



National Center for **Research** on  
**Rural** Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

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## Rural Education Research Digest

Mills, S. J., & Isernhagen, J. C. (2010). *Improving rural student writing: A critical leadership issue*. In B. Irby, B. Alford, G. Perreault, & L. Zellner (Eds.), *National Council of Professors of Educational Administration Yearbook 2010: Promoting critical ideas of leadership, culture and diversity*. Lancaster, PA: DEStech Publications.

In 2000, the Nebraska legislature passed a bill to institute a state-wide writing test. Because no state assessment existed, the Nebraska State Department of Education decided to create the reading assessment from the classroom up by instituting the *6+1 Writing Model* developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in all Nebraska schools. The six elements in this model serve as the basis for the standards in writing proficiency state wide. Teachers from across the state worked together to establish the test items and rubrics used to assess students' appropriate mastery of the six elements given student grade level. Implementation of the model and the assessment has provided a common language for principals to communicate with teachers about proficiency at various student levels and to monitor student achievement. This study examined the performance of students in 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades in rural areas (defined as population less than 24,999 and outside of a metropolitan area) in Nebraska, in an effort to evaluate the efficacy of the individualized programs and proficiency to the state-wide standards.

Data was obtained from average reported scores that met or exceeded the state standards from 2002 through 2007 in the 243 rural districts in Nebraska. Eighth grade students began testing in 2003 and showed the most significant improvement with an 11.66% increase in scores after implementation of the *6+1 Writing Model*. Fourth graders began testing in 2002 and also showed a significant increase in scores with a mean increase of 8.5%. Eleventh graders began testing in 2004 and had the least significant increase (2.97%); however, their baseline percentage scores were higher than 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

Teachers reported that using the new model enhanced teaching efficacy, increased student performance, and allowed for easier assessment of deficit areas in student learning. The results of this study support the Nebraska legislature's goal of increasing students' writing skills and increasing the efficacy of student and teacher interactions about writing. The authors suggest that it is essential for principals to become involved with teachers and parents in the training and implementation of the model in order to understand its effect on student performance and to provide teacher accountability. These results are significant for rural schools because the implementation of the *6+1 Writing Model* has unified writing curriculum across the state and provided a common language with which to communicate about student writing abilities.