

## Parents' Guide to the Dakota STEP-A Science

The Dakota State Test of Educational Progress Alternate Science (Dakota STEP-A) is South Dakota's annual statewide assessment of student progress, administered to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in grades 5, 8, and 11 each spring in the area of Science. The Dakota STEP-A Science is included in the assessment system used in South Dakota as required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

### WHAT IS THE DAKOTA STEP-A SCIENCE?

The assessment provides feedback to educators, students and parents regarding students' academic achievement and mastery of South Dakota's science academic content standards.

Dakota STEP-A results are not used in making grade promotion decisions or high school graduation decisions. The Dakota STEP-A assessment is composed of a rating form and supporting evidence based on grade level state content standards in science.

### WHY WAS THE DAKOTA STEP-A SCIENCE DEVELOPED?

The Dakota STEP-A was developed to meet the science requirement of NCLB. It also serves as one benchmark to measure student achievement. The test was created with the help of South Dakota educators. It was designed to:

- Establish high expectations for the education of South Dakota students with the most significant cognitive disabilities
- Help schools and teachers identify weaknesses in their curriculum and improve instruction in those areas
- Help teachers and parents monitor achievement
- Improve the accountability of the state's educational system

### WHEN IS THE DAKOTA STEP-A SCIENCE ADMINISTERED?

Dakota STEP-A testing takes place in the spring of each school year. The total time required for the administration of the tests varies because the test is not directly administered to students.

### WHAT DO MY CHILD'S TEST SCORES MEAN?

You will receive an individual student report from your child's school that explains how he or she did on the Dakota STEP-A Science. This report will provide your child's raw scores, achievement level and achievement level definitions in science. There are four levels of student achievement:

- **Advancing** – A student performing at this level exceeds expectations. The student is able to perform the content standards for the grade at a high level of difficulty, complexity or fluency. Advancing correlates to Advanced on the Dakota STEP.
- **Applying** – A student performing at this level meets expectations. The student is able to perform the content standards for the grade at the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency specified by the standards. Applying correlates to Proficient on the Dakota STEP.
- **Developing** – A student performing at this level performs below expectations. The student is able to perform some of the content standards for the grade below the level of difficulty, complexity or fluency specified by the grade level standards. Developing correlates to Basic on the Dakota STEP.
- **Introducing** – A student performing at this level is unable to perform the content standards for the grade, therefore, no description is provided for this performance level. Introducing correlates to Below Basic on the Dakota STEP.

The Dakota STEP-A results provide one piece of information about your child's achievement. To obtain a more complete picture, daily class work, other learning activities, and progress towards the student's IEP goals should be considered.

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