

District 20 students meet writing mark

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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NsEA scores released Tuesday.

Students at Gothenburg Public Schools met or exceeded standards in a new NeSA (Nebraska State Accountability) writing test.

One grade scored below the state average.

The results for students in grades 8 and 11 are based on a new, more rigorous testing process that also measured new writing standards focused on college and career readiness, according to Nebraska Department of Education officials who released the scores Tuesday.

Junior high principal and curriculum coordinator Ryan Groene said local students scored well again.

“Our teachers do a good job of preparing students for the writing assessment,” Groene said.

Last year’s eighth graders received an average scale score of 50 on the NsEA test, compared to the state average score of 44.

A score of 55-70 exceeded standards, 40-54 met standards and 39 and lower was below standards.

Local juniors, who took the test last spring, scored an average of 46 compared to a state

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average of 44.

Statewide, about 63% of Nebraska's public school eighth graders and about 62% of 11th graders met or exceeded the new writing standards.

For last year's fourth graders, scoring was a bit different.

Youngsters meeting standards scored in the 4-8 range while 3.99 and lower was the number for students not meeting the mark.

NeSA WRITING SCORES		
Grade	District	State
Fourth	4.61	5.38
Eighth	56	**44
11th	42	**44

*Score based on a 4-8 range of meeting standards and 3.99 and lower as below standards.
**A score of 50-79 exceeds state standards, 40-59 meets standards and 30 and below is below standards.

Within the district, fourth graders barely met the standard with a 4.61 score compared to the state average of 5.38.

For school data collectors, like Groene, and administrators and teachers, the writing test is broken into four categories—ideas/content, organization, word choice/voice, sentence fluency/conventions (punctuation, spelling, and grammar).

This year, state officials said eighth and 11th grade students also were asked to write online and on-demand writing, untimed, on a single day as opposed to writing in two sessions spread over two days that allowed students to create a draft one day and to refine their work the following day.

On demand writing represents the kind of writing expected of high school graduates in college and in the workplace, better preparing Nebraska students for a successful future, officials said.

The new writing standards also are more responsive to the needs of the business community,

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they said.

On Aug. 31, an in-service is planned so local teachers and administrators can review together how their students performed on NsEA writing, reading, math and science tests and a new MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) test.

With the exception of writing, results from those tests will be released Aug. 13.

Because breakdowns of how students perform in different areas of those subjects is available, Groene said the data is valuable.

“It gets us to look at data and good data allows us to improve instruction for kids,” he said.

Although students have taken a state writing test since 2001, this was the first year the essays were sent out of state to be graded by NsEA test officials.

Up until last spring, the district administered a STARS (School-based, Teacher-led Assessment Reporting) that was read and graded by selected teachers at educational service units.

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