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**2018-19 Report Card released:
English-learners, postsecondary readiness are bright spots**

PIERRE, S.D. – Students whose native language is not English are experiencing increased success in mastering the language, according to the 2018-19 South Dakota Report Card. The number of students considered on track to English language mastery grew from 33 percent in 2017-18 to 45 percent in 2018-19.

“This is great news for one of our quickly growing student populations,” said Secretary of Education Ben Jones. “It means that schools recognize the growing diversity of our communities and are taking steps to support these students in order to facilitate their learning.”

Several factors may be contributing to the increase, including greater awareness among educators about the challenges English-learners face and the strategies needed to make course content understandable. South Dakota also has seen an increase in individuals who have specific training to teach this group of students. The percentage of teachers fully certified to teach English-learners was 81 percent in 2018-19, up from 54 percent five years ago.

According to the Report Card, more students are considered ready for postsecondary education based on their course-taking patterns in high school. The percentage of students considered “coursework ready” jumped from 64 to 68 percent. This includes students who: successfully completed at least one course through the state’s dual credit program; passed an Advanced Placement exam; or successfully completed at least two credits of career and technical education in one subject area.

“Students who take rigorous courses in high school tend to have better success rates at the college level, so we’re pleased to see this indicator growing. The increase also may reflect the state’s ongoing investment in both dual credit and CTE,” Jones said.

Beyond these two highlights, the 2018-19 Report Card features multiple indicators of performance. Many of these indicators remained stable or dropped slightly. Jones is focused on what he refers to as the “opportunity gap,” which is the difference in achievement scores between all students and those students who are economically disadvantaged. “Children growing up with fewer resources start out behind in reading, vocabulary and math. Teachers work on this issue every day, but now is the time for us to look at what reforms we can make, or supports we can put in place, that can close this gap,” he said.

Jones indicated that his agency is working with stakeholders to develop a plan to address achievement among this population of students.

The 2018-19 Report Card is available at sdschools.sd.gov. It includes Report Cards for public schools across the state.