By Carolyn Lee
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Ninety percent of Nebraska students are meeting or exceeding state reading and mathematics standards, according to new data recently released by the Nebraska Department of Education.

Chase County Schools (CCS) students are among those students, and have actually improved over last year in the three grades tested in both subjects.

Composite results showed Nebraska student achievement in reading improved from 89 percent meeting or exceeding standards last year to 90 percent this year. In mathematics, student performance improved from 88 percent last year to 90 percent meeting or exceeding standards this year.

The CCS results are as follows:

Grade 4: up 18.35 percent from last year in reading to 100.00 percent above state standards; up 12.90 percent from last year in math to 100.00 percent;

Grade 8: up 17.90 percent from last year to 100.00 percent in reading; up 28.61 percent over last year in math to 100.00 percent meeting standards;

Grade 11: up 1.76 percent from last year in reading to 95.35 percent; up 7.74 percent over last year in math to 95.35 percent above state standards.

Student performance on science standards was released for the first time for the 2007-08 school year, showing that 87 percent of the students in grades four or five, eight and ll are meeting or exceeding standards statewide.

CCS students in grade five scored a 97.56 percent of students meeting or exceeding state standards. Students in grade eight scored a 100.00 percent, while students in grade 11 scored an 86.05 percent.

CCS Secondary Principal Mike Sorensen attributed the increase to two things—the teachers and the students.

“The teachers are motivated, driven, and are compliant with what we as administrators require,” he stated. Sorensen added good students and parental support to the mix.

“We want to be the best school in the state if not the country,” he said. “We strive for perfection.”

Sorensen said all schools in the state are going through changes, and will start giving state tests rather than the present assessments.

Elementary Principal Nathan Vitosh said he attributes the higher assessment scores to more focus on curriculum work and the school improvement process to increase student achievement. “Those are one of the best ways to make a change for the betterment of the school,” he said. “Build and improve.”

Neither principal said teachers at CCS are “teaching to the test,” or drilling students on test questions to improve scores.

Sorensen said that may be true in some states. However, “What we try to do here is focus on school improvement and curriculum. They drive the school. We try to teach kids and prepare them for life, such as college or the work force. If you teach to the test, what are they actually going to learn?”

Vitosh said “teaching to the test” was a big fear when assessments were first implemented statewide. He said the Bush administration used the assessments as a way to keep teachers accountable.

“The scores aren’t tied to funding or teacher pay” in Nebraska, Vitosh said, which he doesn’t

approve of anyway.

“Granted, we’re using some data for both of these ways (curriculum and school improvement process) of making improvements, but it’s done for student improvement rather than for teachers,” the principal stated.

Information about the 2007-08 State of the Schools Report is available at www.reportcard.nde.state.ne.us.