the current four-year cohort graduation rate must meet or exceed the school’s four-year cohort graduation rate target; and
  - For high schools, the current Holding Power Rate (HPR) must meet or exceed the school’s HPR target.

Schools with the **'Highest Overall Performance'** that will be designated as Schools of Distinction must meet all of the following criteria:

1. CMT/ CAPT SPI for the 'all students' group is among the highest 10 percent in the State and is greater than 88;
2. Gaps between the majority of historically underperforming subgroups (students with disabilities, English language learners, Black/ African-American students, Hispanic/ Latino students, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) and the 'all students' group is less than 10 SPI points based on current CMT/CAPT data;
3. For high schools, a four-year cohort graduation rate greater than 94 percent; and
4. For high schools, a Holding Power Rate greater than 96 percent.

## **SUBGROUPS**

### **1. How does the accountability system incorporate achievement gap measures?**

Connecticut's accountability system compares the SPIs of the State's five traditionally underperforming subgroups with that of the 'all students' group. The five subgroups are: 1) students with disabilities, 2) English language learners, 3) Black/ African-American students, 4) Hispanic/ Latino students, and 5) students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The State's expectation is that the achievement gaps in any school for a majority of the subgroups will be less than 10 SPI points. A school's classification will depend, in part, on how well students in the five subgroups perform relative to 'all students' within that school. When making classification decisions for a school with five reportable subgroups, the difference between the 'all students' group and at least three of the five subgroups must be less than 10 SPI points, in order to have met the 'majority of subgroups' expectation and retain the higher school classification. The table below outlines the requirements for all schools based on the possible number of reportable subgroups.

Number of reportable subgroups (N ≥ 20)*	At least how many subgroups must have an SPI gap < 10 in order to retain higher classification?
5	3
4	2
3	2
2	1
1	1

*\*A reportable subgroup is one with at least 20 students. Achievement gap analyses are limited to the following five student groups: students with disabilities, English language learners, Black/African-American students, Hispanic/Latino students, and students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.*

The evaluation of subgroup performance differences in high-performing schools (i.e., schools with SPIs > 88) is consistent with the explanation above. Subgroup SPIs are compared to the SPI for the ‘all students’ group, not to the State target SPI of 88.

## **2. How does the accountability system incorporate performance for students with disabilities who participate in alternate assessments?**

Students who take the Skills Checklist receive ratings in up to five areas: Mathematics, Reading, Science, Communication, and Access Skills. The CSDE applies Skills Checklist ratings in Mathematics, Reading, and Science to the same CMT/ CAPT areas when calculating school performance. Communication ratings are applied to CMT/ CAPT Writing. Ratings for Access Skills are not incorporated into the index scores.

Since the overall expectation within the accountability system is that on average students will score at the ‘goal’ level, the CSDE has made changes to how student performance on the Skills Checklist and the Modified Assessment System (MAS) will impact district accountability calculations. Under the former system, districts could receive credit for up to 2 percent of students achieving ‘proficient’ on the MAS and up to 1 percent of students achieving ‘proficient’ on the Skills Checklist. The combined 3 percent cap remains in place in the new accountability system; however, the cap is no longer placed at the ‘proficient’ level. Instead, the percentage of students achieving at the ‘independent’ level on the Skills Checklist and the ‘goal’ level on MAS for whom districts receive credit may not exceed 3 percent of tested students.

Currently, there are no MAS Science or Writing assessment options for students with disabilities. Because of this, students who take MAS Mathematics and/ or MAS Reading tests will continue to take standard Science and Writing assessments. Participation in the Science and Writing assessments will be included in the participation rate, but performance on these assessments will not be included in the SPI calculations.

### **3. How does the CSDE monitor the selection of appropriate state assessments for students with disabilities?**

In most cases, students with disabilities (SWD) with an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) take the standard CMT/ CAPT assessment with or without accommodations. For those students taking either of the alternate assessments, the CMT/ CAPT MAS or Skills Checklist, specific eligibility criteria must be followed in order to qualify students for these tests. The CSDE is committed to providing the most appropriate assessment to all students in Connecticut; therefore, schools' selection of any alternate assessment is closely monitored. Districts are notified of any perceived irregularity in their selection of assessments for SWD.

The monitoring process includes:

- Focused monitoring with the Bureau of Special Education;
- automatic flagging of students that are selected for the MAS if they previously scored proficient on a standard assessment; and
- periodic review of test selection percentages for each test compared to previous percentages, established federal guidelines, and state averages.

## **GRADUATION RATES**

### **1. What is the difference between the four-year cohort graduation rate and the new Holding Power Rate?**

The four-year cohort graduation rate was introduced with the graduating class of 2009. The rate is calculated by tracking an individual cohort, or group of students, from the initial entrance into 9<sup>th</sup> grade through to graduation using the State's Public School Information System (PSIS). This approach was created when Connecticut and 49 other states signed an agreement with the National Governors' Association to develop a uniform system for tracking students. The system gives credit to schools when students graduate within four years.

The **four-year cohort graduation rate** is calculated by:

*[# of graduates (i.e., # of students in cohort who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less)] / [# in cohort]*

For more information regarding the four-year cohort graduation rate, please review: [Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate Documentation](#) [PDF]

The Holding Power Rate (HPR) gives schools credit for students still enrolled after four years and for students with disabilities who earn a special education certificate. This allows the State to accommodate IDEA requirements for students who remain enrolled beyond four years to ensure provision of post-secondary transition services. We believe that Connecticut's HPR reinforces multiple positive outcomes for students within the four-year timeframe.

The **Holding Power Rate** is calculated in the following manner:

*{[# of graduates (i.e., # of students in cohort who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less)] + [# of students in the cohort still enrolled in public education after four years] + [# of students in the cohort who earn a certificate of completion after four years]} / [# in cohort]*

## 2. How are graduation rate targets established?

The State's ultimate target for the four-year cohort graduation rate is 94% by 2024, and for the Holding Power Rate it is 96% in the same timeframe. Customized annual targets are generated for every school based on their starting point (2011 rates) so that every school is on a trajectory toward meeting the ultimate targets (94% and 96%) by 2024.

Annual targets are computed using the following three steps:

- Compute the annual target increment by subtracting the 2011 rate from the respective ultimate target and divide the difference by 12.
- Add the annual increment to the 2011 rate. This becomes the target for the 2012 cohort (i.e., the "2012 target" reported in 2013).
- To compute the 2013 target, add the annual increment to the "2012 target," and so on for each subsequent year.

For schools with a 2011 four-year cohort graduation rate at or above 94%, the graduation rate target for all future years will be set at 94.0%. For schools with a 2011 actual Holding Power Rate at or above 96%, the Holding Power Rate target for all future years will be set as 96.0%.

## **NCLB vs. ESEA FLEXIBILITY**

### **1. What are the similarities and differences between the old (NCLB) and new (ESEA Flexibility) accountability?**

- Schools continue to be accountable for the performance of students who have been enrolled since October 1<sup>st</sup> of the school year in which the CMT/ CAPT is administered. As in the past, achievement of students in Grades 11 and 12 who retest on CAPT are not included in accountability calculations.
- Schools are now accountable for subgroups with 'n' sizes greater than or equal to 20, not 40, which was the 'n' size threshold under No Child Left Behind; consequently, subgroup performance is just as, if not more important than before. The new system focuses on the progress of students with disabilities, English language learners, Black/ African-American students, Hispanic/ Latino students, and students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.
- NCLB required that 95 percent of students participate in State assessments. Participation rate expectations remain the same in the new accountability system. Students who are absent for testing and do not participate in a make-up session during the assessment window are considered non-participants. Students who are present for testing but do not respond to any questions are considered participants performing at the 'below basic' level as long as their test booklets are marked 'blank'.
- Schools strive to provide services to English language learners (ELLs) that will allow them to achieve English language proficiency while developing academic content. For those who achieve English language proficiency, the State's accountability system under NCLB continued to include them in the ELL subgroup for two additional years. The same approach is applied in the new accountability system. The practice of including students with disabilities who have exited from special education services for two additional years is also applied in the new accountability system.
- CSDE has not changed the manner in which specific groups of ELLs are included in the accountability system. ELLs who are enrolled for the first time in a U.S. school for 12 calendar months or less may be excused from the CMT and CAPT Reading and Writing assessments, but they are required to participate in the Mathematics and Science assessments. While participation in the Mathematics and Science assessments is required and will be included in schools' participation rates, the State will not include performance in accountability calculations.