

A BIG WIN FOR SOUTH DAKOTA STUDENTS



The South Dakota Common Core

In 2013, nearly three-quarters of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency on the state assessment, the South Dakota Test of Educational Progress (STEP). However, on the 2013 Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), less than half of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. Clearly, there was a concerning disconnect between the STEP results and the results from the national test.

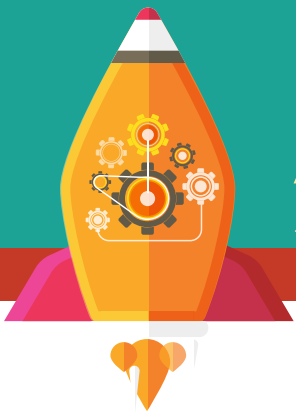
This disconnect impacted older students, as well. In 2012, although the state's on-time high school graduation rate was 83%, 27% of those graduates who entered state universities had to take a remedial class because they lacked the skills for college-level work. The state's bar was set too low—although students were graduating high school and succeeding on the state assessments, they were not prepared for college and careers. To address this problem, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in 2010 in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure that students were learning the skills most essential for college and the workforce.

The previous state standards did not provide students with the skills they needed for successful futures. According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the ELA standards were vague and missing as much as half of the most essential content. The math standards were well organized, but did not appropriately prioritize arithmetic, and although the early grades' content was thorough, the high school standards were missing critical elements of high-quality standards. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, South Dakota's standards received a C in rigor.

With the adoption of higher standards, South Dakota is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 63% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 44% of adults currently have such a credential, resulting in a 19% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.

South Dakota's Proficiency Performance on the 2013 Nation's Report Card and STEP

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
STEP	37%	75%	74%	72%
NAEP	40%	32%	38%	36%



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across South Dakota have been hard at work preparing for the standards since their adoption. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across South Dakota receive a high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two testing options aligned to the higher standards: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for

College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two testing systems were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including South Dakota, where 70,560 students in 150 public schools participated in the Smarter Balanced field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

South Dakota is a governing member of the Smarter Balanced consortium. These tests will replace the STEP tests in grades 3–8 and 11 in math and ELA in spring 2015. Students will be required to apply their knowledge through longer writing and performance tasks, which are required at every grade level. Test questions will require students to apply an array of research, writing, and problem solving skills so that assessment results will provide a more meaningful picture of exactly which skills students have mastered. In addition, teachers will have access to a Digital Learning Library containing resources for in-class formative assessments that provide immediate feedback to help teachers improve instruction. Interim assessments, which can be given in the middle of the year, are also available. These computer-based tests mirror the summative assessments and serve as academic checkups to ensure that students are on track to be successful on the end-of-year tests.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how South Dakota students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced tests because they meet so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career

readiness and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Includes formative or interim assessments that act as academic checkups to ensure students are keeping pace.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.

3. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. The Smarter Balanced assessments will replace the STEP tests in English language arts and math in grades 3–8 and 11.



The South Dakota Common Core:

- Promote deeper understanding of the key concepts students need to succeed as independent thinkers.
- Improve students' ability to apply knowledge to real-world situations.
- Promote instruction that places more emphasis on understanding and application, as opposed to memorization and test-taking.

Better Assessments:

- Give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

Smarter Balanced:

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-based assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across South Dakota receive a high-quality education.

5. Will test scores impact teachers?

- South Dakota's Commission on Teaching and Learning has developed a model system for teacher evaluation that includes student growth as measured by student learning objectives, or SLOs. These SLOs can include the change in student achievement on the state assessment between two or more points in time. This is just one of many measures used in a teacher's evaluation.
- Districts are permitted to use the 2014–15 school year as a time to plan and train for the new teacher evaluation model. During this transition to the new model, districts can use their own alternative evaluation as long as it receives approval from the South Dakota Department of Education.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no testing requirements for graduation. Students in 3rd grade must be proficient on the state reading assessment to be promoted to 4th grade.

7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and tests?

- In November 2014, the South Dakota Department of Education released online training modules on the assessments. Teachers administering the Smarter Balanced assessments are required to watch all modules and pass an online training test.

8. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, South Dakota is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state will not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information.
- Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

9. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Fifty-six South Dakota teachers participated in the development of resources for the Digital Learning Library. Thirty-two South Dakota teachers reviewed the content and resources in the library.

10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- While it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

11. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.commoncore.sd.gov
- www.doe.sd.gov/Assessment
- www.BusinessForCore.org