



# Scottsdale Unified School District

*Arizona's Most Excelling Schools!*

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Dear Parents,

Our district is starting a new era of benchmarking and assessing student achievement and accountability. We are very excited about the capabilities that this new Benchmark Assessment Plan called "Galileo" has to offer.

By now you may have heard bits and pieces from your child or fellow parents related to those benchmark tests, which can be taken on-line or in classrooms using a paper and pencil format. The District would like your help as we implement this program. Therefore, we believe it is important for us to share with you in detail our District's program and requirements. That will enable you to assist and support your child. Additionally, your knowledge about Galileo will help you to use the system effectively and you will subsequently be able to provide valuable feedback to the testing coordinator, teachers, counselors and other administrators at your child's school.

## **Background**

You may ask why the District is assessing its students throughout the course of the year with several tests.

Here is why:

- The SUSD Governing Board has recently adopted District Goals that focus on student achievement and the reporting of benchmark data for all grade levels in reading, mathematics, and writing is a significant component of these goals.
- Some schools and site improvement teams have developed Site Improvement Plan (SIP) goals relating to student achievement and plan to utilize the data collected through our District Benchmark to measure success. Therefore, the District must provide valid and reliable assessments to measure progress towards these goals.
- Both, State and Federal regulations require assessments to measure student progress.

## **District Assessment Plan**

During the 2004-05 school year, teachers from across the district developed SUSD's "**Essential Standards by Grade Level**" in reading, writing, and mathematics. Starting this year, these Essential Standards are being assessed quarterly, using Galileo. All students, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, will be assessed utilizing Galileo. For more detailed information about the administration dates for the benchmark assessments please view the District testing calendar <http://www.susd.org/district/assess/>.

Our goal is to provide timely information to teachers and parents. Therefore, the District has set up a Professional Development web page

<http://www.susd.org/district/professionaldevelopment/essentialst.cfm> that contains the following information:

- Background on the Essential Standards and Galileo;
- Essential Standards adopted for the 2005-06 school year; and
- A video titled "Love of Galileo", which provides more information about the Essential Standards development process, the benchmark assessment goals, and the implementation plan for the first year of Galileo. This video was developed to clarify the message about Galileo and how it is being used as our District Assessment Tool.

We hope that the website provides the necessary background and basics required to understand the benchmark assessment process. For more information about Galileo, please feel free to visit the Assessment Technology Inc. web page at [www.ati-online.com](http://www.ati-online.com).

### **The Benefits and Goal of the District's Assessment Plan**

Our plan for the first year is:

- Implementation of Galileo
- Development and potential subsequent revision of the Essential Standards; and
- Implementation of benchmark assessments throughout the District

Once the "Essential Standards" and "Galileo" are implemented district wide we will continue to work to ensure that we are satisfied with the benchmark assessment test quality and that the benchmark assessment process is properly aligned to instruction. We have therefore determined that during the initial implementation phase of the Essential Standards, our primary focus should be to analyze the data collected. To be clear, it isn't that we aren't "using the data" this year, rather we are interpreting the results within the context of the process this first year to ensure the high quality and integrity of the benchmark assessment process. That is also the reason we did not provide access for parents to data in Galileo and have not widely released or distributed to parents the results of the benchmark assessments.

Once the initial implementation phase has been completed the District will be working with parents to provide access to student data during the second year of implementation. Galileo allows parents direct access to student performance data through online access. If you are interested in receiving information regarding your child's performance on these benchmarks, in the mean time, please contact your school testing coordinator directly.

Ultimately, our District Assessment Plan is designed to provide students, parents, and teachers with valid, timely, and reliable test results regarding the mastery of Arizona's State Standards. This data will be used to determine whether students are on track to meeting the standards on AIMS at the elementary, middle and high school level. Especially at the high school level, these data will be used to determine whether students are on track to pass the AIMS graduation requirement.

While one of the goals of our Benchmarks is to prepare students to be successful on State Standards and therefore pass the AIMS test, the district is also mindful that the results of the benchmarks must be used to determine the overall progress of all students. Therefore, these data and results become more meaningful and valuable when they are used as an instructional tool as well as an assessment tool. The District continues to provide teachers professional development focused on using assessments as an instructional tool to modify future instruction for students based on the results. The use of these data benefits all students even those already exceeding the standards. Instruction should be tailored to address the individual needs of students who have not mastered the Essential Standards as well as for students who have mastered these standards so that all students can show academic gains.

Please feel free to contact your school testing coordinator or contact Katy Cavanagh directly at 480-484-6192 if you have questions about Galileo or benchmark testing.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ildiko Laczko-Kerr  
Director, Student Information Management & Accountability Reporting

Katy Cavanagh  
Executive Director for Excelling Teaching and Learning, Middle Schools