



PREPARING STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS

A PARENT RESOURCE: NEW TESTS. NEW RESULTS.

Our schools are prepared

The good news is that **90% of Connecticut schools already have one successful administration of the Smarter Balanced test completed.** Given the option, most schools and districts chose to administer the test last year. It helped familiarize students and staff with taking the tests on the computer. The feedback was generally positive and most schools' technology proved ready.

This is certainly a big shift for Connecticut's students and teachers—but one that holds great promise for our students. **By making this transition, we are better preparing our kids to meet the demands of college and the 21st century workforce.**

New ruler for measuring student success

With the new tests, students will receive new scores. **Results will be different.** In many cases, the scores will look lower on the Smarter Balanced tests than what many are used to seeing on the CMT/CAPT exams. This means that, in the beginning, fewer students may score at higher levels. This does not mean that students are learning less. Rather, it reflects that we set the bar higher. This is to be expected because **we are using a different ruler.** The shift is like going from centimeters on the CMT/CAPT to inches on the new exams. If the finish line was set at marker "4," much more distance needs to be covered to reach 4 inches than it does to reach 4 centimeters. Reaching a "4" along the CMT/CAPT measuring stick is not the same as reaching a "4" along the Smarter Balanced measuring stick.

In effect, comparing scores on CMT/CAPT to Smarter Balanced is like comparing apples to oranges. Given that the ruler is changing, and that the exams are testing different content and skills, we won't be able to compare scores.

States that made the transition to college- and career-ready standards early did see a drop in scores, but they are also seeing improvements year-to-year. For example, in Kentucky the percentage of high school graduates ready for college and careers has increased from 38% to 62% in just four years. **The initial shift in Connecticut's scores might be jarring.** Based on the experiences of these states, we can also reasonably expect that the first results from the new tests will resemble Connecticut's scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

But like the early adoption states, we anticipate that **scores will steadily improve in the coming years** as students and teachers gain more classroom experience with the standards.

What parents can do

Our teachers and students are aiming higher. The world is an increasingly demanding place and education must evolve to keep pace. Teaching and learning in today's classroom looks different from what many parents experienced.

There are many things parents and guardians can do to be prepared to help students through the transition:

- Speak with your child's teachers about what might be different and what you can do to help your child with the new material at home.
- Ask your child's principal if the school plans to hold an orientation to learn about the new standards and tests to better understand the changes your child is experiencing in the classroom.
- Check with your school's parent organization to see if they are holding an information session on what parents can do to help students at home.
- The State Department of Education is providing parents with resources for each grade level to be able to help children with the standards at home. Visit CTcorestandards.org for more helpful information about the changes. Content continues to be added specifically for parents.

Change is difficult. In the beginning, it might seem that students have a long way to go to reach the new expectations. But Connecticut teachers and administrators are committed to working together to support students with great instruction and resources to meet these new expectations.

We owe it to our kids to make sure that they receive an education that prepares them to thrive in a global economy and civic life.

The State of Connecticut Department of Education is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.



Handy Handouts®

Free, educational handouts for teachers and parents*
Number 358



What are Developmental Domains?

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.

From the moment of birth, children begin exploring their new world by touching, smelling, tasting, listening, observing, and playing. Through this constant exploration, they are rapidly developing the "domains" of their physical and mental abilities. The simplest of activities at every age level promotes stimulation and growth in their cognitive, social, language, and physical (fine and gross motor) skills. These four domains develop all at the same time.



Cognitive Development is learning and processing of information – our thinking and knowing. Cognition involves language, imagination, thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and memory. Our cognitive skills help us organize what we know and generalize that knowledge into other areas. School teachers understand how children learn and process information; therefore, they can recognize a breakdown in cognition. When a red flag appears, teachers may refer a child for an evaluation to pinpoint the breakdown – and the sooner, the better. This child may have a learning disability or some other deficit that needs attention. Help your child develop cognitive skills from an early age by having him/her work with puzzles, blocks, peg games, card games, patterns, and cause and effect activities.

Language Development is learning to express ourselves in order to communicate with others. We learn to express ourselves by learning sounds, combining those sounds into meaningful words, and putting words together into sentences to communicate our thoughts. Then we are able to interpret sounds from others. Talking to our children before they can talk, engaging children in conversation (even when they are just beginning to talk), and exposing children to books and reading to them are instrumental in developing later literacy and language skills. Reading, talking, and singing to children from birth, and providing books and language videos or DVDs for them when they are older will help children develop important language skills.

Social Development is learning to like ourselves and to get along with others. Being in an active environment teaches us to share, take turns, accept the differences in others, include others in play/ conversation, and the list goes on. Just by watching others interact, children learn valuable social skills. That is why the examples we set and the behaviors we display are important. Children are always watching and copying what they see others do.

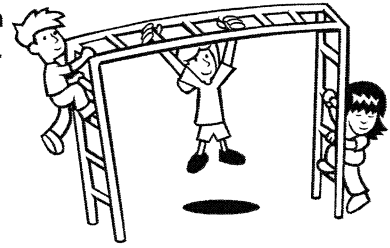
Unfortunately, some children may develop serious emotional or personality problems at some point. These problems include symptoms of extreme anxiety, withdrawal, and fearfulness; or, on the other hand, disobedience, aggression, and destruction of property. If parents suspect their child's social development is not going well (compared to his/her peers), discuss your observations with your family doctor or school counselor. From an early age, having your child interact with other children and adults as much as possible is the best way to help him/her develop socially. Playing games, having conversations in the car or at the dinner table, playing with friends, having parties, going out to eat, etc. are all invaluable ways to foster social development.

Physical Development falls into two categories – fine motor and gross motor skills. Fine Motor skills are activities occurring with the fingers in coordination with the eyes, such as reaching, grasping, releasing, and turning the wrist. These small muscle movements don't develop overnight, but with time and practice. Fine motor skills help us perform tasks for daily living, such as dressing, eating, toileting and washing. In the early childhood years, children become independent and learn to dress and undress themselves without assistance; use utensils for eating; and pour liquid without assistance.



The fingers learn to move in harmony and become strong enough to fasten buttons and snaps; and movement in the wrists helps take care of toileting.

Activities to promote fine motor control include: putting together puzzles with small pieces, peg board games, painting, drawing, cutting, stringing and lacing activities, construction and building sets like Legos®, Lincoln Logs®, buttons, snaps, and tying.



Gross Motor Development involves the larger muscles in the arms, legs, and torso. Gross motor activities include walking, running, throwing, lifting, kicking, etc. These skills relate to body awareness, reaction speed, balance, and strength. Gross motor development allows your child to move and control his/her body in different ways. It promotes your child's confidence and self-esteem and allows the body to perform multiple demands beyond simple muscle movements.

At home or in the classroom environment, have children practice: walking on their toes or heels; walking with toes pointed in or out; walking or moving like a certain animal (crab, worm, bear, bunny, frog, elephant, gorilla, kangaroo, etc.); playing kickball, tetherball, volleyball, basketball, or skating; swinging, sliding, climbing on monkey bars, or playing on a tire swing; balancing while walking along a curb; walking forward, backward, sideways, and heel-to-toe; walking while balancing a book on the head; jumping, hopping, crawling, rolling, doing jumping jacks, and jumping over obstacles. Participating in sports groups help develop gross motor skills as well as cognition, as many sports require thinking and planning where and what their body needs to do next.

Resources

Bright Tots. (2012). *Developmental domains*. Retrieved from <http://www.brighttots.com/domains>

Teach Preschool. (2012). *A brief look at developmental domains in early childhood education*. Retrieved from <http://www.teachpreschool.org/2010/07/a-brief-look-at-developmental-domains-in-early-childhood-education/>

Livestrong. The Limitless Potential of You (2012). *Five domains for early childhood development*. Retrieved from <http://www.livestrong.com/article/156820-five-domains-for-early-childhood-development/#ixzz1jLW65N1g>

For more Handy Handouts®, go to www.handyhandouts.com.

Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com and type in the item name or number in our search engine. Click the links below to see the product descriptions.

All About You, All About Me Fun Deck®
Item # FD-80

Topic Talk™
Item # GB-192

The Question Challenge Game
Item # GB-42

Fine Motor Fun Deck®
Item # FD-105

Body Awareness Fun Deck®
Item # FD-120

Upper Body and Core Strength Fun Deck®
Item # FD-106

*Handy Handouts® are for classroom and personal use only. Any commercial use is strictly prohibited.

PARENT/GUARDIAN LETTER TEMPLATE

[INSERT DATE]

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We aim to ensure that your child—and all [DISTRICT NAME]'s students—receive an education that prepares them to thrive in a global economy and civic life. That's why Connecticut raised the bar and issued a new instructional roadmap. This new roadmap, the Connecticut Core Standards, sets learning expectations for what students should learn and be able to do at each grade level so that so that by the time they graduate from high school, they are ready to succeed in college and the workplace.

With these new learning goals, Connecticut needs new ways to measure student progress. Assessments are like academic checkups. They help teachers and parents see where students are compared to where they need to be. The results can reveal subject areas where a student is excelling and subject areas where a student needs extra help. **This year, the Smarter Balanced assessments will replace our old statewide tests, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), in reading, writing and math.**

The Connecticut Core Standards focus on critical thinking and problem-solving—the real-world skills students need to be successful in college and careers. The Smarter Balanced assessments will be administered on computers and are designed to measure these skills through reading comprehension, writing, and math questions that require students to demonstrate that they truly understand the content. Additional supports are available for some students with special needs, as determined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan.

With the new tests, students will receive new scores. Results will be different and scores will likely look lower on the Smarter Balanced tests than what many are used to seeing on the CMT/CAPT exams. This means that, in the beginning, fewer students may score at higher levels. This does not mean that students are learning less. Rather, it reflects that we are setting a new baseline from which our students will continue to grow.

States that made the transition early did see a drop in scores, but they are also seeing improvements year-to-year. For example, in Kentucky, the percentage of high school graduates ready for college and careers has increased from 38 percent to 62 percent in just four years. As students and teachers gain more classroom experience with the standards, we anticipate that scores will steadily improve in the coming years.

To find more resources specifically for parents and guardians, including ways to help your child with the new standards at home, please visit CTCoreStandards.org. For more information about the Smarter Balanced tests in our district, please visit [INSERT DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS WEBPAGE].

This is certainly a big shift for our students and teachers—but one that holds great promise for our children. By making this transition, we are better preparing our kids to meet the demands of college and the 21st century workforce. Our teachers and administrators are committed to working together to support students with great instruction and resources to meet these new expectations.



PARENT/GUARDIAN LETTER TEMPLATE

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME]

[INSERT TITLE]

