

School board: Don't panic about low-achieving label

Written by Deb Egenberger
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Junior assessment scores below proficient for four years.

Brady High School juniors over the past four years have scored below state-determined proficiency levels in mandated math and reading assessments.

That has landed the high school on a list with 51 other Nebraska schools that have been labeled Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools.

Superintendent Bill Porter told school board members Monday night that the low test scores are a concern but shouldn't raise parents to a panic level just yet.

"Small schools have a low number of students being tested," Porter said. "That can skew things pretty quickly."

He explained that over that four-year period of reporting assessment scores, Brady teachers used tests generated by themselves, not the standard state tests, to determine if students were learning the things they needed to.

"Everyone's system is different in that case," he said. "What is below average to one school is maybe not below average to another."

Principal Gerald Wallace told the board that even if the state looked at scores from such standardized tests as the Tera Nova, the Brady juniors from the last four years would still score at or barely above the 50th percentile.

"That's not great," he said.

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But scores since standard assessment testing began have been on the increase, he said.

"If our scores were staying the same or going down, I think I would panic," said board member Tracey Porter. "But where they're on the way up, I think we need to wait and see how things go in the next couple of years."

The superintendent agrees. He said without all the information, he's not ready to jump to any extreme conclusions.

Standardized reading tests were done this spring with results to be released in the fall. Similar math tests will be given next school year.

Some schools on the Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools are considering making drastic changes in staff and curriculum to be eligible for some federal funding.

Porter said he's not inclined to do that now.

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