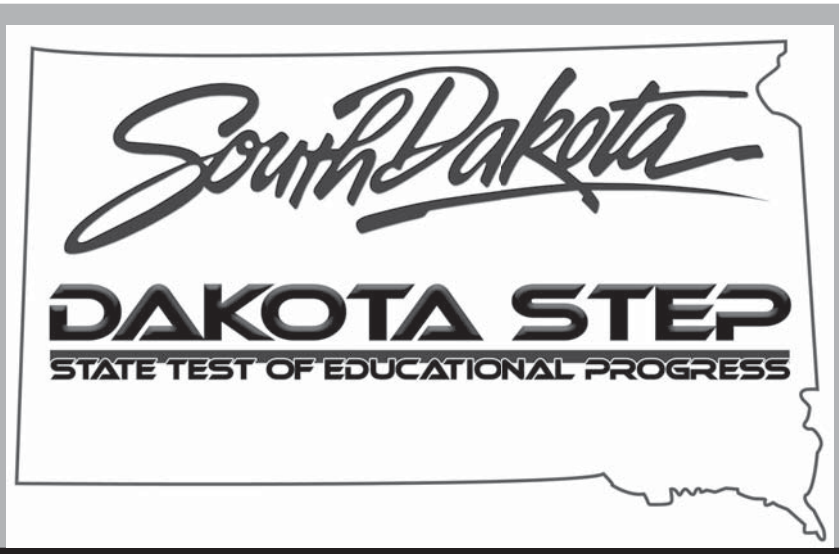


Interpretive Guide

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE TEST OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

For Educators

PEARSON

999-8760-81-X

The South Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (*DSTEP*) measures students' mastery of the South Dakota State Academic Standards. South Dakota educators are encouraged to become familiar with the *DSTEP* development process, remain up-to-date on new developments, and provide feedback via the standards development process. South Dakota Educators participate in various workgroups throughout the development process of the *DSTEP* assessment. This *Interpretive Guide* is intended to provide important background information including further explanations of the role of educators in developing the *DSTEP*.

News and additional information about the
***DSTEP* Assessment Program** is available on the
South Dakota Department of Education website at
http://doe.sd.gov/octa/assessment/dakSTEP/index.asp

Technical information regarding the
Dakota STEP assessment can be found at
http://doe.sd.gov/octa/assessment/dakSTEP/index.asp

South Dakota Statewide Assessment History

The state of South Dakota began its standardized testing program in 1985. Initial efforts centered on a nationally norm-referenced test at grades 4, 8, and 11. The *Stanford Achievement Test, Seventh Edition*, was the first state-wide assessment used. Throughout the years, the *Stanford Achievement Test, Eighth and Ninth Editions*, were utilized.

The development of the *DSTEP* began in the summer of 2002 when the South Dakota Department of Education and Cultural Affairs (DECA) collaborated with Harcourt Assessment, Inc. to develop a standards-based test to fully comply with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). The *DSTEP* was initially created as an augmented assessment using the *Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition* (SAT10)*, Abbreviated Form D* as its foundation, along with custom-developed standards-based items to assess the South Dakota Academic Content Standards in Reading and Mathematics. The first operational administration of the *DSTEP* occurred in the spring of 2003.

In the spring of 2007, a fully customized standards-based Science assessment was added to the *DSTEP* at grades 5, 8, and 11. In addition, the South Dakota Department of Education (SD DOE) also decided to phase-out the SAT10 portion of the assessment in order to provide a better and more tightly aligned assessment. SD DOE decided to gradually build, over a number of years of field testing, a larger bank of items specifically developed to assess the South Dakota State Academic Standards.

The *DSTEP* has been reviewed and approved by South Dakota educators and third-party reviewers, and has been approved by the U.S. Department of Education as a valid assessment for NCLB. We are all proud of the hard work and dedication the South Dakota education community has demonstrated through this process, and the *DSTEP*, with US DOE Approval Status, reflects well on these efforts.

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*

The passage into law of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB)—the latest reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 (ESEA)—has affected the recent development and use of educational assessments. NCLB required states to implement rigorous annual testing programs in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3 through 8 and in one high school grade by the 2005–2006 school year. Also, by the 2007–2008 school year, students must be assessed in science at least once in grades 3 through 5, once in grades 6 through 9, and once in grades 10 through 12 (NCLB, § 6311). The main purpose of the tests mandated under NCLB is to determine the proportion of students proficient in each subject area with the goal of all students reaching proficiency by 2014.

NCLB required each state to adopt challenging academic content standards and performance levels for all public school students and to implement a set of high-quality, yearly student academic assessments that measure these standards. Moreover, to provide meaningful information about a student's performance, the assessments must report the student's results using at least three performance levels—basic, proficient, and advanced.

The *DSTEP* is administered to students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 for Reading and Mathematics and at Grades 5, 8, and 11 for Science each spring between late March and mid-April. South Dakota teachers, parents, administrators, and the public are informed of each school's performance in specific areas through the NCLB Report Card, which reports the results of the *DSTEP*.

Each state is also required to notify the public of the performance of its schools and school districts via state report cards. The NCLB Report Card evaluates attendance, graduation rates, and student mathematics and reading proficiency. The NCLB Report Card reports the total percent of each level for each school, district, and state. Schools and districts that fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for a single year are put on "alert status." If schools and districts fail to meet AYP for two consecutive years, the school or district is identified for school improvement.

The **NCLB Report Card** is available online through the South Dakota Department of Education at **https://nclb.ddncampus.net/nclb/index.html**

South Dakota Academic Content Standards and Performance Descriptors

The South Dakota Content Standards provide a basis for the performance descriptors that characterize and differentiate basic, proficient, and advanced levels of achievement, are designed to guide the planning of instruction, and anchor the assessment of learning from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The performance descriptors provide information to teachers and students, giving them specific targets for instruction and learning. Together, the content standards and performance descriptors provide a common set of goals and expectations for all students in all schools in South Dakota.

The standards are the targets that all students need to meet at the proficient level by the end of each grade level. They are organized by grade so that a student, parent, classroom teacher, administrator, or local school board member can quickly review what learning is expected at each specific grade. The standards are also provided in a second format across grade levels so that the alignment of standards from grade to grade is immediately apparent. The complete Reading, Mathematics, and Science Content Standards can be found at http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/.

- **Indicators** are the common threads that represent expected outcomes for all students preparing to graduate from South Dakota schools.
- **Grade-level content standards** represent expected outcomes for students completing each grade level.

The performance descriptors are organized into achievement levels. These achievement levels describe how a student at that level would be expected to perform the grade level standards. To identify increasing proficiency, the levels are labeled as follows:

- **Advanced:** A student performing at the advanced 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 achievement level.

You can find the content standards and performance descriptors at
http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/index.asp

DSTEP Test Design

The *DSTEP* is South Dakota's annual statewide assessment of student achievement. It is administered to students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 for Reading and Mathematics, grades 5, 8, and 11 for Science, each spring. The *DSTEP* fulfills the requirements for statewide assessment contained in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB, 2002).

The *DSTEP* test assesses students' achievement of the South Dakota Academic Content Standards. The following Content Standards documents used for the development of the *DSTEP* assessment are available online at http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/:

- *South Dakota Reading Content Standards,* approved March 2007, statewide assessments operational in spring 2009
- *South Dakota Mathematics Content Standards,* approved June 2004, statewide assessments operational in spring 2006
- *South Dakota Science Content Standards,* approved June 2005, statewide assessments operational in spring 2007

The assessment is administered in combined-content test booklets consisting of grade-specific subtests.

***DSTEP* Subjects and Grades Tested**

Test	Grade						
	3	4	5	6	7	8	11
Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mathematics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Science	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓

The *DSTEP* assessment is composed of multiple-choice core (operational) items for each content domain and grade. All students are assessed with the same core items for each content domain. All multiple-choice items are worth one raw score point and are the basis of student scores. Linking items (anchor items) are core items used to link the current assessment to the previous year's score scale and are included in the count of core items.

Newly developed items are embedded among the core items to create unique test forms for each content domain and grade level. These field-test items do not count toward a student's score but are evaluated for statistical quality for potential use as core items in future test administrations. Although the number of field-test items is the same across all grade levels within subjects, the distribution of items across standards will differ.

Cognitive Complexity

Cognitive complexity can be described in several different ways. The South Dakota content standards use Bloom's Taxonomy to describe the cognitive complexity for each standard. The cognitive complexity levels in Bloom's Taxonomy include: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. For the purpose of alignment studies, cognitive complexity levels are defined as follows:

Low level (L)—(Bloom's Taxonomy level: **Knowledge**)
This level requires mainly recall, remembering factual information or definitions of terms, or the display of fairly routine skills. This level tends to deal with a single idea or procedure, require a display of concrete understanding, or ask for a demonstration of something learned directly from instruction.

Moderate level (M)—(Bloom's Taxonomy levels: **Comprehension and Application**)
This level requires more intellectual skill than those characterized as "Low", but may seem like it is something less than "High." This level may require the application of rules that are practiced extensively in the classroom, but are now applied to a new situation.

High level (H)—(Bloom's Taxonomy levels: **Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation**)
This level involves the application of ideas and procedures to solve problems or create new understandings. The situations are not habitual or routine; they are novel for most learners. Often multiple ideas are drawn upon or a high level of abstraction needs to be dealt with.

Test Specifications

The *DSTEP* assessment for each content domain is refreshed every year. A minimum of 30% of the core (operational) items are replaced each year with new items that have been developed to measure the content standards, as well as assigning the cognitive complexity. Important considerations when constructing test forms include the achievement of the test blueprint to ensure that the test measures the intended content and that the test is accurate in measuring that content.

Information regarding the test specifications can be fount at
http://doe.sd.gov/octa/assessment/dakSTEP/index.asp

Item Development

It is essential that the *DSTEP* assessment measure the depth, breadth, and intent of the South Dakota Content Standards for each grade level. Important information regarding student performance must be derived from the standards-based test. The *DSTEP* standards-based Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) items developed to assess South Dakota Content Standards must align to the South Dakota Academic Standards. Alignment is defined as "the degree to which expectations and assessments are in agreement and serve in conjunction with one another to guide the system toward students learning what they are expected to know and do," (Webb, 1997, p. 4). When the South Dakota Content Standards are modified to reflect new research, the existing *DSTEP* assessment must also be modified to ensure that it measures the depth, breadth, and intent of the *revised* content standards for each grade level. Item development activities extend beyond the item writing process itself to include:

- revising and maintaining test specifications and blueprints
- conducting item reviews for alignment to the content standards, for bias, and for technical quality
- conducting field tests and analyzing field test data
- constructing new operational subtests and analyzing data to ensure valid and reliable scores from the assessment

The item development process begins with a thorough review of the South Dakota Content Standards, the test specifications, and blueprints by the Contractor's (currently Pearson Educational Measurement) assessment specialists. The result is a clear focus on areas in need of additional development. The "gaps," or content standards with insufficient numbers of items within the existing test, provide a plan for item development. A sufficient number of new items must be written to allow for attrition throughout the review and field testing process.

Alignment Workshops

Alignment workshops are facilitated annually by an outside contractor in order to align newly developed items with content standards and assign cognitive complexity levels (low, medium, and high) to the items. The assigned content standard and cognitive complexity of each item is then captured for reference if and when the items are used on operational forms.

The test blueprints and the findings of the alignment studies are utilized to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the South Dakota pool of items in order to focus item development efforts and construct operational test forms that are aligned with the content standards and cognitive complexity designations.

Students Tested

All South Dakota public school students in grades 3–8 and 11 are required to take the *DSTEP*. Private and alternative site schools, which are classified as accredited or approved by the South Dakota Department of Education, are to administer the *DSTEP*. Students who are state-placed or district-placed must be included in the State of South Dakota's Accountability Plan for *No Child Left Behind*. All students are required to be accounted for and included in local districts if appropriate.

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools may participate, and schools that have volunteered and participated in the past may continue participation yearly. BIE schools are expected to follow the same guidelines as public schools.

Limited English Proficient Students

All identified limited English proficiency students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 must participate in the *DSTEP* assessment (Title I, Part A, Section 1111 of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*). Academic assessment of eligible LEP students must be accomplished in English for all LEP students. In South Dakota, students are provided accommodations, as the *DSTEP* is only provided in English.

LEP students in their first year of enrollment in school in the United States are not required to take the *DSTEP* Reading and the Dakota Writing assessments if these students have participated in the annual *Access* assessment. Participation in the *Access* assessment will constitute participation in *DSTEP* Reading for purposes of determining AYP. Students who enroll for the first time in a school in the United States after the testing window for *Access* annual progress has ended will meet participation requirements for reading through the completion of the LEP eligibility assessment of the W-APT.

LEP students in their first year of enrollment in a school in the United States are required to take the *DSTEP* Mathematics and Science assessment, indicating participation for AYP determination. The results of the mathematics assessment for LEP students in their first year of enrollment in a United States school will not be included in the determination of AYP for the school, district, or state, even if the student meets the requirements of attendance for a full academic year.

It is possible for a student classified as LEP to be enrolled in a district or building that does not provide Title I services. The identified student must still be provided services that meet his or her unique individual educational needs and be included in the state's testing program. (The provision of individual educational needs does not mean that the student must be enrolled in a "special education" program. That is a separate identification and service delivery process).

Information regarding the accommodations can be found at

http://doe.sd.gov/oess/specialed/Assessment_Standards/index.asp

Students with Disabilities

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997* (IDEA) requires the development of policies and procedures for the inclusion of students with disabilities in state- and district-wide assessments (such as the *DSTEP*) and, where necessary, the provision of accommodations for such students. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) must include accommodations that are necessary in order for the child to participate in those assessments. A student who is perceived to have a disability based on Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (Section 504) must also be afforded accommodations if those accommodations are part of the services provided in the student's Section 504 plan. For the expected small number of students whose participation cannot be accommodated, the South Dakota Test of Educational Progress Alternate Assessment (*DSTEP-A*) will take the place of the statewide *DSTEP* assessment. The IEP team must document its decision on the IEP.

Test Security Measures

The test administration must be completed in a timely manner and conducted in such a way to ensure appropriate and consistent testing conditions, as well as secure handling of all test documents. Through a standardized and controlled process, the *DSTEP* provides an accurate representation of student achievement and makes comparisons across schools and years possible.

There are four fundamental dimensions to the security issue. First, the tests must be maintained in a secure manner and not revealed to students or teacher/examiners prior to testing. To do otherwise would give some students an unfair advantage over those who had not seen the questions. Moreover, the test would no longer be examining students' achievement but would merely assess recall of answers to the specific questions that are on the test.

Second, the students must not be given inappropriate assistance during the time they are taking the test (e.g., visual or audible clues that lead the students to the correct answer, materials on the walls or blackboards that assist students in finding correct answers, or explanations that lead the student to the correct answer) or have their answers changed after the test has been administered. In either case, the test would no longer be an accurate measure of the students' skills. Furthermore, teachers are not permitted to pronounce or define the meaning of words to the students.

Third, the test has to be maintained in a secure manner before and after administration because items are reused over time. Thus, it would create an unfair advantage if some students had access to the "old items" because some of those items could reappear on future forms of the test. Anyone administering or handling the DSTEP test materials will be required to review and sign the Test Security Affidavit/Agreement. By signing these documents, teacher/examiners and testing coordinators agree to exercise necessary precautions and follow established procedures that will help ensure the security of the content of all assessment materials. If there is a security breach, there is no replacement form for administering; this will impact the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Upon completion of testing, all test materials are to be collected and returned as directed by the state's assessment vendor. SD DOE staff will make announced test site visits to districts in the state to monitor security of the different administrations. If there is a security breach of any type, a test irregularity form must be submitted to the Department of Education office.

Finally, a more subtle issue is that teachers are not permitted to study, read, inspect, or copy the test before, during, or after it has been administered. Again, this would give an unfair advantage to certain teachers and students when the test is next administered.

Individual Student Report

Individual student reports are available through Infinite Campus (statewide student management system and reporting tool https://sdse.ddncampus.net/campus/sdse.jsp) or eMetrics (online reporting site https://solutions1.emetric.net/SDSTEP/Default.aspx). As both of these sites are secure, you will be required to have a login and password to access the sites. Although the reports do not look alike, they both provide similar information. Following the descriptions of the information found on these reports, you will find sample reports that you can refer to.

The Infinite Campus report provides the following information:

1. Student's information—Name, student ID, Grade, Birth date, School, District, and the date the test was administered.
2. This section provides the following information:

   Scaled Score—A conversion of a student's raw score on a test or a version of the test to a common scale that allows for a numerical comparison between students.

   Achievement Level—Student performance is classified into four Achievement levels. The score ranges for a respective achievement level vary by subject area and grade level. These score ranges are indicated within the subject and represent the range of the scores pertaining to each achievement level: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic.

   Summary—Describes what was tested.
3. This section provides a summary of the student's performance by content area as well as a description of the achievement levels attained.

The eMetric report provides additional detail as described below:

4. This section provides the Raw Score and the Maximum Score:

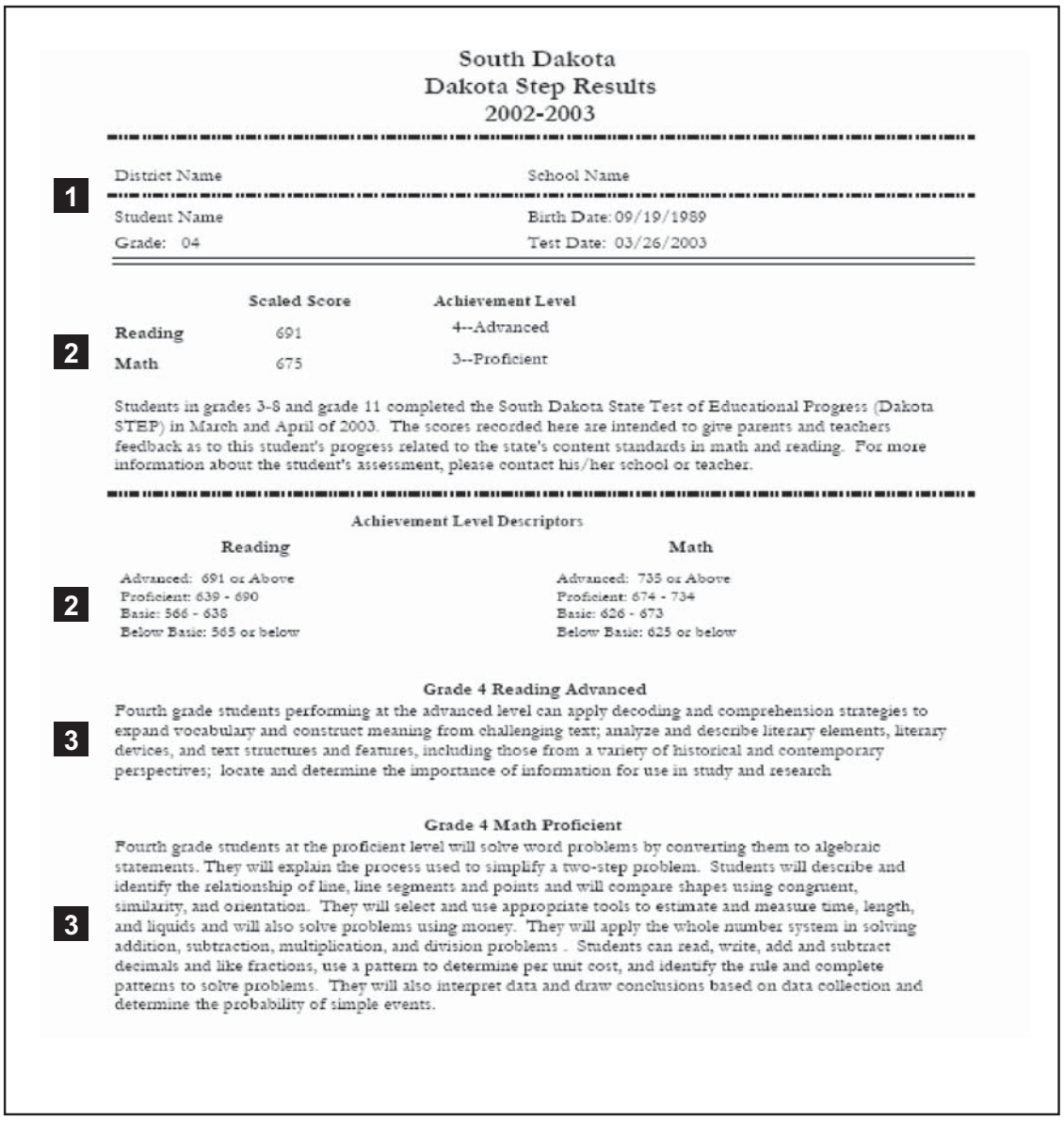
   Raw Score—This is the number of items that the student answered correctly for each content area. Many assessment professionals feel raw scores should not be interpreted in comparing student scores across content areas or across years because the difficulties of the items are not controlled for in these scores.

   Maximum Score—This number reflects the total score that is possible if the student were to answer all questions correctly for each content area.

5. This section provides the content strand and the content indicator along with the raw score and the maximum score at the indicator level.

   Content Strand—These are the strands that are contained within each content area (i.e., in mathematics, algebra, geometry, measurement, number sense, and statistics).

   Content Indicator—These are indicators that are specific goals that are required at each grade level.



South Dakota
Dakota Step Results
2002-2003

1

District Name School Name

Student Name Birth Date: 09/19/1989

Grade: 04 Test Date: 03/26/2003

2

	Scaled Score	Achievement Level
Reading	691	4--Advanced
Math	675	3--Proficient

Students in grades 3-8 and grade 11 completed the South Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (Dakota STEP) in March and April of 2003. The scores recorded here are intended to give parents and teachers feedback as to this student's progress related to the state's content standards in math and reading. For more information about the student's assessment, please contact his/her school or teacher.

Achievement Level Descriptors

2

Reading	Math
Advanced: 691 or Above	Advanced: 735 or Above
Proficient: 639 - 690	Proficient: 674 - 734
Basic: 566 - 638	Basic: 626 - 673
Below Basic: 565 or below	Below Basic: 625 or below

3

Grade 4 Reading Advanced

Fourth grade students performing at the advanced level can apply decoding and comprehension strategies to expand vocabulary and construct meaning from challenging text; analyze and describe literary elements, literary devices, and text structures and features, including those from a variety of historical and contemporary perspectives; locate and determine the importance of information for use in study and research

3

Grade 4 Math Proficient

Fourth grade students at the proficient level will solve word problems by converting them to algebraic statements. They will explain the process used to simplify a two-step problem. Students will describe and identify the relationship of line, line segments and points and will compare shapes using congruent, similarity, and orientation. They will select and use appropriate tools to estimate and measure time, length, and liquids and will also solve problems using money. They will apply the whole number system in solving addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division problems . Students can read, write, add and subtract decimals and like fractions, use a pattern to determine per unit cost, and identify the rule and complete patterns to solve problems. They will also interpret data and draw conclusions based on data collection and determine the probability of simple events.

South Dakota State Test of Educational Progress 2008

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT REPORT

John C. Doe007 **1**

SIMS ID: 063400246
Birthdate: 01/01/1998
Test Date: 2008

Grade: 03
School: Science Elem
District: Cyberland SD

OVERALL RESULTS

John scored at the Proficient level on the Reading test and scored at the Proficient level on the Math test.

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
Reading		X		
Math		X		

2 Students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 completed the Dakota STEP test in the spring of 2008. The test is designed to measure the progress of students on the South Dakota content and achievement standards. This report summarized the results of that assessment. Please contact your local school if you have questions about this information.

MATHEMATICS RESULTS

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
Scale Score Ranges	668 to 793	600 to 667	530 to 599	371 to 529

John's Scale Score: 628
John's Achievement Level: Proficient

3 Third grade students performing at the proficient level will demonstrate linear patterns and number patterns. They will identify special properties of zero and one. Using whole numbers, students will solve equations involving addition and subtraction. They will explain the relationship between repeated addition and multiplication and multiplication and division. Students will select appropriate symbols to compare numbers. They will identify properties of two- and three-dimensional figures. Students will demonstrate similarity and congruence of simple two-dimensional figures. They will identify points, lines, line segments, and rays. Students will identify time before and after the hour within 5 minute intervals. They will select the appropriate units for measurement, solve money problems, and measure length in U.S. Customary. Students will identify U.S. Customary units of length, capacity, weight, and temperature. They will order and compare whole numbers less than ten thousand. Students will find multiples for numbers 2 through 10. They will name and write fractions from visual representation. Students will add and subtract whole numbers up to three digits, know multiplication facts through the tens and multiply two digits by one digit, and round whole numbers to the nearest ten and hundred. Students will answer questions from data represented in graphs. They will describe events that are certain or impossible and complete a given graph.

5	**4** Raw Score	Max Score **4**
TOTAL:	**64**	**84**
Algebra		
Indicator 1: Use procedures to transform algebraic expressions.	6	7
Indicator 2: Use a variety of algebraic concepts and methods to solve equations and inequalities.	6	7
Indicator 3: Interpret and develop mathematical models.	3	7
Indicator 4: Analyze and describe the properties and behaviors of relations, functions, and their inverses.	7	7
Geometry		
Indicator 1: Use deductive and inductive reasoning to recognize and apply properties of geometric figures.	5	7
Indicator 2: Use properties of geometric figures to solve problems from a variety of perspectives.	5	7
Measurement		
Indicator 1: Apply measurement concepts in practical applications.	5	7
Number Sense		
Indicator 1: Use the structural characteristics of a set of real numbers and its various subsets.	4	7
Indicator 2: Apply operations within the set of real numbers.	6	7
Indicator 3: Develop conjectures, predictions, or estimations in the process of problem solving and verify or justify the results.	7	7
Statistics		
Indicator 1: Use statistical models to gather, analyze and display data to draw conclusions.	7	7
Indicator 2: Apply the concepts of probability to predict outcomes and solve problems.	3	7

READING RESULTS

John's Scale Score: 632
John's Achievement Level: Proficient

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
Scale Score Ranges	664 to 805	595 to 663	498 to 594	401 to 497

3

Third grade students performing at the proficient level will be able to use decoding, word recognition skills, and comprehension strategies to develop vocabulary, to increase fluency, and to construct meaning from text. Students will also be able to identify various literary elements, devices, and text structures along with locating and describing text organizational features. Students can gather information for research and other projects.

	4 Raw Score	Max Score 4
TOTAL:	**36**	**56**
Indicator 1		
Standard 1: Use decoding and word recognition skills to develop vocabulary and increase fluency when reading unfamiliar text.	5	7
Standard 2: Use comprehension strategies to read and understand unfamiliar words, phrases, and passages.	3	7
Standard 3: Identify organizational features and their purpose in fiction and informational text.	4	7
Indicator 2		
Standard 1: Locate, describe, and use text structures to expand meaning in a selection.	6	7
Standard 2: Distinguish differences among various literary elements and devices in grade level text.	5	7
Indicator 3		
Standard 1: Respond to ideas and attitudes expressed in literature by making personal connections.	5	7
Indicator 4		
Standard 1: Gather information to research a topic.	5	7
Standard 2: Utilize a set of directions, a model, or diagram in order to carry out a project.	3	7

Using *DSTEP* results for any purpose requires an interpretation of scores. In all cases, it is important to be cautious in the interpretation and use of *DSTEP* scores or any single piece of information about student performance. Particular care should be taken in the interpretation of raw scores. Since these scores are not adjusted for the difficulty of the items in an indicator, raw scores are not on a common scale and cannot be directly compared across indicators. Decisions regarding classroom instruction, curriculum planning, and student placement should be based not only on *DSTEP* results, but also on other relevant information about the school, district, or student.

How Did My Students Do?

Looking at Performance

Test results can give you information about specific areas of strength and weakness in achievement for individuals or groups of students. This in turn can help you set up instructional priorities and assist you in grouping students for instruction. Remember, however, that tests results are a picture of a student's achievement at a single point in time. Test results must be considered in light of information you have gathered about the student from other sources. Such sources include teacher-made tests, classroom performance in both large and small-group activities, informal assessments, teacher observations, and checklists, portfolios, and logs. The following are some general guidelines that will help you review and analyze test results for an individual student or group of students.

Watch for the unusual. In general, test results confirm or extend what an observant teacher already knows about a student. Unexpected patterns of scores, high points, and low points can often direct you to individual or class instructional needs or to areas where more information is needed.

Don't overemphasize small differences—Small differences in a student's scores in different content areas are best treated as random fluctuations.

For large differences always ask "Why?"—Why did one student do better in Mathematics and not so well in Reading? Does he have a special interest in math? Was he absent during a very important time in reading class? In addition to looking at a single student's score across content areas, look at the class as a whole and what their performance was. Once you have posed some questions about a student's test performance or the test performance of a group, look for evidence in classwork, homework, or from other sources that might offer support for why those test results occurred.

Don't expect to discover something new and different about every student—Most students will have scores that fall into a regular pattern. Some will be above average and some below average, without any exceptional differences between their scores in different content areas. However, sometimes you may find that patterns of scores are very different from what you had expected.

Factors Affecting Test Performance

There are many factors that you should keep in mind when looking at test performance. As you examine and interpret students' test results, remember that achievement in school and on the test may be affected by any of the factors listed below:

Student/Home Factors

- The student's general health and physical condition
- The stability of the student's home environment
- The support and/or help the student is able to receive at home
- The student's age relative to other students in the grade
- The ability of the student to get along with others
- The student's school-attendance record
- The student's interest in school
- The student's study and work habits

School Factors

- The appropriateness of the level of instruction for the student
- The amount of time available for instruction
- The expectations set for the student
- The appropriateness of school settings/groupings for the student
- The appropriateness of instructional materials and methods for the student

Using Test Results to Plan for Instruction

This next section will help you use the test results you have received, along with other information, to make decisions about the structure of your instructional program—setting instructional priorities, grouping students for instruction, and monitoring student progress. These are some of the decisions that must be made before specific learning experiences are planned.

Establishing Instructional Priorities—Criteria for establishing instructional priorities may vary from district to district in a state or even from class to class within a school. There are, however, certain factors that are relevant to consider in sequencing instructional standards: curricular goals; curricular and instructional emphasis; curricular sequence; complexity of concepts and/or skills; availability of appropriate materials; and instructional setting or context. The conditions or limitations of an instructional setting or context may dictate that one of these factors weighs more heavily than the others. Keep in mind that the information offered here should be supplemented by knowledge of your specific situation. Individual circumstances and contexts should always play a major role in guiding instructional decisions. One way to identify and track a student's progress is to develop an Instructional Priorities Worksheet; you will capture the following on this worksheet:

- **List the Target Standards**—List 5 to 8 standards that will allow you and your students to focus on the areas of greatest need and will produce more effective results. Remember this is a starting place for instructional decision making. You should consider revising the worksheet as students make progress in one area and other needs take its place in importance.
- **Rank the Standards**—rank the standards on each of the following criteria:
  - **Curricular Goals/Relevance**—You should give a high ranking to the standards that your state or district considers important enough to merit a great deal of instructional time or a great deal of emphasis in instructional materials.
  - **Curricular Sequence**—It is important to consider where in the curricular sequence a standard is introduced and at what point mastery of the standard is usually expected.
  - **Complexity of the Concept/Skill**—Each of the standards listed should be considered in terms of its difficulty or complexity. Generally, the highest rankings should be given to those standards that are either very difficult or very easy.
  - **Availability of Materials**—Standards for which you have suitable instructional material on hand should receive a high ranking in this category. Standards for which you do not have up to date instructional materials should receive the lower rating until you have the updated materials available.
  - **Instructional Context/Setting**—Factors that may affect the advisability of undertaking the instruction of a particular concept or skill include the physical setting for instruction; the political or emotional climate within a group of students; the ways in which students are grouped for instruction; and the availability of funds for special learning experiences.
- **Assign Priorities**—Total the rankings from above to determine which target standard has the highest priority. This implies that when you are ranking the standards you are using equal weighting. In addition, it makes sense to group certain standards together for instructions.

Grouping for Instruction—Many schools use some type of grouping for instruction. Grouping may be by ability, age, achievement, or some other criterion. These decisions should be based on the most complete and reliable information available. The information gathered from the *DSTEP* results, combined with the instructional priority-setting process described previously, can help you make decisions about grouping students together for instruction. Keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Use as many relevant sources of information as possible when assigning students to instructional groups.
- Form the instructional groups in order to achieve a very specific instructional goal or standard; students should not be assigned to groups on the basis of overall achievement or ability.
- Consider alternatives to ability grouping; individualizing materials or assignments in conjunction with whole-group instruction; assigning "learning partners"; establishing peer tutoring; creating small heterogeneous task groups or teams.
- Keep the number of groups to a minimum. The amount of instructional time you can spend with each group is reduced as the number of groups increase.
- Remember that assessment should be an ongoing part of instruction; reassign a student to a different group when the instructional goal is reached.
- Use whole-class instruction and other types of grouping whenever possible if ability grouping is used in the classroom.

Some General Suggestions

Advanced Proficiency Level— you should encourage lively thought and creativity that will stimulate and engage these students. Your concentration should be on challenging these high achievers to stretch even further. Be sure to:

- Honor individual learning styles and needs. The brightest students are often the divergent thinkers.
- Encourage collaboration. Group activities can help these students to consider other perspectives.
- Challenge these students to take responsibility for their own learning. Advanced students are perfectly capable of accepting a role as self-educator, as long as it is a guided role. Ask them to set goals for learning, methods for learning, and evaluation criteria.
- Challenge these students to contribute to other students' learning. Mentoring other students can be extraordinarily beneficial to many brighter students.

Proficient Proficiency Level— will benefit from instructional activities that support on-grade instruction. They are achieving as would be expected for the grade, with some encouragement, their achievement can be increased through focused classroom attention with some useful learning tools. For these students, be sure to:

- Model and teach good questioning behaviors and strategies. Often, it never occurs to these students to ask questions about what they are learning.
- Show your own enthusiasm. Teachers' attitudes can be infectious for students who witness this enthusiasm regularly.
- Show students why something matters. Learning is more interesting and meaningful when they know why something happens instead of simply what happens.
- Show these students how to look for patterns or relationships. New concepts and ideas can be more readily learned if students know how to analyze them or relate them to other things.
- Ask students "What if ...?" to encourage them to hypothesize, to create, etc.
- Show students how to make predictions and how to confirm or revise their predictions. Making predictions can be uncomfortable for students who don't know whether their predictions are correct or what to do if their predictions are wrong.
- Give these students specific strategies to try when something does not make sense. Sometimes simply knowing what to do in a given situation can make the difference between average achievers and high achievers.

Basic Proficiency Level— will benefit with remediation activities that can diminish deficits and help provide a foundation for future improvement. A host of activities are available for remediating performance for low-achieving students. The teacher can make an enormous difference in the progress of these students. Be sure to:

- Use techniques, activities, and materials that strengthen students' interest in learning. More than any other group of students, children achieving low scores need to have their interest and imagination stimulated.
- Show instead of tell. Modeling is far more effective than talking and is much more likely to hold student attention.
- Start and end with the whole. Slower students will need to see the product that is the end goal of a lesson.
- Explain first what is most meaningful or important. Don't burden students with details until you have first emphasized the most salient aspects of a lesson.
- Help make abstract concepts more concrete. Students performing in this group benefit from physical examples, illustrations, models, and demonstrations.

- Show students how to relate what is new to what they already know. Show them similarities or relationships to things they are already familiar with.
- "Think aloud" as you demonstrate. Students learn though processes by modeling yours. You will be giving students guidelines, or a framework, for doing a task.
- Help students recognize when something does not make sense to them. Strategies for recognizing their own lack of understanding can provide a jumping-off point for further instruction.
- Allow students to make mistakes. Students receiving basic scores are often reluctant because they make mistakes so often. Let these students know that mistakes are a common part of learning.

Monitoring Students' Progress

Monitoring the progress of students is an ongoing part of the teaching process. Every teaching opportunity is also a chance to gather information about students' strengths, needs, and misunderstandings. In order to monitor progress, both the teacher and the student must know where the student started out and where the student is headed.

Evaluation of test performance should be a positive experience for students as well. Results should be shared with students in a clear, nonjudgmental way. Whenever possible, students should be allowed to help set the goals for instruction. Once instruction has begun and goals have been set, information from many sources can provide the means for systematically evaluating students' progress toward achieving the goals. Students can also participate in monitoring their own progress toward goals. The monitoring process should be systematic, but it does not need to be complicated or time-consuming. Teacher-made tests, classwork, and homework provide excellent feedback. Keeping samples of students' work can serve as a concrete way to share progress with parents. Observational records allow teachers to gather important information about students' behaviors, attitudes, interests, and other factors that can assist in make instructional decisions. As partners in their own learning, students' attitudes will very likely improve if they are able to see that their efforts are paying off. Active participation by students in the monitoring process encourages them to take responsibility for their own accomplishments. Student checklists, journals, surveys, portfolios, and progress charts work well for self-monitoring in different areas of the curriculum. These evaluation materials can provide evidence of areas of progress as well as evidence of those areas still needing work

A Partnership for Learning

Parents and schools share the responsibility for educating children. Everyone concerned, especially the student, benefits when there is a partnership for learning. Test results are most meaningful when parents have been informed before testing about the reasons for testing, what will be tested, and how test results will be used. When test results are available, it is important to help parents understand the information about their child's test scores.

Parents of a student who did not perform well on the test are often especially concerned. They want to know the reason for these results and what will be done at school to improve their child's performance. The score reports can be utilized to initiate a discussion about instructional programs that may benefit the student. In addition, because the time for teaching specific content and processes varies from school to school, it is important for parents to know whether their child's class has been introduced to the content and processes measured by the *DSTEP*.

Sharing Results with Parents

Once the test has been administered and you have student results, you will want to help parents understand the information about their child's test scores. A parent-teacher conference is the most valuable way to share a student's test results with parents. In such a setting, you will be able to explain and clarify specific statements on the score reports. Many parents have questions such as: How does my child's performance on the test compare with that of other children in this grade? Is my child working up to his or her potential? Are there any areas in which my child's performance was especially high or low? How do my child's scores fit with his or her classroom performance?

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Encouraging Parents to Help

Once parents understand their child's test results, they generally are eager to know how they can best help the child at home. Studies show that parental involvement in almost any form appears to produce a long-term positive effect on student achievement. Parents who are in touch with the school and who help their child at home promote an attitude that encourages the student's success in school. Parent-teacher conferences and notes/telephone calls to parents after test results have been received are all good methods of informing parents about the specific ways can help their children at home

Accommodations—special testing conditions and methods allowed for certain students, primarily those with disabilities or with limited English proficiency

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—set of accountability measures for states, districts, and schools contained in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) covering student achievement, based on each state's academic content and student achievement standards and statewide assessments

Bias—advantage or disadvantage conferred upon groups of students because of certain personal characteristics (such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic region), unrelated to mastery of the content

Blueprints—psychometric recommendations of valid quantities of test questions per content standard to obtain valid test results (http://doe.sd.gov/octa/assessment/dakSTEP/index.asp)

Cognitive Complexity—system used to classify *DSTEP* items according to the complexity of the steps and processes they require students to use (Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking Skills)

Content Domain—the information or skills contained in an area of study. The content areas (or subject areas) assessed on the *DSTEP* are reading, mathematics, and science.

Content Standard—expected outcomes for all students completing each grade level; a statement of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level (http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards)

Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT)—assess how well students perform on specific goals or standards; also referred to as standards-based tests

Cut Score (Cut point)—a score that marks the threshold between two or more levels of performance (e.g., basic, proficient, and advanced) (http://doe.sd.gov/octa/assessment/dakSTEP/cutscores.asp)

***Dakota STEP* (*DSTEP*)**—the South Dakota State Test of Educational Progress

Directions for Administering (DFA)—the directions booklet that accompanies each level of a test; used by the test administrator when giving the test to students

Domain—content area

ESEA—the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*

Field Test Item—a newly created or modified test question that is administered to students for the purpose of analyzing the performance of the item rather than student performance

Individual Education Plan (IEP)—describes special education services provided. Also specifies the testing accommodations a student needs for classroom instruction and assessments.

IDEA—The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires the development of policies and procedures for the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessment and, when necessary to ensure a student's full participation, the provision of testing

Item—any test question or task for which a score point is awarded; a stem or stimuli and responses for which a score or set of scores is to be recorded

Multiple Choice (MC) Items—items that present students with two or more options from which to choose, only one of which is correct; also known as selected response items. Subtests of the *DSTEP* have three to five options depending on the individual subtest.

NCLB—the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*

Operational Items—items that count toward a student's score; "live" items

Performance descriptors—bridge the content standards to assessments of the standards, provide information to teachers and students regarding student progress toward mastery of the standards, and give them specific targets for instruction and learning. The performance descriptors are organized into proficiency levels. These proficiency levels describe how a student at that level would be expected to perform the grade-level standards.

Raw Score—a score that reports the number of points a student earned on each test item, cluster/strand, or subtest. Students earn one raw score point for each correctly answered multiple-choice item. Raw scores are reported as content sub-scores.

Reliability—desired characteristic of a test; achieved when measurement error is minimized

Scaled Score (SS)—a standard score derived from the Number Correct (Raw Score) that indicates performance on all forms and levels of a given test along a single comparable scale. It facilitates conversions to other score types and the study of changes in performance.

Section 504—special classification of students as defined in Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. Testing accommodations are permitted for students who meet the Section 504 criteria.

Validity—desired characteristic of a test; achieved when the test actually measures what it is intended to measure

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