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Impact to Data from MAS Testing

Summary

In November of 2010 and February of 2011, concern was raised within the Hartford Board of Education that the student performance data reported by the District in 2009 and 2010 was not representative of the District's true performance. Further, the questioning of the data led one board member to cast doubt on the level of impact of Hartford's entire reform. The contention was that the shifting of some special education students away from the standard CMT and CAPT tests towards a new, more appropriate standardized test had caused differences between 2008-2010 data sets that were large enough to invalidate the positive story of the reform.

Analysis that we have done has indeed shown that data inconsistencies arising from the adoption of new special education testing requirements have had an impact on absolute gains seen in Hartford – and all districts throughout the State. In the absence of perfect data, however, analyses can still take place to evaluate the impact of reform on Hartford students over time.

Such analyses yield the conclusion that student improvement is measureable and meaningful in Hartford – and that the gains that continue to outpace those of the state are beginning to shrink the achievement gap.

The use of data in assessing student progress is critically important, and the methods employed to interpret the information need to be continuously improved. Interpretations should not be loose. The 2010-2011 data can now be used to create new baselines that can better capture the complexity in measuring student performance.

MAS Background

In 2009, the [Modified Assessment System](#), or MAS, was launched as a pilot to provide a means of assessing the skills of certain special education students for whom the standard CMT and CAPT tests provide little to no value. Following a protocol established by the State Department of Education, these students are deemed by their school-level Planning and Placement Teams (PPT) as unable to reach proficiency on the "standard" CMT or CAPT specifically due to their disability and despite any test accommodations.

Such students become exempt from taking the standard CMT and CAPT in Math and Reading and are directed to take a different test, administered by the State – the MAS. The inclusion of now MAS-eligible students prior to 2009 somewhat depressed overall achievement results in the past, a matter that impacted all Districts in the state.

In Hartford, an average of 7% and 9% of all reading and math test takers were eligible for the new MAS tests and exempted from taking the standard CMT and CAPT assessments in 2009 and 2010, respectively. The numbers below break down the number of test takers in Hartford for Reading and Math.

# of Reading Test Takers, All Grades			
Year	Standard Test Takers (Total)	Standard Test Takers (SPED)	MAS Test Takers
2007	10,988	1,605	0
2008	10,845	1,444	0
2009	10,012	698	711
2010	9,547	491	880

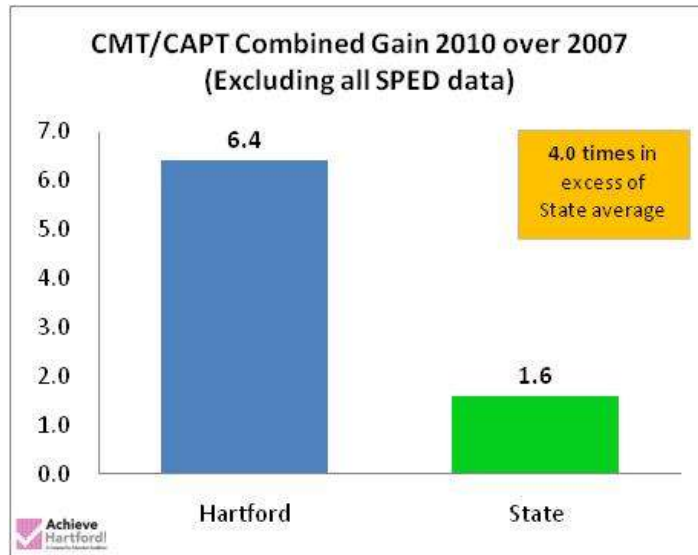
# of Math Test Takers, All Grades			
Year	Standard Test Takers (Total)	Standard Test Takers (SPED)	MAS Test Takers
2007	10,958	1,603	0
2008	10,843	1,475	0
2009	10,047	764	771
2010	9,548	568	815

Analysis

Achieve Hartford! considered two additional ways of analyzing the 2007-2010 state data in an effort to determine the impact that the MAS transition has had on Hartford’s reported gains. While not perfect, both of these methodologies are sound in their approach.

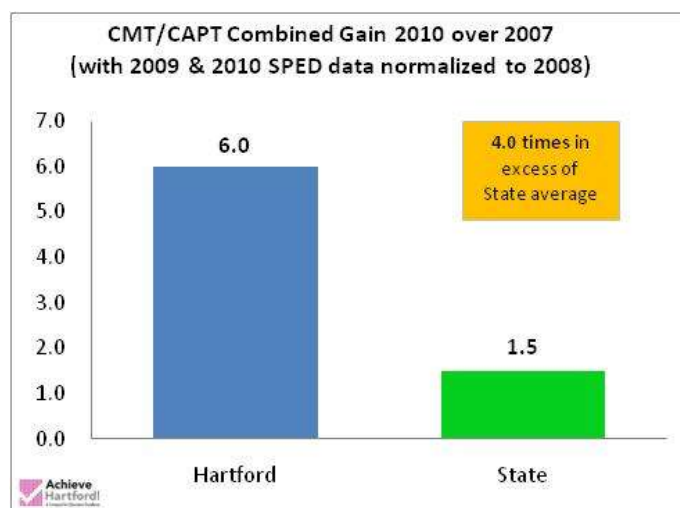
The first analysis examined the District’s performance with all special education data excluded over the last four years – an expansion of our work done back in November of last year. This look encompasses approximately 86% of the students assessed and provides an “apples to apples” comparison over those four years.

- Similar to what was reported in the [November 18th 2009](#) issue of *Education Matters!*, the performance still increased meaningfully (> 6 points) over the past four years. Further, the overall gain experienced by Hartford was 4 times the gain realized by the state.

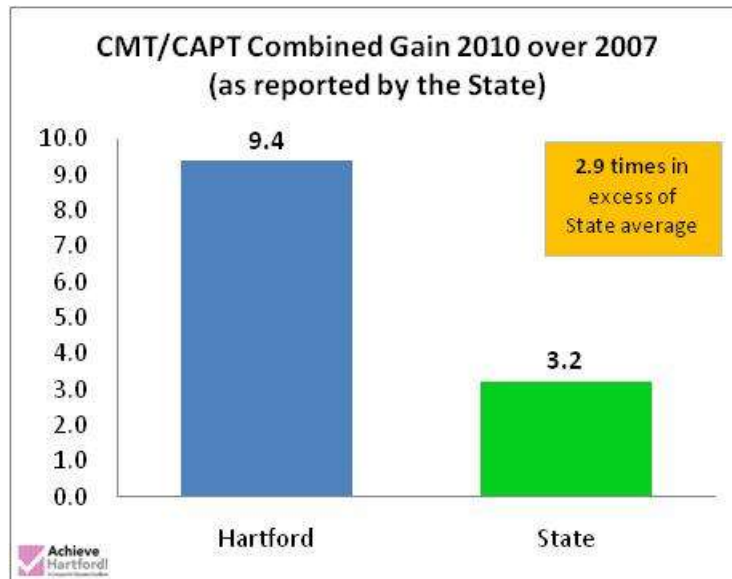


The second analysis – encompassing 100% of students – normalized the 2008 special education student performance over 2009 and 2010, providing a proxy for what might have happened if the MAS transition never took place. Interestingly, this method may under-represent some of the gains realized by the District if special education students performed similar to the rest of the student population in Hartford. Nevertheless, it represents another reasonable way to measure the aggregate performance of the District, and see if the impact of the reform is being felt.

- This analysis also resulted in a three-year gain for Hartford (2010 over 2007) of >6 points – also 4 times that of the State.



These two views compare to the state-reported aggregated view illustrated below.



Takeaways

With the statewide transition to MAS, reporting consistency slipped somewhat in 2009 and 2010, but the direction of Hartford's reform remains unchanged, as the District continues to improve at a rate that outpaces the State. The achievement gap is still closing. The reform strategies in Hartford are not flawed and are having an encouraging impact, with the commitment to shutting down chronically low-performing schools and redesigning them making a positive difference for Hartford children and families.

To be sure, the absolute gains are less than what is reported in the State's standard data set: a three-year gain of 9.4 points, compared to 3.2 points for the state. This is important on a variety of levels, but the progression of impact is real and consistent, as demonstrated in all three looks.

Consistency in data is essential in any measurement. The state's transition with the MAS testing in 2009 and 2010 has somewhat affected that consistency, but the transition should now be complete, fortunately. Beginning in 2010-2011, student performance can now be measured with the use of state data to create three new 2010 baselines. Those baselines include:

1. Non-SPED data from the standard CMT/CAPT tests;
2. SPED data from the standard CMT/CAPT tests; and
3. SPED data from the MAS tests in reading and math.

These looks, along with other school or grade-level breakdowns, should allow for consistent data reports year over year, though special effort must be made to account for future changes in testing and reporting introduced by the State.

Going forward:

Despite the challenge represented by inconsistent data sets made available by the State over the previous 3 years, it is crucial to maintaining accountability that Hartford continue to rely on the state-reported information. Independently reported, the State data represents extremely valuable measuring sticks, though they must be used consistently. The introduction of the MAS tests will likely *not* be the only change in state testing to come, and districts need to create new ways to enhance the evaluation of district and school progress.

Very importantly, any performance targets and measures established, whether overall, by school, or by student, must be reported with specifically defined data and terms with consistent year over year comparisons.

It is also important to note that in a City that had for many years some of the lowest performing schools in the State, data analysis (indeed, applied in a consistent manner) is essential to ensuring that our schools deliver on the promise of a high quality public education. To maintain accountability to that promise, we can and must use student performance data as a very large component of measuring student progress.