

Two grades test well on writing test

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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NeSA WRITING SCORES		
Grade	District	State
Fourth	35	**44
Eighth	48	**45
11th	52	**45

*Score based on a 4-8 range of meeting standards and 9-99 and lower is below standards.
**A score of 50-79 exceeds state standards, 80-94 meets standards and 95 and below is below standards.

Groene surprised at 4th grade NsEA results

Gothenburg junior high principal and data coordinator Ryan Groene has no qualms about the ability of local students to write.

Recently released Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) writing tests show that last year's local eighth and 11th graders surpassed the state scale score average.

Juniors exceeded the state standard of 45 with a score of 52 while eighth graders met standards by scoring 48.

The average state grade was 45.

Fourth graders fell below state standards with an average score of 35 compared to 44 for the state.

Any mark below 39 is considered below standards.

Scale scores range from 0-70.

State education officials said the writing test this year reflects a more rigorous writing process and scoring so students are more college and career ready.

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Groene said the writing curriculum preparing fourth graders to take the NsEA test didn't match up to what state officials were looking for in the test.

"Our kids can write, they didn't write the way the state department of education wanted them to write," he said.

The principal said the district plans to bring in state education officials who understand writing requirements to help the district develop curriculum that aligns with NsEA.

Groene said the district also does an analytical writing in-service in the fall that helps teachers prepare students for the assessment in the tested grades of fourth, eighth and 11th.

Additionally, he said students do practice writing assessments first semester and teachers go to an Educational Service Unit 10 workshop to learn about the NsEA system.

"We're going to work to improve the score because this isn't where we want to be," he said.

He did note that the state moved from holistic to analytical scoring on the writing test and raised the bar for meeting standards this past year.

Rather than receiving one overall score, students are scored in four different areas: ideas and content count for 35% of the overall score, organization is 25% and word choice and sentence fluency are 20% for each.

What's good about NsEA testing, Groene said, is that the district can examine results to try and improve scores for the next year.

One of the challenges of the on-line test for eighth and 11th graders (fourth graders use pencil

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and paper) is when computer glitches occur as they did last spring when students took the test, he said.

However what Gothenburg experienced was minor compared to technical problems that occurred in other districts, Groene said.

By the end of the school year, he said students are tired of taking tests.

Grades six through eight take the norm-referenced MAPS (Measures of Academic Progress) three times yearly and NsEA begins in January and February with the writing test.

NsEA reading, math and science tests are given from March through May.

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