

## **Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, January, 2016**

With the new year and second semester upon us, our thoughts turn to the state and federal mandated testing of students in grades three through eight as well as grade ten (science) and eleven (reading, writing, and mathematics).

### **Smarter Balanced Assessments for Elementary and Middle School Students**

This will be our second year of testing using the Smarter Balanced Assessments for students at the elementary and middle school levels. These assessments were administered for the first time last spring. Our elementary and middle school students will take the tests sometime between April 15th and June 10th this year.

Each session of the Smarter Balanced program will contain questions aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. Some questions are “selected response” (also known as multiple choice); other questions are open-ended and require a short written response; and still others require an extended response. In addition, students will be asked to complete a performance task in both mathematics as well as English/language arts (ELA). The ELA task involves reading a variety of materials and then writing in response to a prompt.

### **The New SAT to be Administered to Eleventh Grade Students**

The major change in Connecticut’s mandated testing for 2015-2016 is the shift from the eleventh grade Smarter Balanced Assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics to the new version of the SAT. Aligned with the Common Core State Standards, the new SAT is a test that many of our students already elect to take at some point during their junior and senior year of high school. Most of the students who take the SAT as part of our federally mandated assessment program will be able to use

these test scores as part of the college admission process if they choose. This test will be administered at Plainville High School on March 2, 2016 with a make-up date of April 27, 2016. There will be not be a testing fee charged to students or parents for the March 2nd SAT testing (or the make-up date).

The Connecticut SAT will be scored on a 400 to 1600 point scale. The Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section and the Math section will each be scored on a 200 to 800 point scale. There will no longer be a penalty for wrong answers. The Connecticut SAT focuses on the skills and knowledge that evidence shows are needed most for college and career success. It reflects what students are already learning in their classrooms in mathematics and English / language arts with literacy focused on topics from science, history, and social studies. The vocabulary portion of the Connecticut SAT will focus on words that students use consistently in college and beyond.

The College Board has identified a critical set of knowledge, skills, and understandings that predict student success in college and workforce training programs. Students are expected to:

- comprehend challenging literary and informational texts
- revise and edit extended texts
- use evidence in reading and writing
- use and understand words in context
- show command of math, especially algebra and data analysis
- analyze data

In comparing the old SAT with this new version to be released this spring, a number of changes are evident. First, there is no penalty for incorrect responses. Unlike the old version of the test, students may make “educated guesses” without fear of losing points. The vocabulary section of the test places emphasis on defining words in context, rather than defining words in isolation. Many students can figure out the meaning of words based on the context in which they are used. Another difference involves writing short responses using evidence from several sources. Sources on the new SAT will include science and history/social studies, and students will be expected to analyze information from these sources and then use that information to formulate a response to a prompt.

The mathematics subtest will focus on the math that matters most for college and careers. The test is designed to assess fluency with, understanding of, and ability to apply mathematical concepts of algebra and linear equations, problem solving and data analysis, and advanced mathematical practices. Certain key elements will be woven throughout the math test:

- Emphasis on mathematical application and reasoning
- Problems from a range of disciplines addressing real-world problems drawn from science, social studies, and careers
- Inclusion of both calculator and no-calculator portions as well as attention to the use of a calculator as a tool
- Includes both multiple choice questions and student-produced response questions

## **Science Assessments for Grades 5, 8, and 10**

Finally, students in grades 5, 8, and 10 will be assessed in the area of science. This science test has not changed in the last ten years and is based upon an older set of standards. As the state continues to adopt the next generation science standards, they will develop a new science assessment. Until that time, students will take the CMT/CAPT based science assessment.

Throughout our school district, the focus continues to be on rigorous day to day curriculum and instruction. Engaging students on a daily basis in higher order thinking, rigorous performance based tasks and assignments, and strong content and skills is the key to preparing our students for success now and in the future.