Statewide, results show improvement

By Carolyn Lee
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A report on Nebraska public schools and student performance released last week showed most school districts demonstrating improvement and growth under a new accountability system. The results also showed that nearly three of every four public school districts, or 72.3 percent, graduated 90 percent or more of their high school seniors.

"The three years of reading scores, the two years of math scores and the four-year cohort graduation rate, for which we have two years of data, have all shown improvement, year to year. This is a credit to teachers and administrators who daily do their job and do the work," said Nebraska Education Commissioner Roger Breed.

The report, which is an annual State of the Schools Report, included the new state accountability results, which are based on state test scale scores. The system, called Nebraska Performance Accountability System (NePAS), ranks public school districts by Status, Improvement and Growth.

In Status, districts are ranked by average scale scores in reading, mathematics, writing and science. In Improvement, districts are ranked by the differences in the average reading and math scale scores of different students in the same grade. In Growth, districts are ranked by the differences in average reading and math scale scores of the same students this year to last year.

The overwhelming number of school districts demonstrated both improvement and growth. This means that a district's average scale score was higher this year when compared to its scale score the previous year.

Out of 248 districts, 185 showed improvement and 198 showed growth in reading. Out of the same number of districts, 177 showed improvement and 181 showed growth in math.

CCS Percent Proficient in Reading	All Grades
2009-2010	68.04%
2010-2011	67.03%
2011-2012	68.37%

Percent Proficient By Grade	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 11
2009-2010	37.50	58.00	72.92	54.55	79.07	78.33	72.73
2010-2011	73.33	48.48	50.00	65.96	75.76	76.74	83.33
2011-2012	64.10	71.15	62.86	56.86	75.47	61.29	87.88

Average Scale Scores: Range 0-200

Level	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 11
State	101.01	103.84	101.08	101.38	104.30	102.43	100.61
State	104.41	109.01	107.65	108.81	110.38	106.08	101.96
State	108.66	111.62	114.26	112.59	115.94	108.89	101.98
District	79.85	83.60	96.75	94.73	110.21	107.67	109.77
District	96.33	84.21	88.44	99.11	108.03	110.95	114.20
District	94.49	98.38	99.11	87.90	111.21	97.45	117.00

Participation

Level	Students Tested	%	Students Not Tested	%
State	147,240	99.90%	145	0.10%
State	149,460	99.88%	175	0.12%
State	151,823	99.94%	86	0.06%
District	317	99.69%	1	0.31%
District	279	100.00%	0	0.00%
District	294	100.00%	0	0.00%

CCS Percent Proficient in Mathematics	All Grades
2010-2011	53.76%
2011-2012	60.41%

Percent Proficient By Grade	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 11
2010-2011	51.11	36.36	52.08	70.21	48.48	55.81	56.67
2011-2012	64.10	66.67	58.33	54.00	62.26	38.71	75.76

Average Scale Scores: Range 0-200

Level	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 11
State	103.49	102.64	102.67	100.35	98.08	97.89	94.61
State	107.84	106.36	108.48	106.09	103.91	99.25	95.59
District	92.78	76.33	87.98	104.79	89.91	96.40	104.10
District	97.36	96.75	91.17	87.68	91.60	85.94	102.91

Participation

Level	Students Tested	%	Students Not Tested	%
State	149,725	99.86%	207	0.14%
State	152,085	99.94%	92	0.06%
District	279	100.00%	0	0.00%
District	293	100.00%	0	0.00%

CCS scores mixed

At Chase County Schools (CCS), the combined tested grades ranked 222 out of the 248 districts statewide in reading status, and 232 out of the 248 districts in math status.

"I would like them (parents) to be concerned," Dr. Brad Schoeppey said of the low ratings.

People don't like the phrase "teaching to the test" but Dr. Schoeppey said, "I think part of it is paying attention to what we teach and teaching toward the test. The state has its standards and that's what their tests reflect.

"We have to look at what the test contains and what we're teaching—if we're teaching the standards the state says we're supposed to be teaching, because that's what the state is testing

on," he said.

Dr. Schoeppey said CCS may think the state has different standards than the community thinks is important.

"Whether we like it or not, we'll be compared to other districts based on this test," he said.

CCS showed an 0.87 percent increase in reading improvement. CCS ranked 169th out of those 185 improved districts in reading.

CCS scored a -0.25 in math improvement, ranking 185th out of the 185 improved districts statewide.

In reading growth, CCS showed a 2.46 percent increase, and ranked 161 out of the 198 districts that improved the past year.

In math growth, CCS decreased -0.76 percent, ranking 192 out of the 248 districts, so was not one of the 181 improving districts.

A new math program has been implemented this year, and Dr. Schoeppey said, "We hope that makes an improvement, but a math program itself doesn't improve scores."

He said, "We have to take a look and make sure how well (the new program) covers the standards the state expects us to teach. If not, we'll have to find supplemental materials."

Under the state accountability system, school districts are also ranked by graduation rates. This year, 180 of 249 Nebraska public school districts graduated 90 percent or more of their high school seniors. More than 50 school districts had a 100 percent graduation rate.

Statewide, 88 percent of the seniors graduated from high school, an increase from 86 percent last year.

CCS posted a 90 percent graduation rate in both 2007-08 and 2008-09, but dropped to an 82.14 graduation rate in 2009-10.

Dr. Schoeppey said that when a school district such as CCS has small graduating classes—there were 45 in last year's class—"If one student doesn't graduate on time, it makes a huge difference."

Dr. Schoeppey pointed out that NePAS bases its graduation statistics on a four-year graduation schedule.

"Some kids don't graduate in four years. Some go into an alternative (Wellington School) program. The point is to get the kids to graduate," he stated.

After Nebraska moved from its previous assessment system to single statewide tests in reading, writing, mathematics and science, the state had no accountability system. The State Board of Education developed NePAS as the new accountability system.