 Editor's note: K-6 Principal Vitosh will be writing several columns in the coming weeks, further explaining the new Reading Mastery program to be instituted this fall.

By Nathan Vitosh
Chase County Elementary Principal

As Principal, it is part of my duties to ensure our students are receiving the best education possible. Perhaps the most important key to elementary education is reading.

As students grow and learn, reading either becomes easier or more frustrating. In my observations, I have noticed that the students who can read enjoy it, and the students who struggle with reading avoid it.

As a child, I enjoyed reading mystery novels, but despised reading text books. If not for some of my teachers, I would not have opened some of my books in school.

Over the last several months, I have been analyzing our AIMS Web and Norm Referenced test scores. The findings show that our students are showing a decline in their reading skills. This in fact seems to be the norm across the state of Nebraska.

The administration at Chase County Schools wants our students to perform at a higher level than the rest of the students across the state. The question is what to do about it.

In regard to this concern, the staff has been attending workshops, looking at our reading scores, sorting through various reading curriculum programs and looking at student learning styles.

With this information, we have decided to adopt the Reading Mastery program. The instructional principles behind this K-6 reading program are to teach every student how to read. The instruction is direct, unambiguous and focuses on specific detail.

Every reading skill and strategy in the program is carefully taught in isolation and then applied and reviewed. The students are given daily practice in decoding and in applying comprehension strategies. Finally, the teacher assessments of the student performance are continuous, and errors are corrected when they occur.

To help our teachers effectively implement this program, we have also decided to seek the help of experts from the National Institute of Direct Instruction. Their focus is to provide the teacher with the instructional tools they need to implement Reading Mastery.

The Reading Mastery program has several benefits. Over the next several months I will provide you with information explaining how the combination of multiple opportunities for practice along with working on skills at the student's level creates a sense of accomplishment and builds confidence in each student.