

Parents' Guide to the Dakota STEP*

The Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (Dakota STEP) is South Dakota's annual statewide assessment of student progress, administered to students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 each spring. Public school districts are required to administer the Dakota STEP. The Dakota STEP is the assessment system for accountability used in South Dakota as required by the No Child Left Behind Act and South Dakota state law.

WHAT IS THE DAKOTA STEP?

The assessment provides critical feedback to educators, students and parents regarding students' academic achievement and mastery of South Dakota's academic content standards. Dakota STEP results are not used in making grade promotion decisions or high school graduation decisions.

The Dakota STEP-A assessment is composed of a battery of multiple-choice subtests. Questions are based on state content standards in reading, mathematics and science.

WHY WAS THE DAKOTA STEP DEVELOPED?

The Dakota STEP was developed to improve the accountability of the state's educational system. 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
- Identify students who may need extra help in reading, mathematics and science
- 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 ADMINISTERED?

Dakota STEP testing takes place in the spring of each school year. The total time required for the administration of the tests varies by grade and ranges from 4.5-6.75 hours. Testing may be spread out over several days, and school districts set their own testing schedules. If your child is absent during testing, it is important that a makeup opportunity be scheduled.

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. This report will provide your child's scale scores, achievement levels and achievement level definitions in reading, math and, in some grades, science.

Scale scores vary for each subject area and grade level. The scale is used to determine your child's achievement level for each subject tested; however, it is not easy to know whether a child has made progress using only the scale score. The Department of Education has defined four levels of student achievement levels based on scale scores:

- *Advancing* – A student performing at the advancing level exceeds expectations for that grade level. The student is able to perform the content standards for the grade at a high level of difficulty, complexity or fluency.
- *Proficient* – A student performing at the proficient level meets expectations for that grade level. The student is able to perform the content standards for the grade at the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency specified by the standards.
- *Basic* – A student performing at the basic level performs below expectations for that grade level. 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.
- *Below basic* – A student performing below the basic level is unable to perform the content standards for the grade, therefore, no description is provided for this performance level.

The goal is to have all students perform at the proficient or advanced level.

The Dakota STEP results provide one piece of information about your child's achievement. To obtain a more complete picture, daily class work, homework and other learning activities should be considered. Please discuss with your child's teacher or counselor how the Dakota STEP results can be used together with school and classroom information to help meet your child's educational goals. Educators use test results to improve educational programs.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD?

Parents and schools share the responsibility for educating children. Everyone concerned, especially the student, benefits when there is a partnership for learning. Students learn best when they know that their efforts are supported at home and at school. Here are some ways you can help your child do his or her best in school:

- *Be a model:* Parents are a child's first teacher. If you show that you value learning, chances are your child will benefit. Your child needs to know that you think school is important.
- *Provide support:* In order to do his/her best in school your child needs your support in many ways. This means making sure your child has enough sleep and is eating well-balanced meals. It also means providing a quiet place where your child can work without interruptions. You can also show your support every time you offer your child encouragement and set reasonable expectations for his or her achievement.
- *Stay informed:* Ask your child or teacher about school activities and learning experiences. Get to know your child's textbooks and take time to look his or her homework assignments. Keep in touch with your child's teachers and the school. Attend parent-teacher conferences and parents' night at the school. Find out the goals that are set for your child, how the school plans to reach those goals, and how you can help.

WHAT IS THE STATE REPORT CARD?

The State Report Card is issued each August and includes information on how schools perform based on students' Dakota STEP results. Assessment results are displayed in percentage of students scoring at the four achievement levels.

To view the State Report Card, go to:
<http://doe.sd.gov/reportcard/index.aspx>

For more information concerning South Dakota's content standards:
<http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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** For the 2013-14 school year, the only Dakota STEP scores most students will have is science at grades 5, 8, and 11. The majority of South Dakota students participated in the Smarter Balanced field test for English Language Arts and Mathematics. There are no student results for Smarter Balanced.*