

School district shows growth but always room to improve

Written by Deb Egenberger
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Brady Public School students who took state math and reading tests the past two years show more overall improvement than kids across Nebraska, according to statewide results released last week by the department of education.

Brady superintendent Bill Porter sees that growth as the true indicator of how the district is educating its students, rather than independent class scores in reading, math, science and writing.

“If we can show growth, it means we are doing what we need to do to make our students better,” he said.

Nebraska State Accountability scores were made public on Nov. 20, as well as a first look at the first-ever Nebraska Performance Accountability System which ranks districts by status, improvement, growth and graduation rates.

Porter explained that improvement is measured at the same grade testing different students.

Growth compares scores of the same students from one year to the next.

For instance, the district as a whole—students in grades 3-12 were tested—had a status score in reading of 110.76 with an improvement score of 5.86 and a growth score of 6.82.

That gives Brady a reading rank of 126 among the 249 schools reporting with 70 schools earning better improvement scores and 73 schools showing more growth.

Math looks even better.

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“We implemented a new math curriculum a couple of years ago and our scores have continuously come up,” Porter said.

Five years ago the district landed on the persistently low achieving schools list, according to state standards.

Porter said scores have improved dramatically since then and the district is now doing quite well.

“We want to give our students a well-rounded education,” he said. “At the same time, there are certain state standards that we have to meet. It takes a little bit of the creativity out of our teaching but it does make the district more accountable.”

Brady students rank in the top half of the state’s school districts in math and right at the midpoint in reading.

Writing and science fall in the bottom half, with science showing the lowest ranking at 194 of 249 and the biggest current concern.

“We knew going in that we would score low in science,” Porter said. “That’s one reason why we are concentrating on a new science curriculum in the high school.”

The district is also looking at realigning science curriculum at the elementary level.

Class size continues to present problems for Brady when it comes to state scores.

Porter said comparing overall scores for classes with 12 or 15 students like Brady’s with much larger districts that test 50 to 100 kids can provide misleading information.

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“In small classes, if one or two students do poorly on the tests, it impacts the overall class score more than a handful of bad scores in a big class,” he said.

That’s why Porter said he takes the time to comb through individual scores, tracking specific student progress.

“The bottom line is showing growth, and we’ve done that,” he said. “Now we just need to work to keep moving forward in all areas.”

NEBRASKA PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY				
BRADY SCHOOL DISTRICT GRADES 3-12				
Indicator Type	Indicator	District Results	State Results	Total Rank Districts
Status	Reading	110.76	110.58	126
	Math	109.54	104.01	105
	Science	89.61	99.92	148
	Writing	43.88	44.75	140
Improvement (Different Students)	Reading	5.86	3.69	71
	Math	13.45	3.92	22
Growth (Same Students)	Reading	6.82	4.80	74
	Math	6.42	3.37	38

States—Ranks districts by average scale scores in reading, math, writing, science.
Improvement—Ranks districts by the differences in the average reading and math scale scores of different students in the same grade.
Growth—Ranks districts by the differences in average reading and math scale scores of the same students this year to last year.