



STATE OF CONNECTICUT



STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TO: Common Core District Leads
FROM: Dr. Dianna Roberge-Wentzell, Chief Academic Officer
RE: December Newsletter: Common Core State Standards Implementation
DATE: December 9, 2013

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

This is the ninth installment of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Academic Office monthly newsletter. We hope you will find helpful information within the newsletter that will support your district's implementation efforts of the Common Core State Standards and that you will be able to forward onto educators.

Featured in this newsletter:

- **America's Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change—a Scholastic Survey Preview**
- **The Common Core—"Just in Time" Communication Tools for Parents**
- **Overview of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System—Professional Development Tools**
- **Technology Grant—Update**
- **Common Core District Teams and Coaches—Professional Learning Opportunities**
- **The "Opt-out" Myth—Guidance and Draft Letter to use for Parents**
- **Update on the Smarter Balanced Field Test**

America's Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change—a Scholastic Survey Preview

Did you know that, according to a national survey conducted by Scholastic, seventy three percent (73%) of the general public and ninety-seven percent (97%) of teachers are aware of the Common Core State Standards? Did you also know that three-quarters (77%) of teachers who teach math and/or English language arts believe the Standards will have a positive impact on students' ability to think critically and use reasoning skills? We know the Common Core will ensure equal access and opportunity for all Connecticut students, but it may be helpful to know what the data says about public perceptions when we prepare to discuss the Common Core with our communities. [Scholastic's survey highlights](#).

The Common Core—"Just in Time" Communication Tools for Parents

Communication supports can be found in the CSDE Common Core Communications Toolkit, which was unveiled and distributed to all superintendents at this year's Back to School meeting in August. Derived from the Toolkit and attached to this email are important facts about the Standards. Additionally, the CSDE has prepared a couple more documents (attached to this email) for LEAs to edit and make their own, and disburse internally and externally for various audiences, including parents. If you have materials, particularly for parents, that have been successful within your district for communicating the Common Core and would like to share it statewide, please email ellen.cohn@ct.gov.

Overview of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System—Professional Development Tools

Save the Date! The CSDE held Assessment Literacy workshops last month that included content specific presentations for Mathematics or English language arts/Literacy (ELA) Smarter Balanced claims. We have made these [documents from these workshops](#) available to you online; we hope you use them to support professional learning within your respective districts. Additional workshops will be offered on Tuesday, January 14, 2014 and Friday, January 17, 2014 at Central Connecticut State University's ITBD. More details to follow in subsequent and separate correspondence.

Technology Grant—Update

Congratulations to the 128 recipients of the 2013 Technology Grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education! Last month, Governor Dannel P. Malloy and Commissioner Stefan Pryor announced plans to fund over [\\$24 million in grant requests](#), providing vital support to students, teachers, and school districts as local efforts accelerate to complete the transition to the Common Core State Standards and the accompanying Smarter Balanced assessments. “Investments in education are an investment in stronger communities and our state’s future prosperity. Ensuring students are prepared to compete in a global economy and excel in 21st century careers means that we must strive to equip them with the knowledge, skills and tools they will need,” said Governor Malloy. “I believe in the Common Core Standards... which is why we secured additional funding in response to districts’ needs and concerns.”

Common Core District Teams and Coaches—Professional Learning Opportunities

Common Core professional learning opportunities will be available for LEAs as described in the 2013 Memorandum of Collaboration. The CSDE has contracted with Public Consulting Group and the Regional Educational Service Centers in order to provide training in 2014 for Common Core District Teams and Coaches in all grade bands to support instructional changes in alignment with CCSS implementation. Information regarding enrollment opportunities will be in the January Newsletter.

The “Opt-out” Myth—Guidance and Draft Letter to use for Parents

There is no opt-out language in state or federal law governing assessment. Attached to this email is a memo regarding the CSDE suggested protocols for addressing parent requests for students to “opt-out” of mandated state testing. In an effort to support LEAs receiving these requests, we have also attached a draft letter to use should you need it.

Update on the Smarter Balanced Field Test (Repeat information from past newsletter)

For districts experiencing Smarter Balanced Field Testing, the Smarter Balanced window is March 18 to June 6. Districts will continue to work with the CSDE on selecting their testing window during which students may test at any time.

- Students in Grades 3 - 8 and 11 are required to take both the Mathematics and ELA tests.
- Testing students in Grades 9 and 10 is optional by both grade and content area. Participation in these grades is for the purposes of standard setting and development of the vertical scale
- The tests are not timed; however, schools should schedule approximately 3.5 hours of testing for each grade and content area. Testing may be administered over multiple test sessions.

Smarter Balanced has made a number of supports available online, some of which are included below:

- [Online Practice Test](#) - Provides an opportunity for students, educators and parents to experience the features of online testing.
- [Usability, Accessibility and Accommodations Guidelines](#) - General guidelines outlining supports available for all students including supports for English language learners and students with disabilities.
- Web-based training modules - Available by January 28, 2014
- *Test Coordinator Manual* and *Test Administration Manual* - Available by January 29, 2014
- For more information refer to the [Smarter Balanced page](#) of the CSDE Web site