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NEWS RELEASE

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New Report Reveals Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) is an Accurate Predictor of Students' Future Success

January 11, 2006 - New research released today by the **Nellie Mae Education Foundation, commissioned jointly with the Connecticut State Departments of Education and Higher Education** reveals that student performance on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) is a strong indicator of students' readiness for future academic and professional success.

The research, entitled "***First Steps: An Evaluation of the Success of Connecticut Students Beyond High School,***" provides insight into the enrollments of the state's high school graduates within Connecticut state colleges and universities. The study was funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Connecticut Department of Education, the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, **the Connecticut State University System, and the New England office of the College Board.**

"The study's finding that the CAPT exam is a good indicator of future success is groundbreaking," said **Dr. Blenda Wilson, President and CEO of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.** "Most testing either evaluates students' progress or potential for future success. This data documents the relationship between CAPT scores and student behavior, and suggests that using CAPT, in conjunction with SAT, could significantly enhance the accuracy of student assessment.

"Recent policy trends calling for greater accountability have focused on exams without knowing the practical implications of whether higher student scores imply greater success beyond high school. This study reveals that student success on CAPT is linked to real success later on," said Stephen P. Coelen, former Director of the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), who authored the report with Professor Joseph Berger, Acting Director of the Center for Education Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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The study tracked Connecticut students who took CAPT exams in their sophomore year of high school in 1996 and examined administrative and educational records to document their behaviors and outcomes beyond high school in college, in seven measures of success. Those measures are: interest in college; time elapsed before starting college; number of remediation courses taken in college; credits taken per semester; number of courses taken and passed in college; college GPA; and the attainment of a post-secondary degree.

For every measure included in the study, it was determined that the higher that students scored on the relevant portions of CAPT—mathematics or language arts—the more successful students were.

The study also provides insight about the college enrollment of Connecticut high school graduates who completed CAPT tests.

“Connecticut public higher education institutions do not now establish enrollment on the basis of CAPT scores,” said Coelen. “But if we look at student attendance and relate it to CAPT scores, we see the community college system provides the much-needed, open door for all students; the State Universities—the Connecticut State University system, CSU—becomes quite positively selective in their admissions while the University of Connecticut is clearly the most selective.” Coelen added however that “there seems to be a significant ‘brain drain’ of students scoring on the higher end of the CAPT test who either do not go on to college or who go out of State, those leaving the State for College having a smaller likelihood of entering the Connecticut workforce after graduation, and—of course, those not going on to college likely underperforming in their eventual workforce activity.”

Betty Sternberg, Commissioner of Education said of the study, “Connecticut public universities historically have been reluctant to use CAPT scores as part of their admission criteria. This study provides evidence that there is no reason for that reluctance. Performance on the CAPT is a solid indicator of student’s future success in college. In addition, CAPT scores should be used in high school to help guide students in making decisions about their post-secondary education.”

"This study is a springboard for improving our ability to track student success over time—a key element for planning for and meeting workforce needs," stated Higher Education Commissioner Valerie Lewis. "We especially need to understand the reasons why apparently 10 percent of those with the highest CAPT scores never enter college. Given Connecticut's need to keep pace economically, this loss of talent is simply unacceptable."

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Wilson concluded, “It is our hope that *First Steps* will advance our understanding of the complexity and appropriate uses of testing and foster informed dialogue to enhance educational opportunities for all people.”

About the Authors:

Stephen Coelen is Professor in Residence in Economics at the University of Connecticut, Managing Partner of the World Institute for Strategic Economic Research at Holyoke Community College in Massachusetts, and Adjunct Professor of Economics and Public Policy and chief U.S. international advisor at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, the Republic of South Africa.

Professor Joseph Berger is Acting Director of the Center for Education Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He also chairs the Educational Policy, Research Administrative Department.

To learn more about funders of the study, please visit the following websites:

Nellie Mae Education Foundation:
www.nmefdn.org

Connecticut Department of Education:
www.state.ct.us./sde/

Connecticut Department of Higher Education:
www.ctdhe.org/

Connecticut State University System:
www.w3.sysoff.ctstateu.edu

New England Office of the College Board:
www.collegeboard.com/about/association/regional/newengland/newengland.html

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FACT SHEET

First Steps: An Evaluation of the Success of Connecticut Students Beyond High School

First Steps: An Evaluation of the Success of Connecticut Students Beyond High School reveals that student performance on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) is a strong indicator of their readiness for future academic and professional success. The research provides insight into the enrollments of the state's high school graduates within Connecticut state colleges and universities.

The study tracked Connecticut students who took CAPT exams in their sophomore year of high school in 1996 and examined administrative and educational records to document their behaviors and outcomes beyond high school on seven measures of success:

- Interest in college
- Time elapsed before starting college
- Number of remediation courses in college
- Credits taken per semester
- Number of courses taken and passed in college
- College GPA
- Whether or not a postsecondary degree was attained

The study is the first to evaluate the effectiveness of a high school test in predicting students' later success, concluding that CAPT appears to act as an excellent predictor of academic success beyond high school. The CAPT exam correctly predicts all seven measures of success; in many cases, quite independently of the high school completion/college entrance exam, the SAT. Since CAPT and SAT measure different facets of students' capabilities both tests provide helpful information about student capabilities and academic deficiencies.

The study also provided insight into the college enrollment of Connecticut high school graduates who completed CAPT tests. Several observations, created by looking at enrolled students' CAPT and SAT scores, should be noted.

- 1) **Public institutions do just as they are expected to do:**
 - The community college system provides an open door for students, allowing a wide range of access while still enrolling a high proportion of very bright students capable of being admitted to any college. This possibly gives low-income students the best buy for their money.

- **The Connecticut State University (CSU) System provides a more competitive environment to students, roughly emulating many private colleges in Connecticut in its acceptance of students by level of CAPT score.**
 - **The University of Connecticut system provides the most competitive environment in the public university sector. Students enrolled in the system resemble those from the most or highly selective private colleges and universities* in the state.**
- 2) **Public college institutions enrolled 51.1% of all Connecticut high school students, continuing on to college. By comparison, private colleges enrolled only 7.1%; most (80%) attending selective private institutions*.**
 - 3) **More students in all three public higher educational sectors drop out of college, or take longer to graduate, than in their counterpart private institutional segments. Often, those who do graduate complete degrees at highly selective private, premiere institutions, either in- or out-of-state.**
 - 4) **Many students who attend college out-of-state are among the highest scoring CAPT scorers. This is a group likely to enter the Connecticut labor force in smaller proportions than those who stay in Connecticut for college.**
 - 5) **Some of the very best high school students never enter college. This includes nearly 10% of the very highest CAPT exam scorers in the state.**
 - 6) **Although the CAPT exam is not a high stakes test, there is pretty clear evidence that the great majority of students took the CAPT exam seriously.**
 - 7) **Both the SAT and CAPT tests offer significant, often independent, explanations of student success in the various postsecondary measures studied.**

About the Authors

Research was carried out by Stephen Coelen and Joseph Berger. Dr. Coelen is currently Professor in Residence in Economics at the University of Connecticut, Managing Partner of the World Institute for Strategic Economic Research at Holyoke Community College in Massachusetts, and Adjunct Professor of Economics and Public Policy and chief U.S. international advisor at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, and the Republic of South Africa.

Professor Joseph Berger is Acting Director of the Center for Education Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He also chairs the Educational Policy, Research Administrative Department.

About the Funders

The study was funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Connecticut Department of Education, the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, the Connecticut State University System and the New England Office of the College Board.

*** Level of selectivity is defined as an evaluation of the way institutions react to admission applications: whether the institution offered open admissions or whether they were selective or more selective in their admissions process.**

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