



## **Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (Dakota STEP) and End-of-Course Examinations**

### **Understanding the Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (Dakota STEP) and End-of-Course Examinations**

Throughout the school years, students in South Dakota must participate in statewide standardized testing. The results from these assessments are used to strengthen the educational process and make sure that students are being taught to and reaching proficiency levels in core subjects.

Students begin taking standardized assessments in grade 3. They continue to test until grade 8 and then again during high school. During grades 3-8, the State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) assessments are conducted in Reading and Mathematics. Students in grades 5, 8 and 11 take the State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) in Science. In grades 5, 7 and 10 students also take a computer-based assessment in Writing.

The State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) assessments are aligned to the academic content standards. The curricular framework provides an overview of how each subject is organized so that teachers may effectively deliver the content of the subject area. Specific skills within each subject are enumerated, and these skills are sought for on the assessments. The skills and knowledge designed for delivery through the academic content standards are meant to prepare students for college and career readiness.

In high school, students take End-of-Course Examinations in 12 subject areas and students in grade 11 take a more rigorous version of the State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) assessment. The End-of-Course Examinations are designed for the following high school courses: Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology, Physical Science, Physics, World History, US History, Chemistry, Spanish I, Government, and Geography.

The End-of-Course Examinations are more specifically aligned to the specific content of the course; the content organization and standards are also found in the curricular framework. This alignment of curriculum to assessment helps students and teachers see areas where increased instruction is necessary, and it allows all stakeholders in the educational process to monitor school's progress at educating their students to the standards.

### **Format of the Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (Dakota STEP) and End-of-Course Examinations**

The State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) assessments that are given to students in grades 3-8 and 11 are all multiple-choice examinations. The tests are given over a time period of 4.5 to 6.75 hours, the time runs longer for older students. These assessments are scheduled to be given in the Spring, and the districts will provide detailed scheduling information.

By state law, all students are also required to take a writing assessment. South Dakota uses an online formative assessment that provides instant feedback and results for students and teachers. Students in grades 5, 7 and 10 take this computer-based assessment.

The End-of-Course Examinations are all 60 questions long and given in a computer-based format (except for students who require a paper-and-pencil format). Individual school districts are allowed to create their own End-of-Course Examinations and so the format of questions may differ ever so slightly throughout the state. The subjects covered by these examinations

are Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology, Physical Science, Physics, World History, US History, Chemistry, Spanish I, Government, and Geography.

The assessments are given at the end of the semester or year, based on the course. Students will be given the amount of time that they need to finish these assessments; additionally students who require testing accommodations per an Individualized Education Plan will receive them. There is also an alternate assessment designed for students with more severe disabilities.

### **Taking the Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (Dakota STEP) and End-of-Course Examinations**

The Dakota State Test of Educational Progress (STEP) assessments are aligned to the frameworks of the statewide curriculum and the Common Core Standards. The Common Core Standards oversee the subjects of math and English/Language Arts; they have been adopted by many states and are designed to prepare students for college and career readiness.

Understanding the content that students are required to know will help prior to the assessment in preparing to perform proficiently. Scores from the assessments will also provide information about in which content areas a student needs to increase their preparedness.

The Common Core Standards are designed to teach students in Mathematics about number sense, algebra, geometry, measurement and statistics/probability. In English Language Arts, students will learn about reading, writing, listening, viewing and speaking. These skills will bring about problem solving, reasoning, critical thinking, evaluative and analytic skills.

Students receive scores on a scale and as a proficiency level. There are four proficiency levels: Advanced, Proficient, Basic and Below Basic. Proficiency levels are determined by the scale score a student receives. A scale score is a translated version of the raw score. The raw score represents the number of correct answers out of total questions; the scale factors in the difficulty level of those questions. The “cut scores” represents the number where proficiency levels raise to the next level and so indicates if a student scores high or low in the proficiency level.

### **Get Your Child Ready for South Dakota State Testing**

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