

# Central principal says tests are a diagnostic tool

**By Kathryn Burke**  
*The Goodland Star-News*  
 Sharon Gregory, principal of Central Elementary, says the standardized tests administered in the Goodland School District each year are used mainly for teachers to identify problems and to help kids learn. "We use it as a diagnostic look," said Gregory as she presented test scores to the school board Monday, "as well as a measure."

Gregory and Shelly Angelos, principal at West Elementary, presented data from the Jerry John's Diagnostic Reading Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The Jerry John's test is administered in the fall and again in the spring, they said, not only to determine where students are, but how much they progress over the year. For the fall this year, second-grade students were lower than average, with only 38.8 percent at or above their grade level. Gregory presented the board with numbers from previous years show-

ing the rate of improvement over a few years. Last year, the data shows the second grade did better, with 51 percent at or above grade level. The year before, however, the second graders scored lower, with only 35.9 percent at or above grade level. Angelos presented a breakdown of the tested group to the board. Ninety three percent of special education students, 63.6 percent of at-risk students and 55.6 percent of English language learners scored below grade level, she said. She said the test is administered early, about six weeks before the cutoff date. The state gives schools a certain date on which the test must be completed and West school has held it earlier than they have to. Angelos said teachers would have more opportunities to prepare students if given the extra time. "Six weeks could do a lot for this test," she said adding they are working on better preparation for next year's second graders. The board agreed, but decided

early testing would make the data different from previous years and harder to compare. Gregory said the most important thing is the improvement that even a low-scoring class can show from fall to spring and over a few years. The test results show that the current third grade, last year's second graders, had 90.4 percent of students at or above grade level in the spring and 84.5 percent at or above this fall, she said. The lower-scoring current fourth grade improved their scores from the 35.9 percent in the fall of their second-grade year to 73.4 percent at or above grade level in the spring. That number increased over the years, with 69.1 percent scoring at or above grade level in the spring of last year and then 71.3 percent this past fall. Gregory said the Jerry John's test is given to first graders in the spring and every other grade through fourth in the fall and spring. Title I kids, she said, are given a third

round of the test, at midyear. The scores, Gregory said, are sometimes low for second graders because of experiences at home. "Some students don't always come to school ready to learn," she said. Some students have a background including reading at home and preschools, she said, while others haven't been exposed to reading. Gregory said a few students are not developmentally ready for reading. After the first few years, she said, the students level out and gain some experience with learning. Scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills places the students at or above grade level for in reading, math and composite, a category including science, social studies, language and reference materials in addition to math and reading. Eleventh graders are scoring at a twelfth grade level in both reading and math and on a thirteen-plus grade level in the composite. Tenth graders are on an eleventh grade level in reading and composite and a 10.9 grade equivalent in math. The test is measured in grades two through 11 and each grade, except for second, scored at or above the national average. "That's the norm," Gregory said. "We did respectfully well."

Gregory said the test scores help teachers "red-flag" any area students need help on and focus lessons for them. Teachers can learn new ways to teach different students through catering to the flagged items. Individual students, she said, can be identified and given more help, too. This summer, Gregory said, teacher met to go over the test results in a Red, White and Blue Data Analysis. She said the analysis looks at how students scored in each area and what needs to be stressed in the classroom. The analysis lets teachers and administrators look at which areas have more questions and need more emphasis for the students to do well on the tests. Gregory said teachers use the tests for Individualized Learning Programs, too. Teachers at Central, she said, are incorporating applied math, including measurements, into their lesson plans, since students scored low last year. For example, she said one teacher is including concepts of whole numbers, place values on money and solving real world problems into math lessons. "We do use a lot of the information to drive our curriculum," Gregory said. Although not all of the tests are sent into the state, she said, the

schools must show "adequate yearly progress." She said that means the scores from year to year have to go up as part of the No Child Left Behind Act. Gregory said they use the Iowa Test, the state Assessment Tests, and local measures for school improvement. She said they use those results along with teacher recommendations to determine which students need to take summer school or extra classes. "We're concerned about kids not taking the test seriously," she said. Gregory said right now, the test scores are not directly linked to federal money, and she hasn't seen any school denied help for not meeting the adequate yearly progress mark. That might change, she said, as the bar to meet the progress is moved up, eventually hitting a 100 percent expectation mark for schools. That means every student in every school will be expected to show a certain amount of progress each year, a task that Gregory said is almost impossible. This year, the fourth, seventh and tenth grades will be taking math and science; the sixth, eighth and eleventh will be taking social studies tests; and the fifth, eighth and eleventh will take reading tests. All the tests are state assessment measures the school will use to help measure the adequate yearly progress.

## Cow/calf trade show planned

The Tri-State Cow/Calf Symposium and Trade Show, "Focus on Information and Opportunities," will be held from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 29, at the St. Francis Community High School. "The cow/calf industry is in a very dynamic state at present," said Tye Faulkender, Cheyenne County extension director. "Cattlemen of the tri-state region are among the best at staying progressive minded. "We look forward to bringing this highly informational event to the cattlemen of the area." The first registration for a group is \$20, with additional members charged \$15 if paid before Tuesday, Jan. 25. The cost will be \$30 after the deadline. Included in the fee will be trade show activities, lunch and seminars. Brochures with registration forms will be coming soon in the mail. The schedule for the day involves a trade show and talks, including:

- Update on the National Animal ID Program by George Teagarden, Kansas livestock commissioner.
- Turning Animal ID and Information into Profit, Bill Mies, E-Merge Interactive.
- What Producers Need to Know About Foreign Animal Diseases, Dr. Hallie Hasel, state veterinarian.
- Rebuilding the Cowherd, Options for Replacements, Jack Whittier, Colorado State University.
- Selecting Genetics to Match Today's Market, Jim Gosey, University of Nebraska.
- Carcass Evaluation 101, Cynthia Dixon, Rawlins County extension agent.
- Technologies and Tools for Implementing Individual Animal

Identification, Dr. Dale Blasi, Beef, Forage and Nutrition, K-State Research and Extension.

- What's Ahead for Cow/Calf Producers: Cattle Outlook for 2005 and Beyond, Jim Minert, Livestock Marketing, K-State Extension and Research.

For further details, call Dr. Sandy Johnson, area extension specialist for livestock, at (785) 462-6281; Faulkender at (785) 332-3171; or your county Extension office. Make checks payable to Cheyenne County Extension office, Box 667, St. Francis, Kan. 67756.



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