STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

December 4, 2015

Monique M. Chism, Ph.D.
Director
Office of State Support
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW,
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Dr. Chism:

Thank you for writing to us regarding Connecticut's participation on state assessments during the 2014-15 school year. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) agrees whole-heartedly with you that participation in state assessments is a matter of educational equity; full participation in the assessment program is an important means to ensure that the public education system is delivering on the promise of high academic expectations and college and career readiness for each and every student. Additionally, the validity of conclusions one can derive from assessment results is dependent on the percentage of students who participated in the assessment; without high participation rates, fair comparisons across schools and years cannot be made.

The CSDE released *estimated* participation rates based on the Smarter Balanced assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for the state, districts, and schools. Estimated rates were also released for all subgroups. Overall, the CSDE is pleased that Connecticut met the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) *overall* participation rate expectations in both ELA and Mathematics. The 95 percent participation rate threshold was also met by almost all the ESEA subgroups, including the High Needs supergroup which is the group that features heavily in Connecticut's ESEA Flexibility Request that was approved on August 6, 2015. The CSDE is proud of the efforts of leaders, administrators, and teachers throughout the state for accomplishing this in a challenging year.

Though as a State, Connecticut met the participation rate requirement, many districts failed to meet the standard. In analyzing these data, it is clear that the primary challenge was in Grade 11. Through Governor Malloy's leadership and the support of legislators, Connecticut will administer the College Board's revised SAT in lieu of the Smarter Balanced assessment as its ELA and Math assessment in 2015-16. There is broad stakeholder support for this change. Therefore, it is anticipated that participation in the state assessment will improve significantly in Grade 11.

In any case, the CSDE is not pleased with the low participation rate in some districts during 2014-15. To emphasize the importance of participation rates, the CSDE has developed a differentiated identification and support system (see attached model). This approach will ensure that districts meeting the standard are commended, those failing marginally are gently alerted,

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and those falling behind are strongly reminded of the potential consequences and provided support to remedy the situation in 2015-16. Beginning with 2016-17, Connecticut's next generation accountability system will lower a school by one category for low participation rates in the 2015-16 year.

It should be noted that the participation rates released by the CSDE in August 2015 are *estimated* because the participation of students with disabilities in Connecticut's alternate assessment has not yet been included. Those results were received recently; once they are included, final participation rates will be calculated, released, and utilized to implement this differentiated system.

Thank you for raising this critical issue with us. We look forward to the continued partnership.

Sincerely,

Dianna R. Wentzell

Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell
Commissioner of Education

District Participation Rate Consequences 2014-15

Level 1 – Criteria:
At least **95%** participation rate in ELA, Math, and Science for All Students ***and*** High Needs Subgroup
Consequences:
Commissioner Letter (C-Letter): Commend participation and restate ESEA expectations.

Level 2 – Criteria:
At least **90%** for all participation rates
Consequences:
C-Letter: Reiterate ESEA expectations, emphasize importance of participation, and expect that Level 1 criteria be met in 2015-16.

Level 3 – Criteria:
At least **80%** for all participation rates
Consequences:
C-letter: Restate Level 2 points. Indicate that funds will be withheld if, at a minimum, participation in 2015-16 fails to meet Level 2 criteria.
District submits *letter* to CSDE outlining corrective action steps.
District is *recommended* to attend state meeting.

Level 4 – Criteria:
Below **80%** in **even one** participation rate
Consequences:
C-letter: Restate Level 2 points. Indicate that funds will be withheld if, at a minimum, participation in 2015-16 fails to meet Level 2 criteria.

District submits detailed corrective action plan.

District *must* attend state meeting.

Notes:

- Determinations will be based on final participation rates that will be calculated once the alternate assessment results are included.
- Timeline:
  - By January 15, 2016 - Letter to districts
  - By February 5, 2016 - Meeting held for districts in Levels 3 and 4
  - By February 16, 2016 – Letters from Level 3 districts and plans from Level 4 districts due
  - By February 29, 2016 – Plans reviewed, revised as necessary, and approved by CSDE