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South Dakota ACT Scores Above Average

PIERRE, S.D. – The state’s ACT scores are on the rise, and despite one of the highest participation rates in the nation, South Dakota continues to see above-average performance by test-takers.

Nearly 80 percent of South Dakota’s 2013 graduates took the ACT. The students earned an average composite ACT score of 21.9, compared to a national average of 20.9. The state average has been at 21.8 for the past three years.

“The fact that such a high percentage of our students choose to take the ACT, and perform well, is a good indication that they are planning on some sort of postsecondary education experience, which is a must in today’s world,” said Secretary of Education Dr. Melody Schopp.

As South Dakota transitions to new college-ready standards in English and math at the K-12 level, Schopp says educators and parents should be looking more closely at ACT “benchmarks.” These benchmark scores provide an indication of how students will perform once they enter a postsecondary institution. Specifically, a benchmark score indicates that the student has a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding college course.

Of the 2013 South Dakota graduates who took the ACT, 72 percent met the benchmark in English, compared to 64 percent nationally. Fifty-two percent met the benchmark in reading, compared to 44 percent nationally. In math, 53 percent of South Dakota graduates met the benchmark for college readiness, compared to 44 percent nationally. And in science, 46 percent met the ACT benchmark, compared to 36 percent nationally.

“Once again, the good news is that when you look at the benchmarks, South Dakota is outperforming the rest of the nation,” Dr. Schopp said. “But you can also see that we’ve got plenty of opportunity to grow, and that’s where we need to focus our energies.”

One of the efforts currently under way to address college readiness is a collaborative effort of the Department of Education and the South Dakota Board of Regents. The two agencies have partnered to provide online coursework for students who need to improve their skills in certain areas, prior to moving on to postsecondary. Once a student successfully completes the coursework, Board of Regents’ institutions will accept that coursework in lieu of a certain ACT score. The two entities also are developing a senior English course and a college-prep math course, both designed to help students brush up on critical skills before leaving high school.

The ACT is scored on a scale of 1 to 36, with 36 being the highest possible score. Students are tested in the areas of English, mathematics, reading and science. The test is commonly used by postsecondary institutions as a benchmark for college entrance and readiness.

Average Composite ACT Scores – South Dakota vs. National

Year	South Dakota	National
2009	22.0	21.1
2010	21.8	21.0
2011	21.8	21.1
2012	21.8	21.1
2013	21.9	20.9