



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
*STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION*



**TO:** Superintendents  
**FROM:** Dr. Dianna Roberge-Wentzell, Chief Academic Officer  
**RE:** Common Core State Standards Implementation and Next Generation Assessments  
**DATE:** February 20, 2013

Earlier this month, Commissioner Stefan Pryor sent a memo to superintendents announcing the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Common Core aligned "Practice Assessment." His memo explained that more information regarding the practice assessment and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) would be forthcoming. This memo will not only address the areas indicated by Commissioner Pryor but also provide clarifying information on the role of the CSDE's Academic Office, CCSS aligned professional learning opportunities, and ways we can support each other as districts implement the Common Core and prepare for the next generation of assessments.

The overarching mission of the CSDE Academic Office is to support the achievement of college and career readiness for all Connecticut students through 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments. The Academic Office seeks to improve college and career readiness outcomes by providing guidance and differentiated support to multiple stakeholders in order to ensure the above is implemented with fidelity and easily accessible. As such, the Academic Office will empower districts to leverage the CCSS and administer a system of next generation assessments that will provide information to students, families, and schools to support educators in preparing students for college and careers.

**COMMON CORE ALIGNED "PRACTICE ASSESSMENT"**

Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year and continuing through 2014, the CSDE will administer a Common Core-aligned "Practice Assessment" to help districts better determine how students are learning in alignment with the standards. The feedback from this assessment will support district improvement efforts. The practice assessment is in addition to the required Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) and will be administered in April and May for the 2013 year. Districts may choose to opt out of the practice assessment but we encourage you to take advantage of this no-stakes assessment opportunity.

The CSDE, at the request of and in service to districts, is providing a sixty-minute, computer-based practice assessment in reading and math as well as a ninety-minute practice assessment in writing in grades three through eight. Students in grade eleven will take a ninety-minute practice assessment, also on the computer, in writing and math. Each student will only take one (reading, writing, or math) form as part of the 2013 practice assessment year. The math assessments will reflect the major work of each grade. Writing will assess the organization, focus and purpose, elaboration and evidence, and conventions. The reading assessment will target informational and literary texts. Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for more details.

Administration of the practice assessment will start on April 22, 2013 and end May 17, 2013. Districts will probably need to stagger and sequence when students take the practice assessment given that it is a computer-based test. For most districts, this will be similar to administering the CMT/CAPT Modified Assessment System (MAS), as the practice assessment will be given through the Measurement Incorporated Secure Testing (MIST) system.

The Academic Office will continue to explore ways in which we can effectively support districts in transitioning to the 2015 Smarter Balanced assessments and in the upcoming weeks, the CSDE will provide technology specifications that will help districts plan and administer the next generation of assessments. In the meantime, participation in the practice assessment will help in this transition. It will also provide your district with the critical feedback needed to inform instruction and professional learning as well as help support planning efforts for the Smarter Balanced assessments in 2015, which will be administered statewide.

### **COMMON CORE ALIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

This summer and fall, the Academic Office will provide professional learning opportunities for district teams that build upon the practice assessment items. These opportunities will support district capacity building and targets the Common Core instructional shifts required by teachers and leaders. This will be the cornerstone experience for the CSDE Common Core aligned professional learning in 2013-14. More details will be provided in the coming months.

The State Board of Education's adoption of the Common Core in July 2010 was the beginning of a promise that all Connecticut students will graduate from our schools and districts ready for college, career, and life. The Academic Office is focused on statewide implementation of CCSS in order to deliver on that promise. More professional learning opportunities will be provided throughout the year to support your district's ongoing efforts, including the creation of professional learning communities and additional communities of practice in order to learn from and share with each other. Additionally, the Academic Office is collaborating with the CSDE's Talent and Turnaround Offices in order to ensure new departmental initiatives are coordinated.

### **MEMORANDUM OF COLLABORATION**

In order to help facilitate Connecticut's implementation of the Common Core and next generation of assessments, the CSDE is offering a Memorandum of Collaboration (MOC) outlining the specific roles and responsibilities of the CSDE and your district. The MOC will guide our work and partnership with you in providing Connecticut's students the best education. The MOC is a tool that will help the CSDE to better serve districts in implementation of the Common Core and next generation of assessments.

Included in the MOC is a request from your district to establish a Common Core District Team and nominate Common Core District Coaches. These groups of people need not be newly created if your district currently has a similar team that hosts the array of people outlined in the MOC. The purpose of the District Team will be to support the CSDE's communication to districts so that the people who need the information the most will receive it. The District Coaches will be the CSDE's point people for capacity building work that will support your district's implementation efforts.

The MOC is due back to the CSDE via email by 5:00pm on Thursday, March 7, 2013. The CSDE will host a conference call for those Common Core District Teams Leads and Smarter Balanced Point People who have submitted their MOC on Wednesday, March 13, 2013 from 1:30pm-2:30pm. Should you have questions regarding the MOC, please contact Emily Byrne via telephone at (860) 713-6546, or you may send your signed MOC via email to [emily.byrne@ct.gov](mailto:emily.byrne@ct.gov).

Should you have any questions regarding this memo, please contact Emily Byrne (contact information listed above) or me via telephone at (860) 713-6775 or via email at [dianna.roberge-wentzell@ct.gov](mailto:dianna.roberge-wentzell@ct.gov).