

SLC shows progress in inner-city school study

The schools can't be compared, however, because testing differs

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A new report on 67 inner-city school districts, including Salt Lake City, shows students overall continue to improve in math and reading skills, according to the Council of the Great City Schools.

Two years of data presented on the Salt Lake district demonstrate student gains; a broader period of time was not analyzed because of testing changes.

The data show 69 percent of Salt Lake third-graders met or exceeded testing requirements in 2005 versus 65 percent in 2004. While some other districts also improved, because each state approaches testing differently, it is impossible to make state-by-state comparisons of students in urban districts.

The Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of urban school districts, along with Salt Lake District Superintendent McKell Withers, would like that to change. "The challenge is we've not been very clear at the federal or state level what the ultimate goal is," the superintendent said. "What is a proficient, competent student?"

Advocates don't talk about a single, national test, but tests that would measure the same content from student to student. That would allow for better comparisons over time and a means to judge how students are performing nationally. What exists now is like a "patchwork," in the words of Jason Snipes, the director of research on the council's report.

While the superintendent of Jordan School District, Utah's largest, isn't opposed to national standards, he sees the hurdles creating them would entail.

"If there were to be national standards, the question would become whose standards would you adopt," said Superintendent Barry Newbold. "And how do you get buy in from every state office of education, state legislature, that we all agree these are the essential skills?"