

Writing scores reflect grading changes

Written by Deb Egenberger
Thursday, 07 June 2012 13:58 -

NeSA WRITING SCORES		
Grade	District	State
Fourth	6, 17	75.38
Eighth	62	77.44
11th	65	77.44

*Score based on a 4-8 range of meeting standards; 38 and lower is below standard.
**A score of 55-70 exceeds state standards, 40-54 meets standards and 39 or lower is below standards.

Brady students proficient on state standards

Brady fourth, eighth and 11th graders scored close to or above the state average on state writing tests administered last semester.

Although the scores are slightly lower than the previous year's results, Brady superintendent Bill Porter is pleased with the overall outcome.

"The state changed the scoring process," Porter said. "A little tougher grading system means our numbers aren't as high as last year but we are still meeting the standards and still working toward improvement."

Higher proficiency targets in grades eight and 11 caused scores across the state to dip, according to Department of Education officials.

"Our expectations went up. We raised the achievement bar," Nebraska Education Commissioner Roger Breed said. "We are confident results will improve under the new process."

The new baseline data should not be compared to results from previous years because of the differences in the testing process, Breed said.

State officials not only changed the scoring but also switched the 11th- and eighth-grade writing tests to a one-day, online format.

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In years past, students wrote their essays with paper and pencil over two consecutive days, in separate 40-minute sessions with a rough draft the first day and a final version the second.

The new on-demand format reflects more of what the business community is looking for in graduates, Breed said.

“And that’s how students these days communicate,” Porter said. “Look what they do with texting and instant messaging.”

The state writing tests measure whether students are mastering writing standards, which were rewritten in 2009. Public school students took the tests between Jan. 23 and Feb. 10.

The eighth- and 11th-grade tests were scored in four areas of writing: content, organization, word choice and writing mechanics.

The writing test remained the same this year for fourth-graders, though changes are in store for next year.

State officials said fourth-grade students will continue to take the test over two days next year, but the tests will be scored on the four writing areas.

Last year’s fourth graders scored above the state average and well into the proficient range at 6.17.

Scores above 4 are considered to have met the standard.

In the eighth and 11th grades, students scored 43 and 45 respectively.

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At both levels, a score of 40-54 meets the standards.

“Considering our eighth graders spent at least half the year with a substitute teacher in English, I’d say they did pretty well,” Porter said. “There is always room for improvement and that’s where we go from here.”