

Parents' Guide to the Dakota STEP Science

The Dakota State Test of Educational Progress Science (Dakota STEP) is South Dakota's annual statewide assessment of student progress, administered to students in grades 5, 8, and 11 each spring in the area of Science. The Dakota STEP Science is included in the assessment system used in South Dakota as required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

WHAT IS THE DAKOTA STEP SCIENCE?

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

WHY WAS THE DAKOTA STEP SCIENCE DEVELOPED?

The Dakota STEP Science was developed to meet the science requirement of NCLB. 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
- 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 DAKOTA STEP SCIENCE ADMINISTERED?

Dakota STEP Science testing takes place in the spring of each school year. The total time required for the administration of the tests varies by grade and takes between 1.5 and 2 hours. Testing may be spread out over several days, and school districts set their own testing schedules.

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 Science. This report will provide your child's scale scores, achievement level and achievement level definitions in science.

The scale is different at each grade level. There are four levels of student achievement based on scale scores:

- **Advanced** – A student performing at this level exceeds expectations. 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 this level meets expectations. 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 this level performs below expectations. 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 at this 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 Science results provide one piece of information about your child's achievement. To obtain a more complete picture, daily class work, and other learning activities should be considered.