



## Dannel P. Malloy

GOVERNOR  
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

September 5, 2014

The Honorable Arne Duncan  
Secretary of Education  
United States Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave. SW, Rm. 7W301  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I am writing to request the start of a dialogue between Connecticut and the U.S. Department of Education on ways to reduce our students' testing burden. In particular, my request is that we explore ways within federal law to allow our eleventh graders – who may be our most over-tested – to take one fewer high-stakes test.

As you know, here in Connecticut we are working to give our students access to new academic standards designed to prepare them for college and careers, as well as new, improved student assessments aligned to these standards. Both of these efforts have entailed significant changes for our educators and students, and getting these transitions right is of vital importance. With the help of a task force of educators, I recently announced a set of new supports for teachers. And last spring, ninety percent of our students in the tested grades took a field test of the new end-of-year assessment designed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

In the context of these multi-faceted changes to public education, I read with interest your recent commentary for the new school year, in which you discussed both the importance of student testing for informing strong teaching, as well as your concern that, as you wrote, "Testing – and test preparation – takes up too much time."

Increasingly, I share your concern that the unintentional overuse of testing can hinder student success. Last year, as a first step to address this issue, Connecticut partnered with the national education organization Achieve to pilot a tool that helps school districts take stock of their use of tests, and to identify areas where testing can be reduced. Eight districts participated in the pilot year, and the tool is available for all districts in 2014-15. Today, my Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor and I will announce a new grant opportunity designed to enable districts to eliminate non-essential tests and improve their assessment systems more generally.

I believe, however, that we can and must do more to address this issue. In particular, I am eager to explore solutions for the students who may be our most over-tested: our eleventh graders.

Many of our eleventh grade students spend a significant amount of time preparing for and taking high-stakes exams, including end-of-year course exams, the SAT or ACT, SAT Subject Tests, and Advanced Placement exams. The Smarter Balanced system has moved what had traditionally been a tenth grade exam in Connecticut to the eleventh grade spring semester. This overcrowded testing schedule is not in the best interest of our high school students.

One potential avenue for exploration would concern the Smarter Balanced test and its possible redundancy with other assessments. As you know, the College Board is redesigning the SAT to align with the college and career ready standards. In 2013, 83% of Connecticut students took the SAT – the fourth-highest rate in the nation. Connecticut recently began providing financial support for thirty of the state's highest poverty districts to provide access to the PSAT during the school day. One possible solution to the concentration of tests in the eleventh grade would be to explore the elimination of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade Smarter Balanced exam, to offer the SAT to all students during the school day, and to designate the SAT as the single required exam for Connecticut students for purposes of both school accountability and college entrance. Needless to say, this concept is just one potential solution, and its implications would require careful study and consideration before we were ready to pursue it.

In the near future, a working group of Connecticut educators, State Department of Education officials, and other experts will begin a study of eleventh grade assessments to consider the SAT and other potential solutions for reducing testing. My Education Commissioner and I are hopeful that, informed by this working group, Connecticut and the U.S. Department of Education can collaborate to explore solutions. This dialogue will inform Connecticut's renewal application for an Elementary and Secondary Education Act waiver in spring of 2015, potentially reshaping the state's testing system for the 2015-16 school year and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dannel P. Malloy", is written over a faint, stylized outline of the state of Connecticut. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dannel P. Malloy  
Governor