

# Memo re SBAC Special Accommodations

**To: The CT Mastery Examination Committee**

**From: The Connecticut Education Association**

**Date: May 17, 2016**

Questions as to the accommodations, validity, reliability and fairness of the SBAC test have been raised in Connecticut and other states, especially as to especially younger students, those from low-income families, those who need special accommodations, and students without computer access at home.

States are moving decisively away from the federally sponsored SBAC and PARCC tests. As of last week, the original number of 30 SBAC states had decreased to 13, with *Education Week* reporting the withdrawal of Wyoming and North Dakota.

Last year, the National Federation of the Blind notified the Smarter Balanced Consortium of the lack of read-aloud and text-to-speech accommodations for grades 3 to 5, and later noted that the Consortium had taken steps to address those specific concerns, and thanked the Consortium for its response. Nevertheless, the Federation continues to raise concerns about SBAC accommodations for all special needs students:

“We warn states about the use of the Smarter Balanced assessment, which, until the access barriers for students with disabilities that are currently being addressed are totally resolved, will be a violation of several federal civil rights statutes and that we suggest policies and practices be put in place at the state level to ensure that assessments do not exclude or discriminate against students with disabilities.”

Concerns regarding problematic SBAC accommodations for ELL and special needs students continue to be documented in surveys of Connecticut teachers and administrators, and teachers in Oregon and Washington State:

## **2015 Connecticut Education Association Teacher Survey. Does SBAC offer appropriate accommodations for students?**

- 64% of participating teachers did not agree that the SBAC's accommodations for students with disabilities worked well.
- 73% of participating teachers do not agree that the computerized test administration format is developmentally appropriate for their students.
- 85% of elementary school teachers reported that the computerized testing format was developmentally inappropriate for their students.
- 71% agree that students 'exhibited widely disparate and inequitable computer skills when taking the SBAC test.'
- In a comparison of poor and affluent school districts, teachers said that the format of the SBAC test placed high-poverty district students at a greater disadvantage, with one-third more

students adversely impacted by inequitable computer skills and developmentally inappropriate tests compared to students in affluent districts.

**2016 Connecticut Association of School Administrators Survey. The survey was conducted from January 20th through February 1st; 320 public school administrators from throughout the state participated.**

- 78% did not agree that the computerized test administration is user friendly and developmentally appropriate for students in my school.
- 82% did not agree that SBAC is user-friendly for students with disabilities.
- 86% did not agree that SBAC is user-friendly for ELL students.

**2015 Oregon Education Association Teacher Survey. The results were similar to Connecticut.**

- 74% reported that SBAC did not meet the needs of students who require student-specific accommodations.
- 78% reported that many students did not have the keyboarding skills necessary to allow them to take the test efficiently.
- “The text-heavy and unclear instructions were barriers for all students, but particularly for students with disabilities and English Learners.”

**2015 Washington State Education Association Teacher Survey. The results were also similar to Connecticut.**

- “Students with accommodations were often cited as rushing through the test and/or giving up quickly.”
- “Many respondents felt the SBAC test was more of a technology proficiency test than a test on ELA and Mathematics.”
- “English Language Learner teacher respondents rated their student’s keyboarding proficiency and their students’ familiarity with their devices significantly lower than all respondents.”
- “Many respondents pointed out socioeconomic bias due to the SBA’s online administration. Less affluent communities and districts have less access to technology at home, and are more likely to have older equipment and fewer computers per student.”