



**NEWS RELEASE**

For more information contact Betty VanDeventer at [betty.vandeventer@nebraska.gov](mailto:betty.vandeventer@nebraska.gov) or 402.471.4537

Oct. 16, 2015

# NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IMPROVE OVERALL, BY STUDENT GROUP

***Faulty federal accountability system leads to 675 Nebraska schools being labeled low performing even though 119 of those schools have 90 percent or more of their students meeting or exceeding state reading standards. And, 90 percent or more of the students in 75 of those schools are proficient in math.***

A new report released today showed that more Nebraska public school students from racial and ethnic groups as well as students from low-income families are, overall, meeting or exceeding state reading and mathematics standards.

The Nebraska Department of Education released the 2015 State of the Schools Report today. The report is available at <http://www.education.ne.gov/>. Highlights of the new report include performance for groups of students as well as federal accountability decisions under *No Child Left Behind*.

“While we still have work to do to improve the performance of all students and to close the achievement gap that persists among groups of students, it is important today to recognize and acknowledge, first, the accomplishments of our students as well as their teachers and administrators who work hard to improve the performance of every student every day,” said Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt.

In reading, trend data show a 16 percent increase in the percentage of English Language Learners meeting state reading standards when compared to 2011 results; a 14 percent improvement for Hispanic students; an 8 percent improvement for special education student performance; a 13 percent improvement for black/African American students; and, an 11 percent increase in the performance of students from low-income families. The following chart shows trend data for student groups in reading and mathematics:

READING STUDENT GROUPS	2010-11 Proficient	2011-12 Proficient	2012-13 Proficient	2013-14 Proficient	2014-15 Proficient
All students	72%	74%	77%	77%	80%
Hispanic	54%	59%	63%	64%	68%
American Indian/Alaska Native	43%	45%	49%	50%	53%
Asian	73%	74%	76%	76%	77%
Black or African American	47%	51%	54%	56%	60%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	64%	65%	68%	67%	72%

White	79%	81%	83%	84%	85%
Two or More Races	69%	72%	75%	74%	78%
Students eligible for free and reduced lunch	58%	61%	65%	65%	69%
Special Education Students	42%	44%	47%	47%	50%
English Language Learners	43%	50%	54%	54%	59%

### **MATHEMATICS STUDENT GROUPS**

All students	63%	67%	69%	71%	72%
Hispanic	44%	50%	52%	56%	58%
American Indian/Alaska Native	32%	34%	37%	43%	43%
Asian	71%	73%	73%	73%	74%
Black or African American	30%	37%	38%	42%	44%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	53%	59%	56%	63%	61%
White	71%	75%	77%	79%	79%
Two or More Races	57%	62%	65%	66%	68%
Students eligible for free and reduced lunch	48%	53%	55%	58%	59%
Special Education Students	35%	39%	40%	42%	42%
English Language Learners	37%	44%	45%	49%	49%

This year, 8 of every 10 students are proficient in reading and nearly three of every 4 students are meeting or exceeding state mathematics standards.

Considering that Nebraska student performance has improved, parents and others are likely questioning how 675 of 932 Nebraska public schools that administered state tests have been named low performing under No Child Left Behind, the federal accountability law. The answer is: The federal accountability system is flawed and misleading.

The Nebraska Department of Education does not agree with the current, outdated, federal policy. “The federal expectation of 100 percent of our students scoring proficient in reading and mathematics is unrealistic,” Blomstedt said. “I do not believe that all of our schools are low performing. Common sense tells us that one child in one grade in one subject area scoring just below a ‘proficiency cut score’ should not brand an entire school as failing.

“As a result of this faulty logic, a number of Nebraska schools have been unfairly labeled as Not Met or In Need of Improvement,” Blomstedt said.

When a school has been designated in need of improvement, federal sanctions require districts to set aside funds, offer school choice or tutoring or to restructure. Congress was scheduled to reauthorize the law in 2007 but that has not occurred, frustrating educators and policy makers in many states.

An in-depth look at those 675 schools named in need of improvement under the federal accountability system showed that 119 schools were considered low-performing even though 90 percent or more of their students were proficient in reading. And, 75 of those schools were named low-performing in math despite 90 percent or more of their students scoring proficient, which means they met or exceeded state learning expectations. Here is a breakdown of the percentage of students proficient at these 675 schools:

Subject	Proficiency Range	Number of Schools
Reading	Below 70%	135
Reading	70% - 79%	183
Reading	80% - 89%	238
Reading	90% or higher	119
<b>Total Schools</b>		<b>675</b>
Math	Below 70%	256
Math	70% - 79%	171
Math	80% - 89%	173
Math	90% or higher	75
<b>Total Schools</b>		<b>675</b>

In early December, the Nebraska Department of Education will issue its first report based on the state's new accountability system, *Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow* or AQuESTT. This system is different from past accountability systems in that it focuses on supporting and rewarding continuous school improvement for every child, school and educator. Under AQuESTT, schools and districts will be classified in one of four performance levels.

Six tenets are at the core of AQuESTT: 1) Student Success and Access 2) Transitions 3) Educational Opportunities and Access 4) College and Career Ready 5) Assessment, and 6) Educator Effectiveness. For detailed information on AQuESTT and these tenets, see <http://aquestt.com>

While AQuESTT results are not included in the State of the Schools Report, data found in this report will be a key component of AQuESTT classifications, which integrate components of accountability, including performance on state tests and graduation rates as well as school and district accreditation, college and career ready education and the effective use of data into a system.

Under AQuESTT, Nebraska's primary goal is continuous school improvement to ensure that students are college and career ready when they graduate from high school so they are successful at work, in the military and in college.

The State of the Schools Report is available at: <http://www.education.ne.gov/> or <http://reportcard.education.ne.gov>. The Commissioner's letter to public school superintendents addressing federal accountability is available at <http://www.education.ne.gov/>.