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There wasn't much of a change in the scores recorded by last year's fourth, eighth and 11th grade students at Chase County Schools when the State of the Schools Report was released by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) recently.

According to the NDE, Nebraska students continue to show incremental improvement in reading, mathematics, writing and science.

The Report shows that 89 to 93 percent of all students statewide are proficient on state standards.

However, the Report shows that Nebraska students have slipped compared to national benchmarks.

The biggest overall gains came in reading, where the number of students judged proficient on state standards increased from 90 percent to 94 percent.

In math, the number of students deemed proficient increased two percentage points to 92 percent.

Writing proficiency stayed flat at 93 percent.

The results are based on locally-developed assessments that measure performance on standards in grades four, eight and eleven.

Proficiency means that students achieve competency for their grade level. It does not mean they scored exemplary on the tests.

At Chase County Schools, the results of the 2008-2009 testing done last year, compared to the year before, are as follows:

Fourth grade: reading, down 4.35 percent from 100 to 95.65 percent; mathematics, down 4.35 percent from 100 percent to 95.65 percent; science, up 2.44 percent from 97.56 to 100 percent; writing, up from 89.29 to 93.33 percent.

Eighth grade: reading, stayed the same at 100 percent; mathematics, stayed the same at 100 percent; science, down 5.41 percent from 100 to 94.59 percent; writing, down from 100 to 94.12 percent.

Eleventh grade: reading, down from 95.35 to 86.67 percent; mathematics, down from 95.35 to 86.67 percent; science, up 13.95 percent from 86.05 to 100 percent; writing, down from 92.50 to 87.50 percent.

The results include all students in a grade level, including special education and English language learning students.

Officials at some smaller schools in Nebraska aren't concentrating on the percentages as much as larger schools are. The number of students taking the tests vary widely in the smaller schools. If one student doesn't take the test, or scores poorly, it makes a much larger difference in a class of 30 students than it does in a class of 400 students.

CCS Superintendent Matt Fisher said, "With the smaller classes we have pushing through here, there is a marked difference between classes. The problem is, as the numbers (of students) go down, in the high school in particular, one class can swing the numbers (on the test) quite a bit."

Fisher pointed out that in a class of 27 or 28 students, two or three students not doing well on the tests represent 10 percent of that class.

"One kid can make a difference if our level drops," he said.

Not all of the Report results noted the number or percentage of students in a class taking the test. However, the writing assessment results did. Several students in the eighth and eleventh grade classes at CCS missed the test, resulting in a lower overall score.

This year's Report also doesn't track results further back than one year. "In the past we could see several years of results," Fisher said, allowing administrators to assess a certain class's progress.

"I don't see any real issues," he commented. "Our groups that didn't change at all were at 100 percent and couldn't go any higher."

Fisher said he prefers to look at the results as a comparison of how a certain group of students rates now as to the past.

"How has that group of students changed?" Have more been added to the grade level? he asked.

"We've never looked at the state testing as to where our students are," he said. The ACT test is the big test.

Fisher said the same ACT test is given to students across the state at the same time. "They pay money and are invested in the test, so they're going to do their best."

But the tests given for the Report are created by the individual schools and may have different questions.

Students are urged to do their best, but "there are no consequences if they don't," he noted.