



Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) Security Manual

2022-2023



**Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System
Security Manual
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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 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. In addition to state required security measures, districts are expected to adhere to NSCAS ACT and ELPA21 security expectations.

The goals of this Security Manual are the following:

- To assure all Nebraska students equality 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 NSCAS testing process;
- To document the practices and procedures so that all NDE staff will consistently follow the steps to assure the security of NSCAS assessments.

Roles and Responsibilities:

All personnel have a role in and assume a responsibility for assuring secure NSCAS testing processes. Personnel include those in districts from the Boards of Education, the superintendents, the principals, the district assessment contacts, the teachers and test administrators, to the students themselves.

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

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

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.

Testing Irregularities are taken very seriously. Testing Irregularities 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.

NSCAS Summative test manuals for general test administration in grades 3-8 and alternate test administration in grades 3-8 and 11 include additional security information, such as scripted test directions. In addition, ELPA21 manuals and ACT manuals also include additional security information, such as scripted test directions.

II. Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) Program Overview

NSCAS Administrations for 2022-2023

All security measures apply to the following Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System Assessments:

Year	Subject	Grade Levels
2022-2023	NSCAS General Assessments	
	NSCAS Growth English Language Arts	3-8
	NSCAS Growth Mathematics	
	NSCAS Science	5 and 8
	NSCAS Alternate Summative Assessments	
	NSCAS-AA English Language Arts	3-8 and High School (3 rd Year Cohort)
	NSCAS-AA Mathematics	
	NSCAS-AA Science	5, 8, and High School (3 rd Year Cohort)
	NSCAS ACT	High School (3 rd Year Cohort)
	ELPA21	All K-12 identified as English Learners

NSCAS Details

- The Quality Education Act, 79-760.03 of Nebraska Revised Statutes, requires statewide testing.
 - Rules for statewide assessments are included in Rule 10
 - Federal law also requires statewide assessments. The current law is known as the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA)
- NSCAS assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science tests are given during a six-week testing window (from the second-to-last week of March until the first of May). NSCAS ACT and ELPA21 follow different assessment windows.
- Recommendations for determining testing schedules are provided to districts, but districts are able to schedule testing according to their testing schedule during the testing window.
- NSCAS tests are untimed with the exception of the NSCAS ACT.
- All districts are expected to follow the scripted directions in the test administration manuals.
- Make up tests are required (The expectation is that all students in the assigned grades or cohorts will be included in the state summative tests).
- If a student is not tested, a code must explain the reason for a missing score. Codes include:
 - Emergency Medical Waiver (EMW)
 - No Longer Enrolled (NLE)
 - Parental Refusal (PAR)
 - District Unable to Test Student (UTT)
 - Student Absent Entire Test Window (SAE)
 - Student Refusal (STR)
- When needed, an appeals process for unusual circumstances is applied, and an internal team reviews each such request. Contact the statewide assessment director if a consideration of unusual circumstances is needed.
- The NSCAS AA (alternate test) assesses the same subject areas and results of NSCAS AA tests are included in all state averages and accountability measures.
- The NSCAS state-developed assessments are confidential and proprietary, secure, and are owned by the Nebraska Department of Education. The test content is not to be viewed by anyone prior to or after the test administration. Only students being tested are allowed access to the test at the time of testing.

III. Security Plan Overview

The NDE believes that building and district personnel have a significant responsibility for maintaining the security of test materials and their administration. This section covers the District Assessment Contact, building principals, districts, and test security training materials.

District Assessment Contact (DAC)

- The superintendent of each school district selects a District Assessment Contact (DAC). The superintendent is responsible for notifying NDE of the designation and of any changes.
- The DAC serves as the “liaison” for all assessment matters between the Nebraska Department of Education and the school district.
- DAC names are collected annually, and a database is maintained at the assessment office and updated as needed.
- Each DAC is required to sign a DAC Confidentiality Agreement annually, assuring that he or she is responsible for providing oversight of the testing process in the district, including overall security.
- The [**DAC Confidentiality Agreement**](#) is submitted electronically to the Nebraska Department of Education Statewide Assessment Office prior to the initial testing window of the year.
- The DAC is responsible for overseeing all aspects of statewide assessment.

Building Principals

- Each building principal is required annually to sign a [**Principal Security Agreement**](#) for all NSCAS tests administered in his or her building(s).
- The security agreement specifies that the principal:
 - Assumes responsibility for the secure storage, administration, and return/destruction of materials.
 - Assures that test administrators or coordinators are appropriately and properly trained.
 - The security agreement must be submitted to the Nebraska Department of Education Assessment Office prior to the initial testing window of the year.

Districts

- DACs and principals share the responsibility for assuring that all Educators who administer NSCAS assessments are trained in appropriate procedures, security, and ethics.
- Districts must 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 encourages any district with additional questions regarding security to contact its own local school attorney for customization of its own policies.
- Districts are expected to adhere to NSCAS ACT security procedures as required by ACT.
- Districts are expected to adhere to ELPA21 security procedures as required by ELPA21.
- School districts are required to hold all certificated staff members in school districts accountable for following the *Regulations and Standards for Professional Practice Criteria as outlined in Rule 27*.
- An [Administration PowerPoint](#), sample policies, [NSCAS Security Procedures](#), and [Suggestions for a Smooth Testing Process](#) have been generated and provided for the districts by the NDE Assessment office.
- Security training materials have been posted on the [NSCAS Overview Page](#) and have been distributed through the Standards, Assessment, and Accountability Updates that are published annually.

IV. NSCAS General and Alternate Statewide-Assessment Development

Operational tests for English language arts, mathematics, and science are comprised of items that were field tested during previous administration years. The NDE involves Nebraska educators in the development of test content. This section covers the selection of subject matter experts (SMEs) and security processes in place during NSCAS exam development.

Nebraska Educator Participation

- Educators must apply for participation in test development and/or be recommended by their administrators.
- The Statewide Assessment Office makes the selection of test development participants.
- Educators who are selected are subject area experts who are trained each year for test development.
- The Statewide Assessment Office ensures, as best it can, that selected educators represent the state in both geography and demographics.

Test Security

- Educators who work on item development must sign a **confidentiality agreement** that assures the security of the assessment content under development and the confidentiality of their work.
- During test development:
 - All assessment content is stored securely.
 - NDE monitors test content developers.
 - Test content and forms are kept secure through the entire process of assessment development.
 - No outside personnel are involved in assessment development except those assigned by the NDE or the vendors.

Vendor Test Security

- The vendors' procedures assure that assessment content entered into their systems are kept secure.
- The vendors apply a rigorous review process to the Nebraska assessment content and assure the quality of assessment construction.
- Only vendor staff assigned to the Nebraska assessment process may review the assessment content.

V. NSCAS Assessment Administration

Training

- Training is the responsibility of the building principal.
- Test administrators, test proctors, and test coordinators must be trained prior to test administration.
- Training materials are provided by NDE and/or vendors.
- School districts may provide supplementary training materials.
- Educators and principals will become familiar with specified testing practices and appropriate assessment accessibility supports for testing. See the *Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) Accessibility Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accessibility Supports for Instruction and Assessment of All Students*.
- The building principal's signature on a signed security agreement affirms that they will insure training for all staff.

Test Administration Manual and Testing Directions

- The Test Administration Manuals (TAMs) provide directions to schools about appropriate test administration practices.
- Specific directions for each test administration are presented in the TAMs.
- The directions in the TAMs must be followed to maintain standardized testing.
- Selected Content from the TAMs:
 - Test rooms must be staffed at all times by trained, school-employed personnel.
 - Test directions must be read verbatim with no deviation from the provided script.
 - Proctors are to control access to all cell phones and personal electronic devices in the testing room.
 - Do not alter, influence, or interfere with a test response in any way or instruct the student to do so.
 - Do not keep, copy, reproduce, or use any specific test content, or examine responses to any item or any section of a secured test in any manner inconsistent with the instructions provided by and through the Nebraska Department of Education and assessment vendors.

VI. Monitoring Activities

The NDE organizes annual monitoring of schools during the testing windows as both a learning experience, where department staff can learn how to improve the NSCAS testing process, and as a monitoring requirement to assure appropriate testing practice in schools. This section covers school selection and monitoring.

School Selection for Monitoring

- Annually 20-50 schools are selected for monitoring.
- The assessment office selects schools and assigns monitors for the schools to be visited.
- Schools are selected based upon geographic representation, district size, and additional NSCAS testing characteristics.

Monitor Selection and Training

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

Monitor Expectations

- 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.
- Monitors may request of a school district to visit a specific content area, but it is likely that any of the content areas might be monitored.
- 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.

District Participation

- Leaders from the district/school levels are also encouraged to participate in monitoring NSCAS Assessments. Leaders are further encouraged to use the same form as NDE staff. Regular monitoring helps ensure proper testing practices are being followed across the state.

VII. Testing Irregularity Response Plan

All testing irregularities are taken seriously. This section covers basic processes for testing irregularities that may occur, including missing materials. In addition to state-required security measures, districts are expected to adhere to NSCAS ACT security procedures as required by ACT and ELPA21 security procedures as required by ELPA21 Assessment Consortium. School districts are responsible for conducting the investigation and taking appropriate action in response to reported testing irregularities.

Overview

- A testing irregularity is any non-standardized incident that may impact the results of the assessment.
 - When testing staff handles issues as expected, a testing irregularity has not occurred.
 - Example 1: A student pulls cell phone out and a staff member witnesses the act and stops the student from accessing the phone.
 - Example 2: A fire alarm goes off and the staff member has the student follow the established procedure and locks the door on the way out.
- When a testing irregularity is identified it should be reported to the building or district assessment contact as determined by each district. Building/district level assessments contacts determine if the Statewide Assessment Office at The Nebraska Department of Education needs to be notified.
- Testing irregularities may be reported by any educator, a staff member, a parent, a student, or a patron.
- If the notification of a security issue or breach is sent or called in directly to the Statewide Assessment Office, it is forwarded to the Director of Statewide Assessment and then referred to the district for initial investigation.
- Districts must report testing irregularities to Statewide Assessment Office in the following instances (Refer to the table below for additional examples):
 - The testing irregularity provided an advantage for a student(s).
 - The testing irregularity resulted in the release or potential release of secure test content.
 - The testing irregularity included the unethical conduct by district employees.

Does NOT need to be reported to NDE	Must be reported to NDE
<p>Incident that violates the intent of the standardized and/or security expectations set forth by NDE but does not result in any student having an advantage, the release of secure content, and/or unethical conduct by certified staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related content was left on the wall uncovered at the back of the room. Proctors realize the oversight following the administration but there was no evidence that students were turning around to use the related content for an advantage. 	<p>Provides an advantage for a student(s)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student uses their cell phone to contact their parent for a ride after school. The student was caught but the proctor was unsure how the student used the cell phone. After the incident is investigated there is no evidence that a student had an advantage or released any content. 	<p>Release or potential release of secure content</p>
	<p>Unethical conduct by district staff</p>

Testing Irregularities Reported to Statewide Assessment Office

- If districts are unsure if a testing irregularity should be reported to the Statewide Assessment Office, they are encouraged to request input from the Director of Statewide Assessment. Such consultation may eliminate or solidify the need for formal documentation.
- Testing irregularities that are reported to the Statewide Assessment Office should use the established template to ensure required information is included in the report.
- Testing Irregularities reported to the Statewide Assessment Office will be classified in one or more of the following categories:
 - **Test Irregularity** - remains a test irregularity as it does not rise to the level of the other categories.
 - If paused, student should resume testing
 - Largely an opportunity to improve training or processes
 - Student(s) did not receive an advantage; no secure content was revealed or potential revealed
 - Certified educators did not engage in unethical behavior
 - **Misadministration** - student(s) had an advantage based on a mistake or behavior.

- If possible, student(s) should be retested; inability to secure a new valid test result will result in the original result being invalidated and used for public reporting and accountability.
 - Any consequences should be determined at the building or district level
- **Security Breach** - secure content was released or potentially released by inappropriate behavior of a student or adult.
 - Secure content was revealed or possibly revealed in part or in whole that results in the content no longer being viable for use in secure testing
 - Any consequences should be determined at the building or district level
- **Professional Practice Violation** - certified educator engages in unethical behavior that violates the professional code of conduct.
 - Certified staff either intentionally or by negligence participated in unethical behavior.
 - Should be referred to the Professional Practices Commission by any professional educator who witnesses or learns of the behavior. Should be reported by the school principal if the incident was reported to the principal.
 - Consequences may occur at multiple levels of the Nebraska educational system.

Response to the Security Breach Report by Director of Statewide Assessment

- The Director of Assessment will review the situation.
- The Director of Assessment will determine whether or not the incident should be reviewed by the NDE legal team, professional practices commission, or the Commissioner.
- 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.
- NDE may invalidate any or all test scores involved in an investigation.

Missing Materials

- Missing materials are a serious potential breach of NSCAS 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.