Interpreting the Report Card: What Does it All Mean?

The Report Card, released annually, is intended to share important information about the state's public schools. It encompasses a variety of indicators that contribute to school performance. But what are those measures, and how can you use the information to draw conclusions about South Dakota's public schools? The below is intended as a guide to help navigate some of the more commonly examined measures in the report card.

Who Counts?

Q1: Which students are reflected in the report card?

A1: Students who attend South Dakota's public school districts are reflected in the report card.

Q2: Are all public school students reflected in the measures?

A2: Generally speaking at the elementary and middle school levels, only students who attended a school for the majority of the school year (October 1 through May 1, with a gap of no more than 15 consecutive days) are reflected in the results on the report card.

Q3: Why not count all students?

A3: The report card is designed both to report to the public how schools are performing, as well as an accountability measure. To hold a school or a district accountable for how well it is performing, it is only fair to reflect the performance of students who have benefited from the education at that school for most of a school year.

Assessment Scores

Q1: I hear a lot about proficiency and whether or not students are proficient. What does that mean in the context of the report card?

A1: Public school students in grades 3-8, and 11, annually take the South Dakota State Assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics, with some of those students also taking Science. The assessments measure students' performance on college- and career-aligned content standards and evaluate higher-order skills through performance tasks. A student's score is based on their unique performance.

South Dakota has set four performance levels – Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. While the Proficient and Advanced levels are combined to set the percentage of students considered "proficient," below is a more in-depth explanation of what each level means:

Achievement Level	Description	Next Steps
Advanced	Students consistently demonstrate advanced grade-level knowledge and skills with deep understanding and a full range of complexity.	Engaging in activities like challenging projects and problem-solving tasks that encourage creative thinking and deeper application of their knowledge and skills.

Proficient	Students consistently demonstrate proficient grade-level knowledge and skills with a broad range of complexity.	Opportunities that build on their strengths, such as enrichment activities, while also receiving additional support in areas where they are still developing
Basic	Students demonstrate foundational grade-level knowledge and skills with a limited range of complexity.	The identification of their strengths and areas for growth, along with tailored instructional support to help them make meaningful progress.
Below Basic	Students do not consistently demonstrate grade-level knowledge and skills.	Focused time and personalized supports to strengthen essential grade-level skills and accelerate their learning journey.

Adapted from: Smarter Balanced Assessments: What Do the Scores Mean and Next Steps

Q2: Can a student's level change from year to year?

A2: Yes! A student's test score is based on what knowledge and skills they demonstrated on the assessment at that point in time.

Q3: How does the report card's measurement of growth factor in assessment scores?

A3: Alongside Student Performance, the report card also displays Student Progress. This is a measurement of growth for students with two consecutive years of South Dakota State Assessment scores – it compares whether students improve year-to-year compared to their statewide peers.

Q4: How is growth calculated?

A4: Students are grouped into a cohort of peers with similar performance to their own. Within their peer group, statistical modeling is used to determine whether they fall into one of four categories:

- Keeping Up: students who are currently proficient (Level 3 or 4) and who are meeting growth targets;
- Not Keeping Up: students who are no longer proficient and are not meeting growth targets;
- Catching Up: students who are proficient or meeting growth targets; or
- Not Catching Up: students who are not proficient and not meeting growth targets.

Graduation

Q1: What does "on-time" graduation mean?

A1: The "on-time" graduation measure counts students who graduated within four years of entering the 9th grade – the expected amount of time to complete high school.

Q2: What's the difference between On-Time Graduation and High School Completion?

A2: Completing high school in four years is not a path every student can achieve. That said, getting that high school credential is still valuable and worthy of celebration. High School Completion measures students who graduate with a regular high school diploma (no matter how long that takes) or work with their teachers at the school to achieve a high school equivalency credential (the GED).

College and Career Readiness

Q1: Why does the DOE measure college and career readiness?

A1: The aim of K-12 public education in South Dakota is to prepare students to successfully navigate to a path after graduation, be that more education, directly into the workforce, the military, or any number of other paths. This measure represents whether students have certain key skills to do that.

Q2: What all goes into this indicator?

A2: This indicator is comprised of two parts: assessment readiness and coursework readiness. Students are assessment ready if they meet the benchmark on one of the assessment options (South Dakota Assessments, ACT, or Accuplacer) for both ELA and math OR earn a silver or higher NCRC certificate. Students are coursework ready if they earn one or more High School Graduation Advanced Endorsements.

Other Measures

Q1: What is English Learner Progress?

A1: This is an important measure of how well public schools are doing in helping students master the English language within five years. Students who are English Learners are not native English speakers and may be new to the country.

Q2: What is measured in the attendance indicators?

A2: The attendance indicator is a percent of public school students who attended at least 90 percent of school days. Chronic absenteeism, which is a separate indicator, measures the percent of students who *missed* more than 10% of enrolled days (for students who have attended more than 10 days). This is an important measure because research has demonstrated that students missing more than 10% of school days increases drop-out rates and hurts student grades. Find out more about attendance at the DOE's attendance page.

Q3: Why is Career and Tech Ed on the report card?

A3: Career and technical education programs play a vital role in preparing students for their future careers. Therefore, the Career and Tech Ed part of the report card shares information related to career and technical education (CTE) provided by districts at the high school level. Within this section, you can learn which types of career courses are provided by districts, how many students are taking the courses, and the district's performance on a variety of performance indicators. The performance indicators are based on CTE concentrators (students who have taken two or more courses within a specific career field) and highlights information such as CTE concentrator graduation rates, completion of a work-based learning course, post-high school plans, and more!