

Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program: Knowing the Facts and Frequently Asked Questions

The Mission of the BEST Program

The mission of the BEST Program is to ensure that all Connecticut students are taught by highly competent and caring teachers who hold high expectations for their students. The assessment of teaching competency as part of certification assures the public that teachers have attained the necessary skills to promote student learning.

BACKGROUND

Connecticut's Comprehensive Plan for Education for 2001-2005 credits high standards for teachers coupled with high standards for student achievement as integral to Connecticut's success over the last decade in raising student achievement and promoting an agenda of excellence and equity. Since 1989, the State Board of Education and the legislature have consistently supported funding of the BEST Program, even in periods of economic downturn.

What is Connecticut's Continuum for Teacher Quality?

Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching (CCT) embodies the knowledge, skills, and competencies that teachers need in order to ensure students learn and perform at high levels. These standards are applied across teachers' careers as follows:

- Connecticut colleges and universities are developing performance-based systems based on the CCT to ensure prospective teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to be recommended for initial certification;
- **Beginning teachers participating in BEST must demonstrate teaching competency through submission of a teaching portfolio based on the CCT in order to be eligible for their provisional educator certificate;**
- Local school districts are developing teacher evaluation and professional development systems based on the CCT and which incorporate multiple sources of evidence of teaching and student learning; and
- Experienced teachers may demonstrate excellence in teaching by earning voluntary advanced certification through the portfolio-based assessment system of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, as well as assume leadership roles such as BEST mentors or portfolio scorers, instructional coaches, and curriculum specialists.

Why did the State replace the Connecticut Competency Instrument (CCI) with the portfolio assessment?

The CCI was based on the 15 Connecticut Teaching Competencies, adopted in 1984, which defined generic teacher behaviors. The portfolio assessment is based on Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching (CCT), which expands the definition of teaching competencies beyond generic teaching behaviors to the knowledge, skills and competencies that promote student learning both across and within specific disciplines. As a result, the CCI no longer effectively reflects the standards inherent in Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching and was eliminated from the BEST Program.

WHAT IS THE BEST PROGRAM?

The BEST Program is a two to three-year induction program for beginning classroom teachers holding initial educator certificates. BEST participation requirements are determined by both the endorsement a teacher holds and his or her teaching assignment. There are two categories of participation in the BEST Program (please refer to the BEST Participation Category Chart that follows for a description of the Portfolio Induction and Support Categories).

What is the Portfolio Induction Category?

The Portfolio Induction category is designed for classroom teachers of bilingual education, elementary education, English language arts, mathematics, music, physical education, science, social studies, special education, visual arts and world languages. It consists of two components:

- **Support** for beginning teachers through **school or district-based mentors or support teams** and through **state-sponsored training** such as beginning teacher seminars (both web-based and regional), and
- **Assessment** through a **content-specific teaching portfolio** submitted during the second year of teaching, in which beginning teachers document a unit of instruction or a series of lessons that illustrate their planning, teaching, assessment of student learning and reflection on teaching and learning. The portfolio includes lesson logs, videotapes of teaching, examples of student work and assessments, and teacher commentaries.

In order to be eligible for the provisional educator certificate, beginning teachers must demonstrate mastery of essential teaching competencies related to teacher content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment. Teachers who do not successfully complete the portfolio assessment in year two will be required to submit a new portfolio in their third year of teaching.

SUPPORT:

What kinds of support are available to beginning teachers in BEST?

- **District-based:** support in year-one of BEST is through the assignment of a mentor or support team in the teacher's own district. Many districts also conduct workshops for new teachers that focus on curriculum and instruction, classroom management and the BEST program portfolio assessment.
- **State-sponsored content-specific seminars:** The BEST Program has developed seminars that are delivered through two different modes: "Online" (web-based) and "In-person" (regional) seminars.

“Online” seminars/learning units are available through the CSDE website in each of the ten portfolio subject areas or on www.ctbest.org, click on Online Seminars. These user-friendly seminars, which can be accessed at any time, provide a focus on effective instruction in the teacher’s own content area and support/resources/tips for teachers as they prepare portfolios. This website also provides access to an “exemplar” or model portfolio in each portfolio subject.

“In-person” seminars are scheduled in the spring for teachers in year-one of BEST and in the fall for second-year teachers. The “in-person” seminars provide an opportunity for collegial exchange with other beginning teachers, BEST staff project leaders, teachers-in-residence and/or portfolio scorers. Check www.ctbest.org for schedules of seminars and to register.

Other Resources for Beginning Teachers:

- **Portfolio Exemplars**: Sample portfolios for each of the ten portfolio subject areas are available at each of the six RESCs. In addition, the on-line seminars (see above) provide one portfolio “exemplar” in each portfolio subject area ([RESC “exemplar” contact information](#).)
- ***BEST Communications Web-Site***: www.ctbest.org is the BEST Program’s Communications and Registration website. It has been established to facilitate communications and conversations with BEST Program Staff. All beginning teachers are expected to sign-up for BEST communications in the beginning of each program year (go to www.ctbest.org and click on “electronic communications”). Once signed-up, the beginning teacher will get frequent emails from staff regarding important program information, instructional and portfolio preparation tips and resources.
- ***Portfolio Assessment Conferences (PACs)***: A beginning teacher who does not meet the acceptable performance standard on a portfolio submitted as a second-year BEST participant, is eligible for an in-person conference with a trained portfolio scorer. These trained professionals will assist beginning teachers in understanding their performance in the portfolio assessment and preparing for a re-submission of the portfolio during year-three.

For further assistance:

- ***BEST Staff***: The Bureau of Evaluation and Educator Standards has a teacher-in-residence for each portfolio area that is available to assist teachers with questions regarding their participation in BEST and their portfolio requirements. [Click here for a list of project leaders and teachers-in-residence](#).

ASSESSMENT:

What is the BEST portfolio assessment?

Teachers document, a unit of instruction (usually 5-8 hours of instruction) conducted with one class. It includes (a) teacher lesson logs, (b) videotaped segments of teaching (usually two 20-minute segments), (c) the work of 2 students in the class, and (d) reflective commentaries on the teaching and learning that took place during the unit.

How much written information must be submitted in the portfolio?

Portfolios average between 40 and 70 pages of documentation in total. Teachers prepare daily logs of 1-2 pages each and 8-12 pages of written commentaries (subject to page limitations). The remainder of the portfolio documentation consists of student work samples (usually 15-20 pages) and copies of relevant materials used in the teaching of the unit (e.g., handouts, daily assignments, etc.).

Who scores the portfolio?

Portfolios are scored by highly trained assessors with extensive classroom experience in the same content area as the beginning teacher. Each assessor must go through approximately 50 hours of training and meet proficiency standards before being able to score portfolios. It takes approximately 5-6 hours to evaluate and score a teaching portfolio. Portfolios are scored/reviewed independently by at least 3 scorers/trainers.

How many beginning teachers meet the assessment standard?

On average, 85% of beginning teachers successfully complete the portfolio standard at the end of their second year. Only about 2% of beginning teachers do not meet the requirement at the end of the third year of teaching, either by not submitting a portfolio or not meeting the standard.

What feedback do beginning teachers receive?

Beginning teachers receive a portfolio performance summary report, including an individualized performance profile providing descriptive feedback about their performance. Beginning teachers who do not successfully complete the portfolio assessment are eligible for a "BEST Portfolio Assessment Conference," in which a portfolio scorer/trainer meets with a beginning teacher to help him/her interpret the score report and discuss strategies for improvement.

Is there any evidence that the portfolio assessment negatively impact teacher attrition?

We see no evidence that the portfolio assessment is causing teachers to leave the profession. In fact, as compared to other states, Connecticut has relatively low levels of beginning teacher attrition—about 7-8% annually for beginning teachers in Connecticut as compared to a national average of 10%.

Where can I find more information regarding the BEST Program?

The [Guide to the BEST Program for Beginning Teachers](#) provides detailed information regarding who must participate, timelines for participation, registration, support and assessment.

BEST PARTICIPATION CATEGORIES

I. PORTFOLIO INDUCTION PROGRAM

BEST Program requirements for teachers of bilingual education, elementary education, English language arts, mathematics, music, physical education, science, social studies, special education, visual arts and world languages

YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE <i>(if needed)</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">School-based support: (required)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by mentor or support team <p style="text-align: center;">State-based support: (recommended)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline-specific seminars including internet accessible “online” sessions • BEST Orientation Sessions 	<p style="text-align: center;">School-based support: (optional at discretion of district)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by mentor or support team <p style="text-align: center;">State-based support: (recommended)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline-specific seminars including internet accessible “online” sessions • Portfolio Videotape Workshops <p style="text-align: center;">Assessment (required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of a teaching portfolio by May 1. 	<p style="text-align: center;">School-based support: (optional at discretion of district)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by mentor or support team <p style="text-align: center;">State-based support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Conferences for beginning teachers not meeting the portfolio standard in year two <p style="text-align: center;">Assessment: (required)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of a teaching portfolio by February 1.* <p><i>*Third portfolio submission: Upon request of the superintendent of schools, year-three participants who have already submitted two portfolios and have not met standards, may have one additional submission opportunity by June 1. This option is not available to individuals who have submitted fewer than two portfolios.</i></p>

II. SUPPORT ONLY INDUCTION PROGRAM

BEST Program requirements for teachers of agriculture and vocational agriculture, business education, health, home economics, technology education, partially sighted, hearing impaired, blind, marketing education, occupational and trades-related subjects in vocational-technical schools or in a comprehensive high school and TESOL.

Year One
<p>School-based support (required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by mentor or support team <p>State-based support (recommended):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BEST Orientation Sessions