**By Jan Rahn**
*Managing Editor*

State results were released last month for student performance in writing.

"We will need to look at our scores over the next few years compared to this year's scores to truly evaluate our progress, strengths, and areas that need improvement," said Perkins County Schools Superintendent Tobin Buchanan.

Perkins County Schools fourth, eighth and 11th graders were tested, with the scores released by the Nebraska Department of Education in May comparing students statewide.

The tests measure the newly-revised Nebraska state writing standards and determine Nebraska's student writing proficiency in the designated three grades.

Fourth Grade

Seventy-nine percent of PCS fourth grade students met the standard—however, last year 82 percent met the writing standard.

"It is our goal every year to meet or exceed the state average," said Buchanan. "Our score this year dipped 3 percent below last year's scores. We will continue to look at strategies to improve our students' writing."

Statewide, of the 22,001 students tested, 92 percent of the fourth grade student population met the state standard.

The fourth graders were given timed paper/pencil tests over two days and were scored as either "proficient" or not.

This writing process has been underway in Nebraska since 2001, and students have improved over time.

In 2013 a more rigorous writing process will be applied to grade four writing.

Eighth and 11th Grade

This year, a new process and scoring system was handed to students in grades eight and 11, said Buchanan.

They only got one day to complete the assessmet on a computer.

The bar was raised, according to the State Board of Education who began a new, more rigorous writing process for students. In addition to the newly revised writing standards, the writing process became more "college and career ready."

A more rigorous scoring process was also applied. The new scoring rubric included higher expectations in four areas of writing: content, organization, word choice, and writing mechanics.

Districts for the first time will receive specific feedback in the areas where writing instruction and student performance needs improvement.

"This year should be considered a baseline year for data," said Buchanan. "Scores next year can be compared back to this year's scores."

- Eighth grade: 69 percent of PCS students were proficient in writing compared to 63 percent statewide. There were 20,810 students tested in Nebraska.
- 11th grade: 63 percent of PCS juniors were proficient in the standards compared to 62 percent statewide among 20,961 students tested in writing.