

NeSA writing results released for W-P fourth, eighth and 11th grades

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 06 June 2013 17:13 -

By Diane Stamm

The Wauneta Breeze

Writing results were released last week for the Nebraska State Accountability tests given this past spring.

In Wauneta-Palisade Schools, the average score for the eighth and 11th grade classes were in the Meets the Standard range.

The 11 juniors tested had an average score of 42, three points lower than the state average. The 11 eighth graders scored a 44, one point below the state average. Last year, eighth graders scored 45 and juniors 40.

Percentages for the Below the Standards, Meets the Standards and Exceeds the Standards were not available for W-P classes because fewer than ten students were reported in a standard or all students were reported in a single performance category.

The fourth grade class averaged a score of 36, below the average state wide score and in the Below the Standard range (39 and under).

The fourth grade test is a narrative writing.

“We do not ‘teach the test’ and the writing score is not a true reflection of the writing abilities of

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our students,” said Superintendent Randy Geier. “Next year, we plan on gearing our Write Tools curriculum more toward narrative writing, which should help the scores.”

He added, “I would like to remind our parents and patrons, a one time assessment is a poor way to measure student learning. However, we have to comply to federal mandates. The technical difficulties did interrupt the concentration of our fourth graders. We plan on making upgrades regarding the servers in both buildings this summer. Our juniors did very well and our eighth grade scores were solid. The school district is committed to improving writing across all curricular areas.”

More than 64,000 fourth, eighth and 11th graders took the writing test.

Overall in the state of Nebraska, tested students improved their scores enough for a two percent upgrade for eighth graders and 6 percent for juniors from 2012. Sixty-six percent of eighth graders and 68 percent of both fourth and 11th graders meet or exceed state standards.

Students in grades eight and 11 were first tested last year under the new scoring process so two years of data are available; 4th graders were tested for the first time this year using the new system.

Students in grades eight and 11 were asked to complete their essays on computers in an on-demand writing session while 4th graders were given timed, paper/pencil tests over two days.

Writing essays were scored in four areas: content/ideas, organization, voice/word choice, and sentence fluency/writing conventions. School districts received feedback at all three grades to help teachers determine how well their students scored and where instruction and student performance need improvement.

School results can be found at <http://www.education.ne.gov/nesainitial/Search.aspx> .

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Test results for reading, math and science will be released this fall.

Nebraska Education Commissioner Roger Breed said the new writing scores should be interpreted with caution since some eighth and 11th graders experienced formatting issues while writing their essays online.

“Considering that teachers tell students it is important to do their very best on state tests, it is understandable that students would become frustrated when, in some cases, they tried but could not correct formatting irregularities,” he said. “Some but not all eighth and 11th grade students experienced the problems when taking the online test.”

Some examples of the formatting irregularities included lines wrapping incorrectly, words breaking oddly and, at times, the entire essay centering on the screen. Studies looking at whether the formatting issues affected student scores were inconclusive. While other states also have reported irregularities during online testing, Breed said he is confident formatting issues will not occur in future years since a different test engine will be used to administer Nebraska’s online tests next year.