



# **Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) Security Manual**

**2024-2025**



**Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System**

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# Security Manual

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction .....	i
The goals of this Security Manual are the following: .....	i
Roles and Responsibilities: .....	i
II. Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) Growth Testing Program Overview .....	1
Current Program .....	3
III. Security Plan Overview .....	4
District Assessment Contact (DAC).....	4
Building Principals.....	4
Districts .....	4
IV. NSCAS General and Alternate Statewide-Assessment Development .....	6
Nebraska Educator Participation .....	6
Test Security.....	6
Vendor Test Security.....	6
V. NSCAS Growth Assessment Administration .....	7
Training .....	7
Test Administration Manual and Testing Directions .....	7
VI. Monitoring Activities .....	8
School Selection for Monitoring.....	8
Monitor Selection and Training .....	8
Monitor Expectations .....	8
VII. Security Incident Response Plan.....	9
Overview .....	9
Initial Investigation by Director of Statewide Assessment.....	9
Response to the Report by Director of Statewide Assessment.....	10
Missing Materials.....	10

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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 NSCAS Growth 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. In addition to state required security measures, districts are expected to adhere to ACT and ELPA21 security.

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

### Roles and Responsibilities:

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

At the NDE, many are responsible for the security of the NSCAS Growth testing process 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 Growth testing process contribute to the level of security needed to assure a fair, reliable, and consistent NSCAS 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. Breaches 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 Growth 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) Growth Testing Program Overview

### Growth Assessment Administrations for 2024-2025

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

Year	Subject	Grade Level
<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>NSCAS Growth General Assessments</b>	<b>3-8</b>
	<b>NSCAS English Language Arts</b>	
	<b>NSCAS Mathematics</b>	
	<b>NSCAS Science</b>	<b>5 and 8</b>
	<b>NSCAS Growth Alternate Assessments</b>	<b>3-8 and High School (3<sup>rd</sup> Year Cohort)</b>
	<b>NSCAS-AA English Language Arts</b>	
	<b>NSCAS-AA Mathematics</b>	
	<b>NSCAS-AA Science</b>	<b>5, 8, and High School (3<sup>rd</sup> Year Cohort)</b>
	<b>ACT</b>	<b>High School (3<sup>rd</sup> Year Cohort)</b>
	<b>ELPA21</b>	<b>K-12</b>

### History

- The Quality Education Act, 79-760.03 of Nebraska Revised Statutes, requires statewide testing.
- Centralized statewide tests, Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA), were first introduced in 2010 as outlined in the legislation.
- These tests became fully operational in 2012 when the NeSA science tests were administered.
- Since then statewide tests in reading & writing (English language arts), mathematics, and science have been developed and administered to all Nebraska public school districts.
- In the first three years of test administration districts could either test students in paper/pencil mode or online with computers.
- The majority of districts chose to test their students online, and later studies supported this mode of delivery.
- In 2012 the State Board of Education issued a requirement that students were to be tested online, with accommodations for students with a need for paper/pencil tests.
- A battery of alternate tests, NeSA-AA, for the most significantly challenged students (generally not more than 1% of the assessed population) was developed in accord with the general NeSA tests.

- The Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) tests are no longer administered. The state summative assessments are part of the newly developed Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS).

**The statewide Growth assessments are transitioning to assess college and career-readiness, according to the schedule below:**

Growth Test	Tested Standards 2019-2020	Year of Transition to Assessment of College and Career Ready Standards
NSCAS English Language Arts	Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards of English Language Arts	Spring 2017
NSCAS Mathematics	Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards of Mathematics	Spring 2018
NSCAS Science	Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards of Science (Field Test Only)	Spring 2021
NSCAS-AA English Language Arts	Nebraska College and Career Ready Extended Standards of English Language Arts	Spring 2017
NSCAS-AA Mathematics	Nebraska College and Career Ready Extended Standards of Mathematics	Spring 2018
NSCAS-AA Science	Nebraska College and Career Ready Extended Standards of Science (Field Test Only)	Spring 2021
ACT	ACT College and Career Readiness Standards	Spring 2016

## Current Program

- NSCAS Growth assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and general science tests are given during a six-week testing window (from the second-to-last week of March until the first of May). 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 Growth tests are untimed with the exception of the 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)
  - Exempt (EXP)
  - Full-Time Equivalency (FTE)
  - Invalid (INV)
  - Left Before Window (LBW)
  - Not Currently Enrolled (NCE)
  - Other (OTH)
  - Parental Refusal (PAR)
  - Student Refusal (STR)
  - Unable to Test (UTT)
- 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) assess 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, their administration, and their return. 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 to the Nebraska Department of Education Assessment Office prior to the testing window.
- 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 Growth tests administered in his or her building(s).
- The security agreement specifies that the principal:
  - Assumes responsibility for the secure storage, administration, and return 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 testing window.

#### Districts

- DACs and principals share the responsibility for assuring that all Educators who administer NSCAS 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 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. You will find these on our website.
- 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 in grades 3-8 and alternate 3-8 and 11, 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 be recommended by their administrators.
- The 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 Assessment Office ensures 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:
- NDE monitors test content developers.
- Assessment content is reviewed by NDE staff before being transferred to the vendor.
- 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 Growth 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 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 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 more about 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 50-70 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.

## VII. Security Incident Response Plan

All incidents and types of security breaches are taken seriously. This section covers basic processes for issues or security breaches that may occur, including missing materials. In addition to state-required security measures, districts are expected to adhere to ACT security procedures as required by ACT and ELPA21 security procedures as required by ELPA21. School districts are responsible for conducting the investigation and taking appropriate action in response to breaches in test security.

### Overview

- When a security breach is reported, the report may be written or oral.
- Security breaches may be reported by any educator in a school district, a parent, a student, or a patron.
- 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.

### Initial Investigation by Director of Statewide Assessment

- The Director of Statewide Assessment will follow up with the person reporting.
- The Director of Statewide Assessment will ask for a written report of the security breach using the **Report of Security Breach** form.
- The written report will include:
  - How the security breach occurred
  - When the security breach occurred
  - Who was involved
  - 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 following the investigation
  - The actions the district is taking to insure that the incident will not be repeated.

### 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.