



NEWS RELEASE

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NEBRASKA 8th, 11th STUDENT WRITING SCORES IMPROVE

Writing test scores for Nebraska 8th and 11th graders improved this year, according to two years of trend data.

Writing test results showed that 66 percent of Nebraska 8th graders met or exceeded state standards, a 2 percent increase. And, 68 percent of the 11th graders met or exceeded standards, a 6 percent increase. A report released today also showed that 68 percent of the 4th graders met or exceeded the standards. The state's process for scoring tests was recently revised to better ensure high school graduates will succeed in college and their careers.

2012, 2013 Nebraska Writing Comparison

GRADE	2012		2013		% Change
	% Below	% Meets/Exceeds	%Below	% Meets/Exceeds	
4 th	*	*	32 %	68 %	*
8 th	36 %	64 %	34 %	66 %	+2 %
11 th	38 %	62 %	32 %	68 %	+6 %

* Trend Data Not Available

Students in grades 8 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. More than 64,000 4, 8th and 11th graders took the writing test.

Nebraska Education Commissioner Roger Breed announced the 2013 writing results today at a news conference in Lincoln. Breed said he was pleased that the results showed a greater number of students meeting or exceeding state writing standards.

Students in grades 8 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.

2012-2013 State Averages for Domain Scores**Score Range: 2 to 8**

Grade	Ideas / Content		Organization		Word Choice / Voice		Sentence Fluency / Conventions	
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
4th	*	5.4	*	5.3	*	5.4	*	5.5
8th	5.7	5.7	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.8	5.5	5.6
11th	5.8	5.9	5.7	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.8

* Data Not Available

“Strong writing skills are essential for success in the workplace and at college,” Breed said. “Our high school graduates entering the business world must have strong writing skills. Young people attending college will find themselves writing in every class.”

Breed said the new writing scores should be interpreted with caution since some 8th 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 8th 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.

Statewide writing results for Nebraska public school districts and school buildings are available on the Nebraska Department of Education’s homepage at: <http://www.education.ne.gov/>. Data showing student performance by racial and ethnic groups will be released next fall as part of the State of the Schools Report.