



NEWS

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DR. DIANNA R. WENTZELL, COMMISSIONER

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State test scores up across the board

*Preliminary results of Smarter Balanced tests show improvement in all subjects, grades, and subgroups
Many Alliance Districts outpaced statewide improvement in ELA and Math*

(HARTFORD, CT)—The Connecticut State Department of Education today announced significant and important jumps statewide in preliminary English language arts and math results on the second administration of the Smarter Balanced exams. Overall, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standard statewide increased by 3.3 points to 55.7 percent in ELA, and 3.9 points to 44 percent in math. The 2014-15 test administration represented the baseline year for the Smarter Balanced exams, which set a new, higher bar for students because unlike the tests of the past, they are designed to assess critical thinking skills with more complex, difficult questions.

The 2016 Smarter Balanced results showed solid improvement in both subjects, across all grades, and for all high-needs student subgroups. All of Connecticut's Alliance Districts showed improvement in ELA and most showed improvement in math, with about half of Alliance Districts improving at a faster rate than the state overall — a testament to the success of targeted support and investment in our highest need districts.

“With record-high graduation rates and now significantly improved scores on the Smarter Balanced test, our smart investments and commitment to our children are changing lives. Every time we raise the bar for our children and set high expectations, they reach it. This is undoubtedly a step in the right direction — and it’s a step we should all celebrate. And it could not have been done without our outstanding educators — teachers, principals, and other district staff,” Governor Dannel P. Malloy said. “We need to continue the momentum, and we need to maintain a laser-sharp focus on preparing all children for success in college and the workforce. The work we’re doing is paying off — and we must continue to build on our successes.”

“Thanks to historic investment in our education system and the efforts of truly dedicated educators, Connecticut students are achieving more,” said Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman. “These successes are valuable indicators that we are on the right track today, and they position us for a stronger tomorrow. I commend our teachers and educators for their hard work, and our students on these accomplishments.”

“These results demonstrate that Connecticut is moving in the right direction. These gains are a testament to the commitment of our students for rising to meet the challenge of higher standards and to our families, teachers, and leaders for instilling critical thinking skills and a love of learning in our students,” Education Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell said. “Our promise to our children is that we will give them an education that prepares them to succeed in college, career, and life, and we are getting closer to making that a reality for more students.”

Two years ago, Connecticut transitioned to new Connecticut Core-aligned exams that presented a higher bar for students — with significantly tougher questions intended to test critical thinking ability and real-world skills. The change was part of a broader transition that involved aligning curriculum, standards, and exams to higher-level thinking required for college and career success. The release of the 2015-16 Smarter Balanced results is the first time Connecticut is able to measure student growth, an important indicator for determining whether the state is making good on its promise to kids of preparing them for success. The Smarter Balanced exam is administered to all public school students in grades 3-8. Students in 11th grade take the SAT as their Connecticut Core-aligned state exam, a change Governor Malloy announced last summer.

While student performance was up on average across the state, it is encouraging to note that about half of the Alliance Districts improved at a rate faster than the state, with some districts showing improvement gains of 5 percentage points or higher. In ELA, six Alliance Districts improved by 5 percentage points or higher: Bloomfield at 6.1 points, East Haven at 7.2 points, New Haven at 5.0 points, Norwich at 5.1 points, West Haven at 5.1 points, and Windham at 8.7 points. In math, 10 districts improved by 5 points or higher: Ansonia at 5.5 points, Bloomfield at 5.9 points, East Haven at 6.4 points, Killingly at 5.4 points, Meriden at 7.1 points, Putnam at 10.3 points, Vernon at 5.1 points, West Haven at 10.3 points, Windham at 6.6 points, and Windsor Locks at 7.9 points.

Among Commissioner’s Network schools, clear bright spots emerged: East Hartford Middle School, Lincoln-Bassett School in New Haven, John B. Stanton School in Norwich, Walsh Elementary School in Waterbury, Windham Middle School, and all showed significant gains in ELA and math.

“I especially want to congratulate our Alliance Districts and Commissioner’s Network schools that demonstrated that hard work, innovation, and commitment to positive culture and rigorous academics can impact student outcomes,” Commissioner Wentzell said. “It is incumbent on us to examine what is working in these schools and districts so that we can share successful strategies with our peers across the state.”

As Connecticut continues to score highly in ELA, it is encouraging that the new results show that over half of third-graders are now meeting or exceeding the achievement standard in math. After last year’s release of Smarter Balanced results showed struggles with math performance, Commissioner Wentzell brought together educators, industry and business leaders, and experts in math and STEM instruction on a Commissioner’s Council on Mathematics. This group spent the last year researching best practices, both in Connecticut and across the nation, and exploring innovative strategies in the areas of math instruction. That council will release its final report and recommendations in the fall.

The results showed improvement for all subgroups of students. Overall, 31.4 percent of black students and 33.2 percent of Hispanic students met or exceeded expectations in ELA, while 17.6 percent of black students and 21.2 percent of Hispanic students met or exceeded achievement standards in math. That represents a jump of over 3 percentage points since 2014-15 — and it represents important growth. Nonetheless, it highlights that, just like other states across the country, achievement gaps remain and must be tackled. On ELA, 68.6 percent of white students met or exceeded expectations, while 56.9 percent did so in math. The results showed similar disparities among high needs populations of students, including English language learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families. These are gaps that must be closed.

“In Connecticut, we remain fiercely committed to the work of supporting all districts — and especially our highest need districts — in their efforts to improve student outcomes and close achievement gaps. The State Board of Education’s new [five-year strategic plan](#) focuses on that goal and makes equity a top priority,” Commissioner Wentzell said.

Today’s release focuses on showing student performance and year-to-year improvement on the Smarter Balanced tests. In the coming weeks, the State Department of Education will follow with a detailed analysis of student growth, which measures the performance and growth of the same set of students from one year to the next. For example, a growth analysis will look at how a specific matched cohort of third-graders grew in one year’s time, comparing that cohort’s performance in third grade to its performance by fourth grade.

In spring 2016, Governor Malloy announced that Connecticut would shorten the length of the Smarter Balanced exam by eliminating the performance task section of the ELA portion of the test. The move was intended to increase student learning time, decrease student anxiety, assuage family concerns about testing, and limit over-testing. Elimination of the performance tasks, which are often duplicative with in-class work, increased learning time for up to 1 hour and 45 minutes for every grade 3-8 student. The CSDE was able to also eliminate the performance task score portion from the first year of Smarter Balanced test so that a fair comparison and growth analysis could be done from 2015 to 2016.

Over 234,000 students in grades 3-8 participated in the second administration of the Smarter Balanced assessment. This represents a participation rate of over 97 percent.

2015-16 Smarter Balanced results can be accessed here: [Smarter Balanced Assessment Preliminary Results](#)

Overview with charts can be accessed here: [Smarter Balanced Assessment 2015-16 Preliminary Results presentation](#)

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