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The Imperial Republican

The Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) public school test results in reading, mathematics and science were released last week. The scores obtained by students at Chase County Schools (CCS) were up in most categories and grades.

“We are extremely pleased with the improvement we saw at the elementary reading level,” Superintendent Brad Schoeppey said of the preliminary results.

“I’m really pleased with our elementary teachers’ work they did this year. We asked them to do things with standards they hadn’t done in the past,” he said.

Schoeppey said that, overall, test scores were up over the 2011-12 year’s testing in the elementary grades.

Now, it’s time to focus on math at the middle school level. “They’re not where we want them to be,” he noted.

The school focused on the elementary level last year, Schoeppey said, to make AYP, or Adequate Yearly Progress, according to state standards.

CCS had been put on a “probationary” list after two years of below average test scores. It has been on the list for two more years.

It then takes yet two more years to get off the list and have a “clean slate,” Schoeppey explained.

If a school remains on the AYP list for three years, actions may be taken by the state to remove teachers, allow students to transfer to other schools within the county and more.

The superintendent thinks that the preliminary test results just received will count as one year to get off the list.

State results

NeSA scores for all grades tested across the state in 2013 showed that 77 percent met or exceeded state proficiency in reading; 69 percent met or exceeded in mathematics; 70 percent met or exceeded in science; and 68 percent met or exceeded the standards in writing.

Students in grades 3-8 and 11 are tested.

Looking at the 2013 results for CCS, some elementary grades had a large percentage of students who met or exceeded the state standards in the subjects tested.

However, there were students who were also below the state standards.

But Schoeppey is quick to compare the test results to the 2011-12 year’s results.

For instance, last year’s third grade had 95 percent of students who were at or above the state reading level, compared to 63 percent the year before. In math, the same students scored 90 percent last spring, compared to 63 percent the year before.

In the fourth grade, last year’s students scored 82 percent last year and 71 percent the year before in reading.

That’s an increase of 19 percent, Schoeppey noted, in the same students over a two-year period. He was able to make that comparison because those fourth graders were also tested in third grade.

Those same fourth graders scored 79 percent at or above the state level in math this past year, compared to 63 percent as third graders.

In fifth grade, last year’s students scored 89 percent at or above the state levels in reading, compared to 65 percent as fourth graders.

In math, they scored 87 percent at or above state levels, compared to 60 percent as fourth graders. In science, they scored 91 percent at or above state levels, compared to 65 percent as fourth graders.

Last year's sixth graders scored 80 percent at or above the 77 percent state level in reading, compared to 57 percent the year before. In math they scored 60 percent at or above the state level of 67 percent, compared to 54 percent the year before.

"That's an area we'll be working on," Schoeppey pointed out.

The sixth, seventh, eighth and eleventh grade math programs will be a focus this year, he said, "to get those scores where we need them to be. We should not have any area below the state average like last year."

Seventh and eighth grade reading scores were low. Seventh and eleventh grade math scores were low.

Eighth and eleventh grade writing scores were low.

Schoeppey stated, though, that some of this past year's scores are "way above" the state averages.

"I'm really pleased with our elementary group and think we'll continue to see increases" in scores, he said.

Besides the math in grades just mentioned, Schoeppey said there will be a real focus in reading in seventh and eighth grade, also, this year.

"Our first goal is to get everybody proficient and passing" on the test, he stated.

"Then we want to see them get into the advanced category. If we can get all our scores in the 80s and 90s, I'll be pleased. Now we focus on the middle school."

The state scores students by "exceeds the standards," "meets the standards" and "below standards."

The superintendent said CCS teachers spent August to April teaching students to the state standards. "I don't think there's been that emphasis on the standards" in the past, he said.

Teaching "to the test" doesn't bother Schoeppey one bit." I don't know why that's a bad connotation," he said.

Every teacher has always taught a subject and then tested on that subject, he said, and the same is true with the state testing.

"The issue is to focus teachers to what they should be teaching and what the state thinks students should know."