



Wahpe Woyaka pi

(Talking Leaf)

South Dakota Council Teachers of Mathematics Newsletter

Presidential Ponderings

After attending the Board of Education hearing, it was clear to me that the SD Dept of Education wants K – 12 Mathematics standards that have “clear, simple language.” (Mercer, 2025, par. 31) But my question is: at what cost?

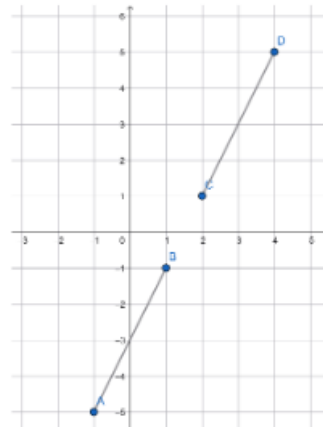
I hope that the SD Dept of Education realizes that all K – 12 math teachers take several math courses. If they attend a SD Board of Regents school, elementary teachers will take at least three math courses, one general education requirement and two courses specialized in elementary math content. In addition, they take a Methods course on how to teach mathematics. Most middle school and high school math teachers are mathematics majors so they take a lot of mathematics courses. It is the responsibility of higher education faculty to train preservice teachers on reading and understanding content standards. If we are doing our jobs, then the language in the standards doesn’t need to be simplified.

Here is a standard from the proposed SD K – 12 Math Standards, “**Understand a trapezoid to be a flat shape with four sides, where at least one pair of sides go the same direction (parallel).**” Instead of saying “a flat shape,” one should say that it is two-dimensional. I also find it interesting that the SD Dept of Education has taken an “inclusive” view of trapezoids. In the current SD standards, a trapezoid is defined as a quadrilateral with exactly one pair of parallel sides, or what some call the “exclusive” definition. If you don’t know the difference, you haven’t been watching math social media, where they even have t-shirts that you can buy. With the inclusive definition in the proposed standards, parallelograms are also trapezoids. While I use this definition in my college geometry course, I am not sure I would use it with first graders. Yes--that standard is a **first-grade standard** in the proposed standards; whereas in the current standards, students would encounter the exclusive definition of a trapezoid in fifth grade.

Now focusing on the last part of the standard, “at least one pair of sides go the same direction (parallel).” Does going in the same direction actually mean parallel? Why not just use the word parallel instead of putting it in parentheses? In the picture at right, do the segments go in the same direction? Yes, they do, and because they lie on the same line they aren’t parallel.

This standard is an example of an attempt to simplify the language, which actually renders a definition inappropriate for the grade level and mathematically incorrect.

Here is a 5th grade standard from the fractions section in the proposed standards, “**Add and subtract fractions, unlike fractions, mixed numbers, and improper fractions.**” What are “unlike fractions”? The current SD standard that seems to correspond to this standard is “Add and subtract fractions with unlike denominators (including mixed numbers) by...” So, it seems like they removed the “math jargon” of the denominator. You cannot just remove or replace words from standards without losing meaning.



Fall 2025-2026

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Calendar Reminders

SD STEM Ed Conference Speaker Proposal Deadline	Oct. 28
Public Comments on Proposed Standards for November 10th Hearing	Nov. 4 (9 AM)
SD STEM Ed Early Bird Registration	Dec. 1

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Presidential Ponderings (*continued*)

“Broadly, *academic language* refers to the language used in school to acquire new or deeper understanding of the content and to communicate that understanding to others.” (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, p. 2)

In mathematics, language is crucial because students need to understand definitions and correct terminology to communicate mathematically. Thus, teachers need to use mathematical terminology in the classroom so students can acquire the language. This is especially true when there are English Language Learners in that classroom. All teachers want their students to know the language for standardized assessments, so it is essential to use proper language throughout their teaching and assessment.

While I am thankful that the SD Dept of Education is adding the Mathematical Practices back into the proposed standards, I think they also need to realize that the “academic language” in mathematics standards is very important. It is hard to simplify without losing mathematical meaning and context. I am confident that veteran teachers can read the proposed standards and know what they need to teach, but what about new teachers? We train these new teachers using mathematical language because it is necessary to understand the content; therefore, this “simple language” won’t be as meaningful or helpful to them.

Dr. Graves admitted that they liked the Arkansas and Archimedes standards because the language is simpler. What he didn’t mention is that for each three grades of Arkansas math standards, there is a separate document, [3 – 5 Math Standards Resource Guide](#), to help teachers teach the content. The one that is linked above is 70 pages—so while their standards look simpler, they didn’t “take all the meat off the bones” because there is too much, they just moved the “meat” to a separate document. The current SD standards have everything in one document, which is easier for teachers.

References:

Gottlieb, M. & Ernst-Slavit, G. (2013). Academic language in diverse classrooms: Mathematics, grades 3 – 5. Corwin.

Mercer, B. (2025, October 15). State DOE gets pushback on math, health standards. Keloland News. <https://www.keloland.com/news/capitol-news-bureau/state-doe-gets-pushback-on-math-health-standards/>

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Elementary Highlights

Show me your fingers!

Do you know the multiplication trick for 9's using your fingers? Do you tap your fingers when adding on? The power of using fingers in math has mixed reviews. Some teachers feel students should not use their fingers to count and should just memorize facts. When I taught 2nd grade, I would often have students hiding their fingers under the desk, trying to count them. When asked if they were using their fingers, they would give that look of panic and fear. I always made a point to tell them it is OK to use their fingers and that they were a great tool to help them learn! I told them that unless something crazy happened, they would always have a great tool and could use their fingers. Once they realized they could use them, the panic only set in when they ran out of fingers and would ask if they could use my fingers. This led to teaching different strategies and how we could solve without using fingers.

Now that I teach preschool and junior kindergarten, I see fingers as an even better tool for learning. One hand is a natural benchmark of 5, and two hands show the 10 benchmark. This is great for when you ask kids to show you 7 fingers. You can start at 5 and count 2 more. I also use fingers as a number sense activity for these young learners. They can show me 6 fingers with 5 on one hand and one more, but then I show them 3 fingers on each hand, and some kids don't think it is 6. Showing 4 and 2 also surprises them. It is a great way to show their number fluency and really create a base for addition in a very easy way at a young age. Hopefully, when students are using their fingers in math, you see it as a learning tool!

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"...I see fingers as an even better tool for learning."

Let's make our social media presence heard, SD Math Teachers!
You can follow SDCTM on the following social media platforms:



Instagram: SDCTM_Math



Facebook: South Dakota Teachers of Mathematics



X (Twitter): @SouthDakotaCTM



Be sure to watch for updates on all platforms!



Higher Ed Viewpoint

Professional Development (PD) plays a vital role in helping teachers stay up to date with the latest research-based instructional practices while also providing valuable opportunities to collaborate and learn from master teachers across the state. Continuing education is so crucial that the state requires teachers to complete six education-related credits over five years. According to the NCTM Position Statement on *Changing the Professional Culture of Teaching Mathematics*, "Teachers must actively engage in collective investigations of their teaching practices to foster continuous growth and improvement. These investigations allow educators to examine critically their instructional methods, collaborate with peers, and refine strategies to better meet the diverse needs of their students. This collaboration can take the form of professional learning communities, peer observations, and joint problem-solving sessions, all aimed at improving mathematical understandings." According to the National Education Association, "The more professional development teachers get, the more likely students are to succeed."



"Professional development plays a vital role in helping teachers stay up to date with the latest research-based instructional practices..."

In the past, the SD Department of Education provided Title II money in the form of grants to SD Colleges and Universities to provide ongoing professional development for K-12 teachers. However, these grants have not been available since 2017, and there has been no math-specific PD since Math Circles ended in 2022. So, where can SD teachers turn for PD on mathematics content?



The South Dakota STEM Ed Conference, held each February in Huron, offers teachers a valuable opportunity to deepen their understanding of mathematics content through sessions led by skilled educators from across the state and experts from around the nation. School districts must allow teachers to participate in these experiences, providing money for substitutes and other forms of financial support.

In addition to the annual SD STEM Ed conference, the SDCTM offers a Summer Symposium for teachers. This past July, the symposium entitled "Building Thinking Classrooms: The Next Steps" provided 41 teachers with a chance to learn more about how to implement this groundbreaking strategy in their classes.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has an annual conference each fall and one or two spring conferences. The fall conference this year was held in Atlanta, Georgia, in October, and the spring conferences are in Indianapolis, IN, in February and in New Orleans in March. These provide another excellent resource for teachers to learn from professionals throughout the US. However, these conferences may not be an option for teachers in SD due to distance and cost.



CAMSE (Center for the Advancement of Math and Science Education) also offers Professional Development workshops for K-12 teachers. According to the Black Hills State University website, "The Center for the Advancement of Math and Science Education (CAMSE)'s mission is to promote effective and meaningful teaching and learning of science and mathematics at all levels." They had several offerings this past summer.

(Continued page 5)



Higher Ed Viewpoint (*continued*)

Finally, individual school districts may provide these opportunities. In the summer of 2021, Dr. Sharon Vestal and I were tasked with delivering PD to the Chamberlain middle school and high school teachers related to content from the SD Mathematics Standards.

The Board of Education has proposed new Mathematics Standards for South Dakota teachers to simplify the language. However, in simplifying, are we losing mathematical accuracy and depth? Instead of simplifying the standards, could we offer teachers opportunities to learn from one another about the standards' meaning and how to integrate them into our K-12 curriculum? Teachers want to do what is best for their students and provide accurate content with the depth and precision necessary for whatever the students plan to do in the future. To accomplish this, they need the precise language and explanations provided in detailed standards.

We must consider how to provide mathematics teachers with resources to help them understand the standards and learn about the latest research on effective instructional practices.

References:

NCTM Position Statements <https://www.nctm.org/Standards-and-Positions/NCTM-Position-Statements>

neaToday <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/why-professional-development-matters>

CAMSE <https://bhsu.edu/about/centers/camse/index.html>

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Proposed K-12 Math Standards **Current K-12 Math Standards**

Voice your concerns & make suggestions
about the proposed
SD K-12 Math Standards
here!

SD Board of Education Hearing Schedule
November 10, Sioux Falls Ramkota, 9 AM
February 23, Pierre, TBD, 9 AM
May 4, Rapid City, TBD, 9AM



Leadership Perspectives

South Dakota Proposed K-12 Math Standards, Where Did They Come From?

The South Dakota Department of Education started the math standard review process in the 2024-2025 school year. Anyone could apply to be a part of the Standard Review Committee, which was slated to meet this past summer in June of 2025. While the SD DOE ultimately decided not to take any applicants and canceled that meeting, they met with a small group of handpicked educators at the end of July. These educators were given standards to look at from a variety of sources and provided feedback. The SD DOE then crafted the Proposed Math Standards and posted them this fall, September 2025.

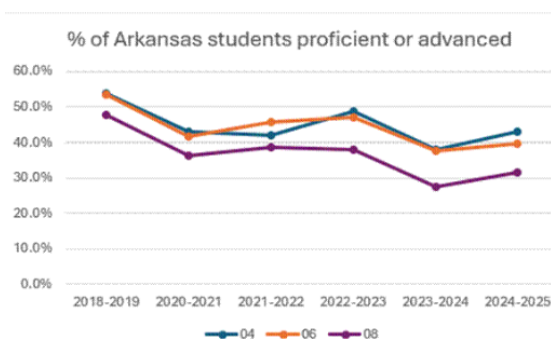


Currently, the standards are in the feedback cycle. Already, one public hearing has been held in Aberdeen on October 15th. SDCTM President, Sharon Vestal, and Vice President, Susan Gilkerson, testified at this hearing along with others, and 11 educators left public comments through the online form. As the three remaining public hearings approach, it is important for everyone to consider the proposed standards and give feedback.

According to the SD DOE, the proposed standards are “designed to ensure the state’s mathematics education is rigorous, relevant, and responsive to the needs of all learners.” As part of this process, the committee members “examined standards from other states and organizations, including Arkansas, North Dakota, South Carolina, and the Archimedes standards.” Let’s unpack that.

The Arkansas Math Standards underwent a similar rewriting and were implemented in 2023. Considering the standardized testing data from Arkansas (Fig. 1), there is a clear change from the 2022-2023 school year to the 2023-2024 school year. It is important to note that they also changed their standardized test from the ACT Aspire to using ATLAS (comparable to the Smarter Balance testing used in South Dakota). It is easy to say, as Dr. Graves

(SD Secretary of Education) shared, that “The results of that change haven’t appeared. We don’t know what that’s going to result in.” Even if that is true, one might argue that we shouldn’t use them as inspiration for our rewrite if it is uncertain if the rewrite had a positive effect on student learning. One major difference from the current SD Math Standards is that the Arkansas standards include specific courses past Algebra II. These courses include Algebra III, Technical Math, Quantitative Reasoning, Statistics, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, and Critical Algebra I.



“...it is important for everyone to consider the proposed standards and give feedback.”

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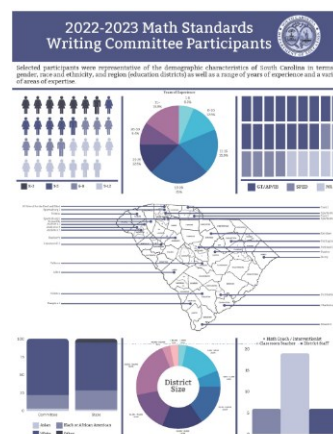


Leadership Perspectives (*continued*)

The North Dakota and South Carolina standards have some interesting differences from the current SD Math Standards. For example, North Dakota has highlighted 3 “Math Attributes” that summarize the Mathematical Practices they have used in the past. These attributes are Problem-Solving, Connections, and Reasoning and Proof. They then highlight these Math Attributes at each grade level (Fig. 2). This could be the inspiration behind the goal of “embedding” the Standards for Mathematical Practices in the proposed SD Math Standards. They also include a page in their standards on how to read the document, a column for clarification of many of the standards throughout the document, and occasionally have an assessment boundary (i.e., what the highest level of the problem on a test would be). While the ND Standards don’t include specific courses beyond Algebra II, they do include (+) standards that could be used in 4th-year courses.

Math Attributes (MA)		
Learners will practice and demonstrate broad, transferable, and enduring skills necessary for advancement through participation in various relevant learning experiences.		
Problem-Solving (P)	Connections (C)	Reasoning and Proof (R)
Analyze, evaluate, critique, and adapt approaches and solutions when solving novel situations.	Create connections within and across concepts, using supporting evidence to interpret how they originate, extend, and relate to other learning, ideas, and life experiences.	Reason logically, citing relevant evidence to explain and critique what they see, think, and conclude through exploration, generalization, and validation.
K-2.MA.P Learners can identify and use strategies to problem-solve situations and determine an appropriate solution.	K-2.MA.C Learners can make connections and demonstrate relationships using words, pictures, or symbols.	K-2.MA.R Learners can use prior knowledge and experiences to explain their thinking.
3-5.MA.P Learners can develop and carry out a logical plan to problem-solve situations, reflect on the reasonableness of solutions, and explore alternate strategies with guidance.	3-5.MA.C Learners can make connections and summarize related ideas using supporting evidence.	3-5.MA.R Learners can reason logically based on experience and knowledge, citing evidence to support their reasoning and conclusions.
6-8.MA.P Learners can analyze information and formulate a flexible, systematic plan to problem-solve authentic situations and reflect on the reasonableness of the solution, making revisions when necessary.	6-8.MA.C Learners can create connections within and across concepts and provide examples of how they relate to other learning and ideas using supporting evidence.	6-8.MA.R Learners can reason logically, citing evidence to evaluate and explain what they see, think, and conclude through exploration and justification.
9-12.MA.P Learners can analyze, evaluate, critique, and adapt approaches and solutions when problem-solving in novel situations.	9-12.MA.C Learners can create connections within and across concepts, using supporting evidence to interpret how they originate, extend, and relate to other learning, ideas, and life experiences.	9-12.MA.R Learners can reason logically, citing evidence to critique and explain what they see, think, and conclude through exploration, generalization, and validation.
Lifelong MA.P Learners can integrate their cumulative knowledge and life experiences to discern and prioritize information in authentic situations, consider and apply alternative methods of resolution, and evaluate the relevance, efficacy, and accuracy of solutions.	Lifelong MA.C Learners can apply connections within and across generalizations within and across concepts to execute effective decision-making or generate new ideas.	Lifelong MA.R Learners can reason logically to discern the validity of information and synthesize it to formulate, investigate, and critique claims and evidence.

The South Carolina Math Standards interestingly include more courses than the current or proposed SD Math Standards. Of note, they include a Seventh & Eighth Grade Compacted Math Standards (presumably for students on the accelerated pathway), Pre-Calculus and Calculus Standards, and Reasoning in Mathematics (presumably for an alternate third- or fourth-year math credit). In the preamble, they considered a breakdown of who was a part of their writing committee to illustrate that it was a representative group from their state (Fig. 3). Considering the SD review committee was made up of 19 educators, which included only one instructional coach from Sioux Falls, and no educators from Rapid City, it would be interesting to see this demographic breakdown for the SD Math Standards Review Committee.



The Archimedes Standards are perhaps the most controversial standards the SD DOE had the Revision Committee consider. These standards were spearheaded by Dr. Jonathan Gregg. Jonathan Gregg is from Hillsdale College and is a member of the National Association of Scholars and the Freedom in Education coalition. One might recognize this name from the Social Studies standards revisions that went into effect this school year (2025-2026). Interestingly, in the preamble of the Archimedes Standards, it is said, “[standards] ... they can also become overly relaxed, emphasizing equity to the point that they compromise the very achievement they are supposed to encourage.” It has been said that these proposed math standards seem less rigorous than the current standards, perhaps falling into this fallacy.

The Archimedes standards have seven characteristics: Lucidity, Practicality, Content-Rich Rigor, Democratic Accessibility, Depoliticized, Research-Based Practices, and Accessibility for Parents. A quote from Lucidity is: “Other standards confuse teachers and administrators, to say nothing of parents and students, with vague and incoherent language that relies on educational jargon and entangles dissimilar mathematical concepts.” It goes on to describe how including methods and strategies as part of the standards is doing a disservice to all stakeholders. When in conversation with other educators, the opposite is often said to be true- having strategies and methods is a support to let educators know how to teach the standard. To hear more about reducing mathematical language, see President Sharon Vestal’s article in this quarter’s newsletter.



Leadership Perspectives (*continued*)

Throughout the preamble, the Archimedes Standards demonstrate how their standards compare to the Common Core State Standards. Consider one such comparison, given by the authors:

Common Core: 2.MD.B.5. Use addition and subtraction within 100 to solve word problems involving lengths that are given in the same units, e.g., by using drawings (such as drawings of rulers) and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.

Archimedes: 7.2 Measure length using inches, feet, centimeters, and meters
The Archimedes Standards argue that their changes take away obstacles and focus on fundamentals. From this comparison, which the authors of the standards highlighted, that may not be the conclusion every reader would draw.

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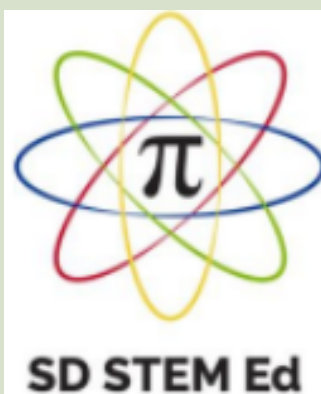
It is interesting that every group of standards the SD DOE had the Review Committee examine and give feedback on included 4th year standards, the majority of which had specific course standards for Pre-Calculus, Calculus, and Statistics, and half of which included alternative 3rd year math courses. Despite that, the decision was to remove 4th year Math Standards when creating the Proposed Math Standards.

When standards review committees meet, it is common practice to look at what is being done in other states. The question of which states should be considered is where there may be some disagreement. One might question who gets to choose what state's standards are considered, and why that state was chosen. Seeing this Hillsdale professor pop up in the math revision process, after being a part of the social studies revision process, begs more questions to be asked.

Liz Pettit
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There's Still Time to Submit a Speaker Proposal!

Greetings great teachers of SD! I just want to bring to your attention that we have just 2 days left to submit a speaker proposal form to our winter STEM ED conference in Huron on Feb, 6-8. I know there are a lot of great teachers out there so how about sharing some of that wisdom with the rest of your colleagues. You can use this [link](#) to register your talk. Please consider helping us have a great conference with lots of exciting talks to attend.





NCTM Representative Tips

Here's a quick round-up of news and resources from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Use this [link](#) to find out more!

Quick Refresher: What is NCTM?

I know most of you are already in the know, but here's a quick reminder about the organization that supports us all. Founded back in 1920, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) is the largest professional group for math educators in the world. Their mission is straightforward: to champion high-quality math teaching and learning for every single student. They are the public voice for math education, offering leadership, professional development, and research to help PK-12 teachers in the classroom.

New Position Statement: Shifting Our Math Culture

NCTM recently released a new position statement, "Changing the Professional Culture of Teaching Mathematics" (June 2025). This position statement challenges us to fundamentally change how math is taught and how students view it. The main idea is that math shouldn't be a gatekeeper that limits students. It should be an empowering, collaborative, and fair experience for everyone. It's a quick read, and it's a great piece to reflect on as you shape the environment and goals for your own math classroom this year.

Opportunity: Listen to the "Adding It All Up" Podcast

Looking for a little professional learning on the go? NCTM launched a great podcast series in 2024 called "Adding It All Up." The podcast is hosted by former and current NCTM presidents. The episodes tackle current topics, insights, and new trends in math education. They cover practical things like:

- Starting the school year strong
- Building welcoming classroom communities
- Integrating data science and data literacy
- Advocating for better math access

These episodes are typically 20–45 minutes long—perfect for your commute or lunch break!

Classroom Tool: Engaging "Notice & Wonder" Lessons

If you're looking to spark curiosity, check out NCTM's collection of Notice & Wonder lessons. If you haven't used the Notice and Wonder routine, it is pretty simple. You show your students an interesting photo or video and ask them, "What do you notice?" and "What do you wonder?" The goal is to get students thinking like mathematicians and seeing the world through a mathematical lens. NCTM has put together some really engaging images and videos that I think your students will like. I recommend taking a few minutes to explore these free resources.

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"If you're looking to spark curiosity, check out NCTM's collection of Notice & Wonder lessons."



Classroom Highlights

Minute Math Corner

I hope everyone's school year is going great. We are about to wrap up the first quarter of our school year. It doesn't seem like we should be that far into school yet. Time flies faster every year.

Every year our classes are filled with students at varying levels. At the end of the class period, I give the students time to work on their practice problems. Some of them finish quickly and accurately. Some of them need more time to work through the problems. An area where I struggle with is what to do the quick finishers. The default for many of the kids was to play a game or scroll on their computers which is not the default I want them to go to.

In the past, I have had them work on a puzzle of the month. This worked well for about a week, but they soon grew tired of this and went back to their default. When the next month and next puzzle came out, they would be excited about it again, but it again would not last the whole month. I also allowed them to play some games that I had in my corner. But with only a limited supply of games, these were soon forgotten.

This year we had an individual anonymously donate some money to our school and each teacher got to purchase a wish list for their classroom. The items on my wish list were some games for my corner. All of these games have some math element to them and the kids need to use strategy and logic to play. Many of these games are individual games, but they can be adapted play with a larger setting of students as well. All the games can be completed in about 5 min or less so they are perfect for a short time filler at the end of class. I'm so thankful to the individual who donated to my classroom. The default of going to the computer has rarely come up. The kids are focused on their math so they can get to their game. I have had to occasionally tell kids that they need to rotate what they are playing so they don't do the same thing every day.

I like that I am able to incorporate their games into the lesson discussions that we have in class and discuss correlations with different strategies and how they can be applied to our practice problems. Some of the games are: Marble circuit, Uzzle, Uzzle Stack, Chess, Checkers, Connect 4, Battleship, Yahtzee, 24, Set, Kanoodle, Genius Square, and Genius Star.

Susan Gilkerson
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"I like that I am able to incorporate their games into the lesson discussions..."



High School Physics Photo Contest Entry Form

SD-AAPT High School Photo Contest — Rules and Entry Agreement

(this page must be returned with submission)

high school physics
photo contest

The judging of the photos & descriptions will be completed at the February 5-7, 2026 SD STEM Ed Conference. Submission deadline is the first week of January. Any high school student is eligible to enter, but must identify a teacher that we might contact.

Rules

- Photos must be unmounted, 8" x 10" or 8.5" x 11", and may be either black-and-white or color. Traditional photos must be submitted on photographic stock. Photos taken with a digital camera must be submitted as a high-quality print on photo stock and be trimmed to 8" x 10" or 8.5" x 11".
- **If photos are taken with a digital camera:** an unmodified electronic photo must be emailed. (Small adjustments to brightness, ... is acceptable.) Computers shall not be used to modify or enhance photos.
- Only one photo per student. (Multiple small photos on one 8.5" x 11" sheet are not allowed.) Only one student per entry. (Photo cannot be taken by two or more people.)
- The student must take the photo.
- The submission must be emailed (photo, description of the science in the photo & include the below information {to James.Stearns@k12.sd.us})
- Essay of 250 words or less describing the physics in the photo. The essay should have a title and must be written by the student. (Hand-written submissions are not acceptable and will be disqualified.)

We cannot mail prizes if we do not have complete mailing addresses. Email and phone numbers may be used to contact you with questions, but will not be sold or otherwise used for marketing purposes. Entrant grants SD-AAPT permission to post their submission on the SD-AAPT website, or to use it in SD-AAPT publications or marketing materials. Submissions will not be returned. Any submission which does not meet the above criteria will not be considered.

I have read the above rules and agree to all terms and conditions. I understand that if I omit or falsify information, or if I do not sign this form, I will not be eligible for this contest.

Student signature

Date

Home address

Student email address

Student's High School

H. S. Address

School Phone Number

Teacher's name & email

Is your photo (Circle one) "Natural" or "Contrived"

Teacher may bring the entry to Huron or MAIL entry to:

James Stearns
15 North Fifth Street
Groton, SD 57445-2024



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www.sdctm.org

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