

Education under scrutiny: Poor scores on basic skills test cited

 web.archive.org/web/20160118092149/http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705308724/Education-under-scrutiny-Poor-scores-on-basic-skills-test-cited.html
Amy K. Stewart

June 6,
2009

Summary

Poor math scores on the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test is just one more reason why the state should be doing Singapore math, said Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper.



Poor math scores on the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test is just one more reason why the state should be doing Singapore math, said Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper.

"I believe we need to give incentives for schools and school districts to improve math instruction," Stephenson told the Deseret News, shortly after the State Office of Education announced UBSCT scores Friday.

Stephenson chaired the task force that resulted in legislation to require the state education office to create the test.

A total 82 percent of the class of 2009 passed all three segments of the test. Students must pass the test before graduation or face receiving a diploma which indicates they did not pass the exam. Starting in February of their sophomore year, students have five chances to pass all three categories of the test: reading, writing and math.

Statewide, 92 percent of students passed in reading; 89 percent passed in writing; and 85 percent passed in math.

Stephenson said he or another lawmaker will resurrect a Singapore math bill, which didn't make it through the 2009 legislative session. The bill would have allowed a few schools to apply for a grant to launch Singapore math, a method in which students learn mastery of core concepts and then move on to solving problems by applying that knowledge. The curriculum is extremely visual and involves word problems.

In southeast Asia's Singapore, students consistently test No. 1 internationally in math.

There were definitely "significant roadblocks" in the state test scores due to lack of math skills, said John Jesse, director of assessment for the state office of education. Nearly 6 percent of the students didn't pass the test fell short because of their inability to clear the math segment.

"The message is clear," he said.

Regarding the overall 82 percent of students passing the test, Jesse said, "it seems good and it is good — unless your student, or you, are one of the 18 percent that didn't pass."

The number is up 80 percent from the class of 2008.

Garfield School District had a 100 percent pass rate this year, due to continuous student preparation in language arts and math, starting in the seventh grade, since 2005.

"We're ecstatic. The students worked hard to get there," Vicki Ahlstrom told the Deseret News on Friday. She is a Garfield district testing coordinator. The district has an enrollment of 911 students, with 99 seniors.

Statewide, the class of 2010 is already off to a great start with the test. A total of 78 percent have already passed all three categories of the test. A total of 66 percent of the class of 2011 have passed all of the exam.

Test data revealed differences in scores due to demographics.

Eighty percent of female students passed the test, while 76 percent of male students passed. Boys and girls did about the same on math, with girls scoring less than a percentage point higher. Female students scored 4 percent higher than male students in reading, and 9 percent higher than boys in writing.

A total 82 percent of Asian students passed the test, while 49 percent of Hispanic students passed. A total of 83 percent of Caucasian students passed.

For more information, go to www.schools.utah.gov/PR/UBSCT_2009.pdf.

E-Mail: astewart@desnews.com