



EASTON, REDDING, AND REGION 9 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

February 25, 2014

Dear E/R/9 Parents and Guardians:

We are less than a month away from “opening the testing window” on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Field Test. With the exception of science tests, the SBA will largely replace the state’s familiar CMT and CAPT. I am writing to provide some basic information about the SBA as well as to describe how we intend to implement the test.

The Smarter Balanced Assessment is the “next generation” standardized test that will accompany the Connecticut Common Core Standards. In keeping with the overt purpose of the Core --- to improve student “college and workplace readiness” --- the SBA can be expected to be more difficult than the CMT and the CAPT.

The CMT first appeared in 1985 and is now in its “fourth generation”. The first CAPT was administered in 1994, evolving by 2007 into the “third generation” --- the version that was administered last year. In comparison, the SBA is still in gestation: the version that our students will encounter this school year is a “field test”. SBA developers will use the results to finalize the test that will be administered in 2015 ---- the first year of official full-scale implementation. More simply put, the tests will count – next year.

If that’s the case, why use the SBA this year? Quite simply, the CT Department of Education gave all school districts a narrow choice about how to meet state and federal testing requirements during this school year. We could continue with CAPT/CMT for one more year or use the SBA Field Test. Not testing was not an option. Since we saw little value in the outmoded CAPT/CMT, we decided upon the Field Test in the belief that a SBA “dry run” would give students a taste of what lies ahead. Additionally, students will take the SBA on a computer. Field testing our technological capabilities also makes sense.

As we near SBA implementation, I want to share two inherent concerns.

- 1) CMT/CAPT testing was concentrated into several weeks. SBA testing is distributed over several months – from March 18th to June 4th. Granted, it’s not a matter of testing every student every minute of the school day from March to June. On March 18th, for example, testing is confined to the 5th grade in Easton and the 8th grade in Redding. Nonetheless, that’s a long stretch of prospective disruption to customary school routines.
- 2) For the most part, students had only so much time to complete the CMT/CAPT. Not so with SBA. Even though there are guidelines about how much time students should spend on the

language and math components, the SBA is untimed. Conceivably, students compelled to do so could glue themselves to the computer for as long as they wish.

I recently heard superintendent colleagues from Westchester school districts describe painful meetings in which parents relayed the distress that their high performing students experienced during last spring's comparable New York testing. Some argue that student "test distress" is to be expected; that more rigorous academic expectations are worth such costs and will benefit our students in the longer run. That may be true. Nonetheless, for this year's SBA testing, we do not want our students compulsively glued to the computer experiencing excessive anxiety or frustration. For this reason, we will intervene as may be necessary and encourage students to return to the rest of their school day rather than continue with the test. We might recall this approach to SBA Field Test implementation when we review the test results that we will receive next December (even though it is not yet clear how those results will be reported.)

Please feel free to contact me directly with any comments, questions, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Bernie Josefsberg