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Nebraska State Accountability Security Manual

For use in the Fall of 2013 and Beyond

Fall 2013

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I. Introduction

In a centralized testing process, it is critical that equity of opportunity, standardization of procedures and fairness to students, teachers, and districts is maintained. Therefore, the Nebraska Department of Education requires that all school districts place a high priority on test security and review the NeSA Security procedures outlined in this document. Test security includes test maintenance and storage, training of test administrators, test administration, test ethics, and secure return of materials.

The goals of this Security Manual are the following:

- To assure that all Nebraska students have the opportunity to be assessed appropriately, fairly, and in a secure manner;
- To assure that all Nebraska educators understand and follow the steps to develop and maintain a secure NeSA testing process;
- To document the practices and procedures so that all NDE staff will correctly follow the steps to assure the security of NeSA testing.

Roles and Responsibilities:

All personnel have a role in and assume a responsibility for assuring a secure NeSA testing process. These personnel include those in the district from the Boards of Education, the Superintendent, the principals, the teachers and test administrators, and the students themselves.

At the NDE, many are responsible for the security of the NeSA testing process from the policy level to the operational level including the Commissioner, the legal and investigative team, the assessment office staff, the item and prompt writers, as well as the staff who serve in monitoring roles.

At the vendor level, all who are involved in the NeSA testing process contribute to the level of security needed to assure a fair, reliable, and consistent NeSA testing process.

All educators need to be familiar with appropriate testing ethics and security practices related to testing. Professionalism, common sense, and practical procedures provide the right framework for testing ethics. It is important to note that school districts are bound



to hold all certificated staff members in school districts accountable for following the Regulations and *Standards for Professional Practice Criteria* as outlined in Nebraska Rule 27.

Breaches in security are taken very seriously. They must be quickly identified and reported to the Nebraska Department of Education's Statewide Assessment Office. From there the determination is made as to whether or not a professional practices complaint will be filed.

The policies and procedures in this document are based upon an extensive security audit conducted by Caveon Test Security in 2012, reviews of materials by Caveon staff, interviews with Nebraska educators and vendors, and existing materials developed by the Nebraska Department of Education.



II. NeSA Testing Program Overview

As outlined in the Quality Education Act, 79-757-79-762 of Nebraska Revised Statutes, statewide tests in reading, mathematics, science, and writing were developed and are administered to all Nebraska public school districts annually. The testing schedule includes the following grades:

Reading and Mathematics:	Grades 3-8, 11
Science	Grades 5, 8, 11
Writing	Grades 4, 8, 11

The centralized statewide tests, Nebraska State Accountability, NeSA, were first introduced in 2010 as outlined in the legislation and became fully operational in 2012 when the NeSA science tests were administered. The test administration window begins with writing in mid-January and is three weeks long. The NeSA reading, mathematics, and science tests are given from the last week of March until the first week of May, a six-week testing window. Make up tests are required, as the expectation is that all students in the assigned grades will be included in the tests.

The tests in reading, mathematics, and science consist of 45-60 multiple-choice items depending upon the subject and the grade level. These tests are administered in two parts and are not timed. Within the testing window districts determine test administration schedules based on recommendations by NDE. The tests are administered in accordance with the scripted directions in the administration manuals, and all districts are expected to follow those directions.

In the first three years of test administration districts were given the option of choosing the mode of testing. Districts could either test students in the paper/pencil mode or online with computers. Although the majority of districts chose to test their students online, it was not until 2012 after a series of studies had been completed that compared student scores in both modes, that the State Board of Education issued a requirement that students were to be tested online. The online testing requirement began with the 2013 test administration window. Students who demonstrate a need for an allowable accommodation may be tested in the paper/pencil mode. The other exception to the online requirement is 4th grade writing which remains paper/pencil.



A statewide writing assessment, holistically scored, was first administered in 2001 as a pilot, and in its early years was administered to only one grade per year on a rotating basis. In 2004, the writing test was administered to students in grades 4, 8, and 11, but a significant change was undertaken when analytic scoring and online administration for grades 8 and 11 were introduced in 2011. By 2013 NeSA-W tests in all three grades were analytically scored, and grades 8 and 11 were administered online.

A battery of alternate tests for the most significantly challenged students (generally not more than 1% of the assessed population) was developed in accord and scheduled with the regular NeSA tests. The development of the alternate tests included all of the same technical qualities and requirements as the tests for the general population. The alternate tests, NeSA-AA, assess reading, mathematics, and science, and the results of these tests are included in all state averages and accountability measures.

All students in the assigned grades are expected to be tested. If a student is not tested, a code, including such codes as Medical Waiver, (MW), No Longer Enrolled (NLE), or Parental Refusal (PR) must explain the reason for a missing score. An appeals process for unusual circumstances is applied, and an internal team reviews each such request.



III. Security Plan Overview

As security is taken very seriously, and the NDE believes that building and district personnel have a significant responsibility for maintaining the security of test materials, their administration, and their return, there are specific requirements placed on building and district administrators and teachers.

The superintendent of each school district is instructed to select a District Assessment Contact (DAC) who serves as the “connection” for all assessment matters between the Nebraska Department of Education and the school district. The DAC names are collected annually, and a database is maintained at the assessment office and updated as needed. The DACs serve an important role in security and in all assessment-related matters.

Each DAC annually signs a [DAC Confidentiality Agreement](#) that assures that he or she is responsible for providing oversight of the testing process in the district. This includes, among many other things, the security of the overall testing process. The security agreement is submitted to the Nebraska Department of Education Assessment Office prior to the testing window.

Additionally each building principal is required annually to sign a [Principal Security Agreement](#) for each NeSA test administered in his or her building. The security agreement specifies that not only does the principal assume the responsibility for the secure storage, administration, and return of materials, but that the principal has assured that the test administrators are appropriately and properly trained. The security agreement is submitted to the Nebraska Department of Education Assessment Office prior to the testing window.

Security training materials, including an [Administration PowerPoint](#), sample policies, [NeSA Security Procedures](#), and [Suggestions for a Smooth Testing Process](#),” have been generated and provided for the districts by the NDE Assessment office. These materials have been posted on the [NeSA Admin. & Security page](#) and have been distributed through the Standards, Assessment, and Accountability Updates that are published twice a year. Districts are advised that DACs and principals share the responsibility for assuring that all teachers who administer NeSA are trained in appropriate procedures, security, and ethics.



Districts are advised through the Updates that they are to maintain a set of district policies that include a reference to Nebraska’s Security Procedures. Included in this manual is a [Sample District Security Policy](#). The Department further encourages any district with additional questions regarding security to contact its own local school attorney for customization of its own policies.



IV. Exam Development

The Nebraska Department of Education involves Nebraska educators in the development of test items and prompts. Teachers are nominated by their administrators for participation in test development, and the Assessment Office makes the selection of item writers so that teachers represent the state in both geography and demographics. Teachers who are nominated and selected are subject area experts who are trained each year for the test development.

Teachers who works on item development, whether the content is reading, mathematics, science, or writing prompts, must sign a [confidentiality agreement](#) that assures the security of the items under development and the confidentiality of their work. All items are stored in NDE zip drives and collected at the end of each day. NDE staff monitor each table of item developers. After each day's session, the items are transferred to secure NDE files and kept secure. All secure materials used are kept in NDE locked offices.

Items are reviewed by NDE staff before being transferred to the vendor. The vendor's procedures assure that the items entered into their item bank system are kept secure. The vendor applies a rigorous review process to the Nebraska items and assures the quality of the item construction. The only vendor staff who review the items are those assigned to the Nebraska assessment process. At a designated time, the vendor team joins with the Nebraska team for the construction of the test forms. Both items and test forms are kept secure through the entire process of exam development. No outside personnel are involved in forms construction except those assigned by the NDE or the vendor.



VI. Exam Administration

The Nebraska Department of Education requires that all testing administrators are trained prior to test administration. Training has been designated as a responsibility of the building principal or the District Assessment Contact who have assured through their signed security agreements that the training has occurred. The NDE provides training materials and a PowerPoint to be used in the test administration training, and in some districts additional materials have been added. Some districts also require the teachers or testing administrators sign a security document indicating that they understand the procedures required for appropriate test administration.

The NeSA test administration manuals provide specific standardized testing directions for each test administration. It is expected that each test administrator will follow those directions for each session. Test administrators are told that they are not to deviate from the directions provided. Deviation from the standardized directions may constitute a security breach.

The administration manuals specify the number of proctors suggested for each testing session. It is recommended that one proctor be present in the room for each 12 students. Direction to schools about test administration practices appropriate for all students as well as approved accommodations for students with disabilities and for students learning the English language is provided through the [NeSA Approved Accommodations Document](#).

It is expected that as part of the test administration training, teachers and principals will familiarize themselves with the appropriate accommodations and the testing practices.



VII. Monitoring Activities

Although districts take appropriate actions for the training of test administrators and test administration, the assessment office organizes an annual monitoring of schools during the testing window. The NDE views it both as a learning experience where department staff can learn more about the NeSA testing process and as a monitoring requirement to assure appropriate testing practice in schools.

Annually 50-70 schools are selected for monitoring. The schools are selected based upon the geographic representation, district size, and additional NeSA testing characteristics. Generally the monitoring visits are scheduled for 1/2 day, so that two schools, geographically close can be visited in one day. The assessment office makes the selection of the schools and assigns the monitors for the schools to be visited.

Each year, the NDE recruits certificated staff to help with the monitoring and testing visitation process. Staff members who have agreed to monitor and visit schools are provided a training orientation on guidelines to conduct a testing monitoring visit. The training is conducted by staff from the assessment office. Each staff member is provided with a [NeSA Observation Checklist](#), which is to be completed after the visit and submitted to the statewide assessment office. This document is revised annually to reflect current security requirements.

Monitors are instructed to contact the school principal and the District Assessment Contact by email to arrange an appropriate day and time for the visit. The monitors may request to visit a specific content area, but it is likely that any of the content areas might be monitored.

The monitors are reminded that it is not their responsibility to provide feedback to the school, but rather to observe and to take note of anything that needs to be reported back to the Statewide Assessment Office. If feedback is necessary to the school, or if a process needs follow up or change, it will be the responsibility of the Statewide Assessment Office to provide that feedback.



VIII Security Incident Response Plan

All incidents and types of security breaches are taken seriously. When a security breach is reported, the report may be written or oral. It may be reported by a school district, a parent, or a student. If the notification of a security issue or breach is sent or called in directly to the assessment office, it is forwarded to the Director of Statewide Assessment. The Director of Statewide Assessment will ask or follow up with the person reporting and request the following steps be taken:

1. Submit a written report of the security breach using the [Report of a Security Breach Form](#) including how it occurred, when it occurred, and who was involved. The written report form will include:

- the details of the incident as known by the reporting person(s),
- the actions that were taken or the investigation conducted by the district in response to the incident,
- the consequences to the individuals involved that followed the investigation, and
- the actions the district is taking to insure that the incident will not be repeated.

2. The Director of Assessment will review the situation and determine whether or not the incident should be reviewed by the legal team, professional practices commission, or the Commissioner.

3. The Director of Assessment will respond in writing to the district indicating next steps from among the following possibilities:

- no additional steps will be taken by the department;
- specific steps that will be taken by the department;
- specific steps should be taken by the district; or
- a referral is being made to legal/professional practices, or to the Commissioner of Education.

4. Missing materials are a serious potential breach of NeSA test forms and/or answers. The vendor provides the initial contact concerning materials that were not returned with the district's shipment at the end of the testing window. Loss of secure materials will require a formal district response, using the [Missing Materials Report](#) when requested by NDE Assessment Department.

