

Neb. ACT Scores Dip But Top National Average

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska high school students are still outscoring their peers nationally on the ACT college entrance exam even though the state's results slipped from last year, according to a report released Wednesday.

The yearly report shows Nebraska students who graduated this year outpaced the national average in English, reading, mathematics and science.

Nebraska students scored an average of 22, down from 22.1 last year, on the test that measures college readiness. The national average is 21.1. The highest possible ACT score is 36.

The test is widely accepted for admission to Midwest colleges, while schools on the coasts require the SAT.

The report also shows that 16,581 students — 78 percent of the total class of 2012 — took the test. Nebraska was one of 18 states with a participation rate higher than 75 percent.

Nebraska students scored highest in English, with 75 percent meeting the goal for college readiness compared to 67 percent nationally. They scored lowest in science, with 36 percent qualifying as college-ready, compared to 31 percent nationwide.

In reading, 59 percent were deemed college-ready, compared to the 52 percent national average. Fifty-one percent met the benchmark for math, while 31 percent did nationally.

The scores have held stable over the last five years, with small changes in scores for students in different racial groups. Scores for African American students dipped from 17.5 in 2008 to 17.1 this year.

American Indian and Alaska Native students scored an average of 17.9, down from 19.1 in 2008. White students saw a small improvement, from 22.5 to 22.7, and scores for Hispanic/Latino students decreased from 19.5 to 19. Asian student scores were 22.1 this year, compared to 22.9 in 2008.

U.N.: Consult With Tribes On Land Sale

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A United Nations fact finder is urging the federal government and local and state officials in South Dakota to consult with Native Americans ahead of a planned auction of land in the Black Hills.

James Anaya says he is aware of concerns about the auctioning of nearly 2,000 acres of privately owned land in western South Dakota. Tribes making up the Great Sioux nation consider the land sacred and are trying to raise money to purchase it.

He says the tribes should be consulted before any activity that would disturb the land takes place.

Anaya has earlier named the Black Hills as an example of land that should be returned to tribes as a way to foster reconciliation.

Army National Guard Unit Returns To S.D.

RAPID CITY (AP) — Six soldiers from the South Dakota Army National Guard have returned to the United States following a yearlong deployment.

The Rapid City-based Detachment 48 was deployed last year to Afghanistan to provide aerial surveillance in support of ground forces. They returned to Rapid City on Wednesday with a ceremony featuring Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch and Rapid City Mayor Sam Koiker.

The unit deployed to Afghanistan for seven months in 2008.

Two Ex-Workers Sentenced In Abuse Cases

BEATRICE, Neb. (AP) — Two former workers at a Nebraska center for developmentally disabled adults are going to prison for abusing residents.

KWBE radio says a judge on Wednesday sentenced Cameron Barnes, of Fairbury, to 2 to 4 years on two felony counts of abuse of a vulnerable adult, to be served consecutively. Matthew Johnson, of Beatrice, was sentenced to consecutive 1 to 4 year prison terms on similar charges.

Attorneys for both men asked for probation. Gage County District Judge Paul Korslund sentenced them to prison, saying they had violated a trust to care for those who could not care for themselves.

Barnes and Johnson were among five workers fired and charged after an investigation at the Beatrice State Development Center last year. The investigation found at least seven residents were routinely abused.

Nebraska

Report: Medicaid Expansion Would Help Economy

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Expanding Medicaid in Nebraska as part of the federal health care law would reduce a "silent tax" that consumers pay in the form of higher premiums, according to a report from the University of Nebraska.

The report by the University of Nebraska Medical Center estimates that extending coverage would provide health care access to 90,000 new enrollees over six years. It also would return between \$2.9 billion and \$3.5 billion in federal money to the state through 2020, and sustain an estimated 10,000 jobs over the next eight years.

The analysis follows an earlier report by the university's Center for Health Policy, which found that the number of uninsured Nebraska residents topped 271,100 in 2010 — a 67 percent increase since 2000. Rates of

uninsured were particularly high in the so-called "rural-frontier counties" of western and central Nebraska, regions with larger immigrant populations and fewer companies that can afford to subsidize employee health insurance.

Expanding Medicaid would cost the state \$140 million to \$168 million, according to the report. But Jim Stimpson, the study's author, wrote that it would also reduce the cost of uncompensated care, which health insurers pass on to consumers through higher premiums.

The estimated amount of uncompensated care would shrink by \$650 million between 2014 and 2019, according to the report. Uncompensated costs without the expansion are expected to top \$1 billion.

"Investing in the health of Nebraskans has

always been the right moral choice, but UNMC's report is additional evidence that providing health care coverage through this new program under the ACA is also the right fiscal choice and the right economic choice," Jennifer Carter, director of Nebraska Appleseed's Health Care Access Program, said in a statement.

Republican Gov. Dave Heineman has criticized the Medicaid expansion proposal as potentially too costly for the state. He said the federal government has a history of not fulfilling its financial commitments.

Stimpson acknowledged his findings relied on the assumption that the federal contribution would not drop below 90 percent by 2020. But he noted that Nebraska officials could opt back out of the Medicaid expansion if the share of federal money shrinks.

Candidate Unveils Education Proposal

BY DAVE KOLPACK
 Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. — The Democratic candidate aiming to unseat North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple said Wednesday the Republican chief executive is hoarding money the oil-rich state should use to pay for education.

State Sen. Ryan Taylor unveiled his "Lasting Harvest" plan for pre-kindergarten through college that includes funding for early childhood programs, more scholarship money for college students and a boost in teacher salaries.

"As a state we have this \$2 billion budget surplus mounting and it's up to the governor, it's up to our leaders in Bismarck, to invest those dollars wisely," Taylor said during a news conference at the downtown Fargo Public Library. "Currently the Republican Legislature and the governor have sat on those dollars for too long while needs across our state go unaddressed."

While the state's revenue from oil production has built up the healthy surplus, more than half of which is socked away in rainy day funds, state spending on K-12 and higher education has gone up substantially under Dalrymple. He took over for Gov. John Hoeven after Hoeven was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2010.

Amanda Godfread, Dalrymple's communications director, said the governor's commitment to education is evident in the endorsement of the North Dakota

Education Association, which represents about 8,500 educators.

"Jack Dalrymple's plans for the future help schools address rapidly increasing enrollments, and secure equitable funding for teachers and students to succeed," Godfread said.

Taylor promoted his plan with comparisons to other states. North Dakota is one of 10 states in the country that does not fund the Head Start program for low-income children, one of 11 states with no money for pre-kindergarten curriculums, and one of 11 states without ongoing financing for school facilities, he said.

There are 985 families in the state on the waiting list for Head Start, including 330 from the Fargo region, he said.

"It's embarrassing. And we can do better," Taylor said.

Taylor's plan would provide \$10 million for Head Start and \$10 million for pre-kindergarten classes. He said the state should create a pool of \$100 million for school facilities in areas that are

seeing rapid growth.

The Towner rancher said he would raise teacher pay that ranks what he called "an embarrassing" 47th in the nation to 40th within his first term.

"Wealthiest state in the country. Forty-seventh in teacher pay," he said, shaking his head.

Taylor's running mate, former Valley City State University and Mayville State University president Ellen Chaffee, outlined a needs-based scholarship program that she said would cut student loan debt in half, and talked about forming an advisory committee to help with the selection process for the state Board of Higher Education.

The state's college students incurred \$184 million worth of debt during the 2010-11 school term, Chaffee said.

"North Dakota is in a position to help," Chaffee said. "Other oil-producing states like Wyoming have used a portion of their oil revenue to invest in their students' education. We would follow suit."

S.D. Gov. And A.G. Urge Open Government

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Attorney General Marty Jackley say government should be as open as possible so people can find out what the state and local governments are doing.

Daugaard and Jackley spoke Wednesday at the first meeting of a task force they formed to study the state's laws on open meetings and open records.

The 33-member panel decided to study laws that require government agencies to provide public notices of meetings and allow them to close meetings only for limited purposes. The task force also will look into laws that determine which documents are open and how much government agencies can charge to provide those records.

Members of the task force range from city, county and state officials to law officers and journalists.

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