

## Executive Summary

This report provides the Nebraska Legislature with comparative statistics to monitor and evaluate progress toward achieving **three key priorities** for Nebraska's postsecondary education system:

- **Increase the number of students who enter postsecondary education in Nebraska.**
- **Increase the percentage of students who persist and successfully complete a degree.**
- **Reduce, eliminate, and then reverse the net out-migration of Nebraskans with high levels of educational attainment.**

These priorities were developed by the 2003 LR 174 Higher Education Task Force and are incorporated in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 85-1428 (3).

This summary highlights the comparative analysis used to measure and evaluate performance with respect to each priority. Throughout this analysis, the latest available statistics are compared to the quantitative baselines established in 2004 for the LR 174 Higher Education Task Force. The complete report and its appendices, which are online at [ccpe.nebraska.gov/reports](http://ccpe.nebraska.gov/reports), provide a detailed and fully documented analysis.

## Overall Progress and Challenges Facing the State

- The research findings in the *2016 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report* reflect modest annual changes in the state's postsecondary education system.
- **While the changes measured each year have been relatively small, progress through 2010 was generally in the right direction with respect to the first and second priorities recommended in 2003. However, between 2010 and 2014, enrollments have declined.**
- Estimates of net migration—priority three—do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude whether Nebraska is gaining or losing more working-age adults with college degrees.
- Even though progress toward most of the state's higher-education goals is generally in the right direction, it is not aggressive enough to meet the state's long-term needs and goals.
  - Since 2002–2003, the number of students graduating from Nebraska's high schools has increased 4.3%. The cohort four-year graduation rate has increased from 86% in 2010–2011 to 89% in 2014–2015. However, many students continue to drop out of high school before they earn diplomas, lessening their likelihood of financial and other successes and, for the purposes of this report, reducing the pool of students who could go to college.
  - The fall 2012 college-going rate of Nebraska public and private high school students was the 18th highest nationally, but it has not increased significantly for graduates of Nebraska's public high schools since the Commission began estimating college continuation rates in 2007–2008.
  - Overall freshmen retention rates have increased slightly since 2004 while the state's overall college graduation rates have also increased slightly since 2004. College graduation rates are significantly lower for Hispanics, black non-Hispanics, Native Americans, and multiracial students than for white non-Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduate students.
  - Nebraska has increased the amount of state funds allocated for need-based financial aid, but state funding has not kept pace with the number of students who are eligible for state grants. The Nebraska Opportunity Grant program has aided thousands of students, but more state-funded, need-based aid is needed to enable more of the state's low-income and moderately low-income students to go to college and earn degrees.

# Priority 1

## Increase the number of students who enter postsecondary education in Nebraska

Decreasing enrollments are one of the most significant trends evidenced in this report on higher education in Nebraska. Since 2010, Nebraska’s total fall enrollment has decreased an estimated 5.8% to 137,571. Meanwhile, first-time freshmen (FTF) enrollment decreased to 18,407, a 6.3% decline since 2010. The decrease is consistent with national trends over the same period.

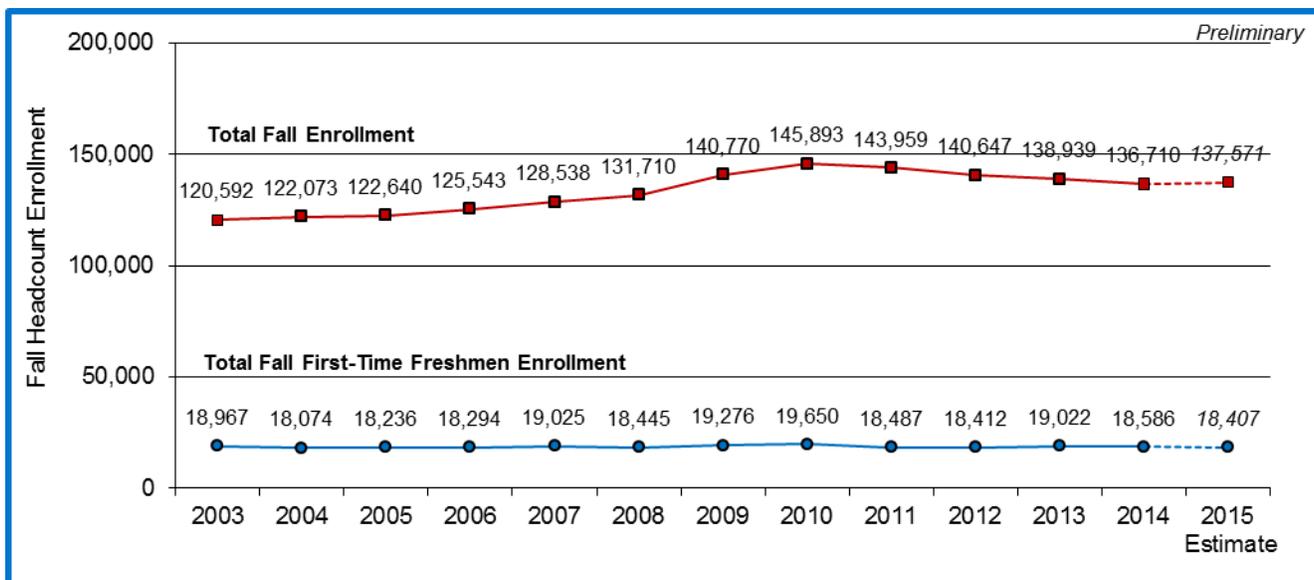
It is estimated that fall 2015 statewide enrollment increased 0.6% since 2014, resulting in a 12-year increase of 14.1% since baseline in fall 2003. As shown on the next page, between 2003 and 2014, total fall enrollment increased 11.3% at the University of Nebraska, 17.6% at the state colleges, and 40.4% at the independent institutions. Meanwhile, fall enrollment declined 0.2% at the community colleges and 2.5% at the for-profit/career schools.

### Total fall enrollments

Nebraska’s total postsecondary headcount enrollment increased steadily from 120,592 in fall 2003 to a high of 145,893 in fall 2010, an increase of 21.0%. However, fall enrollment decreased to 136,710 in fall 2014, for an overall 11-year increase of 13.4%.

Based on preliminary estimates, between 2014 and 2015, fall enrollments increased 1.2% at the University of Nebraska and 5.1% at the independent institutions. It is estimated that fall enrollments at the state colleges were unchanged while declining 2.1% at the community colleges and 20.5% at the for-profit/career schools.

Fall Total Headcount Enrollment and First-Time Freshmen Enrollment: Fall 2003 – Fall 2015



Note. See Figure 1.1 (page 3) and Figure 1.14 (page 16).

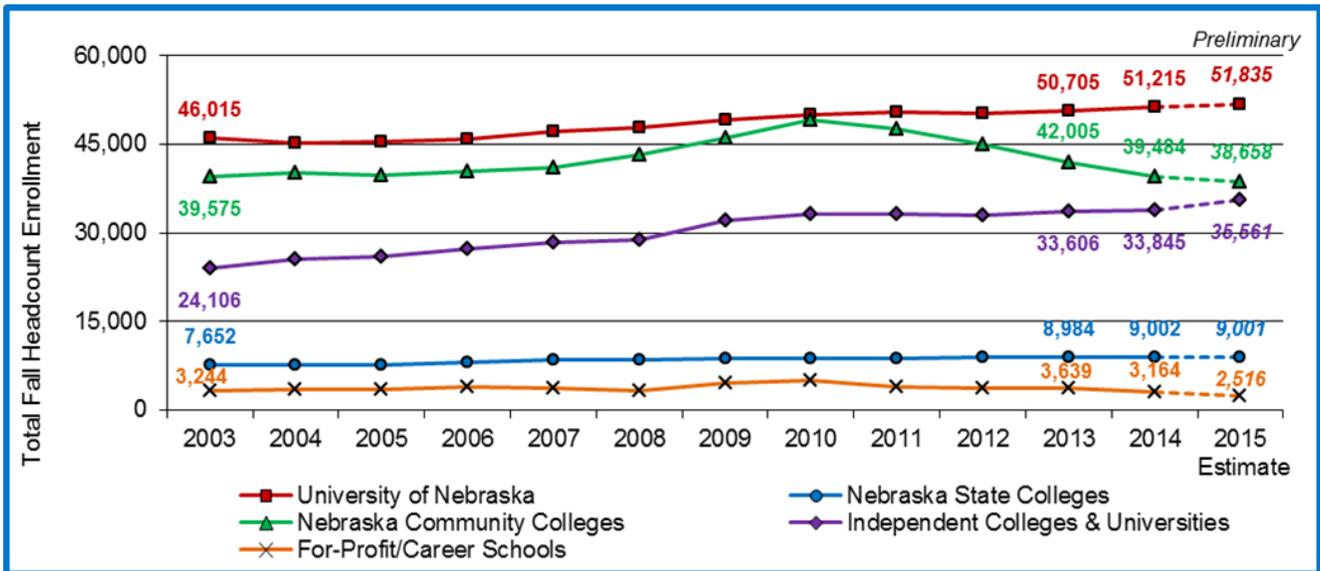
Freshmen fall enrollments

Total enrollment of first-time freshmen (FTF) at the state's postsecondary institutions decreased 2.0%, from 18,967 in fall 2003 to 18,586 in fall 2014.

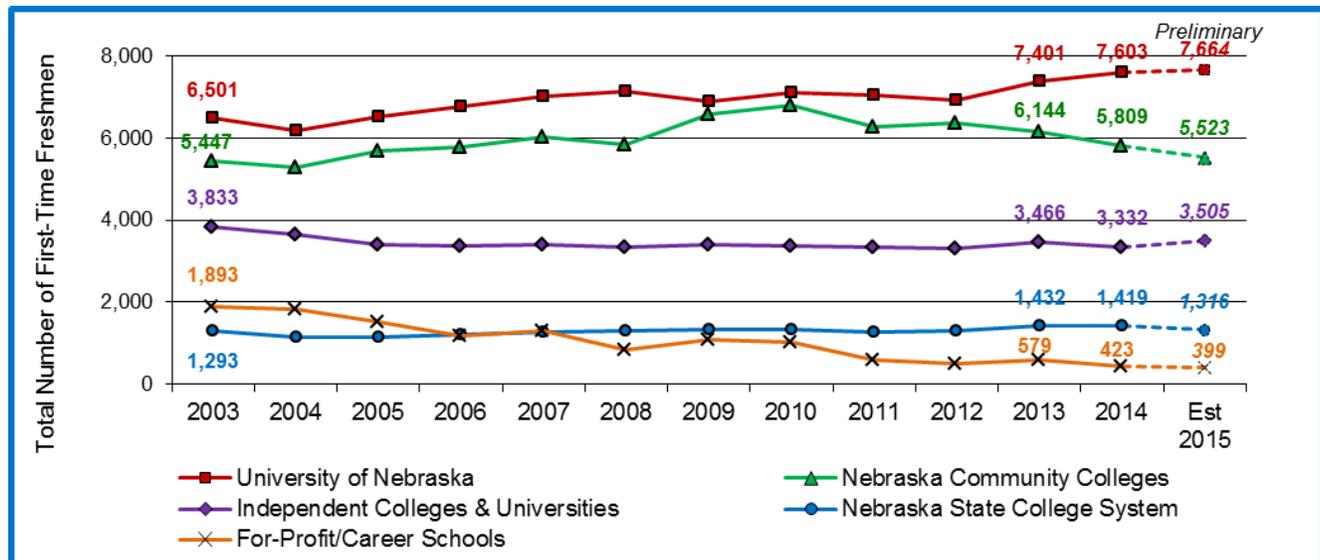
It is estimated that fall 2015 statewide FTF enrollment decreased by 1.0% since 2014, resulting in a 12-year decrease of 3.0% since baseline.

Between fall 2003 and fall 2015, FTF enrollment decreased an estimated 8.6% at the independent institutions and 78.9% at the for-profit/career school sector. However, FTF enrollment increased 17.9% at the University of Nebraska, 1.8% at the Nebraska State College System, and 1.4% at the community colleges.

**Fall Total Headcount Enrollment by Sector: Fall 2003 – Fall 2015**



**First-Time Freshmen Enrollment by Sector: Fall 2003 – Fall 2015**



Note. See Figure 1.2 (page 4) and Figure 1.17 (page 19).

Nebraska high schools—Nebraska’s primary source of college students

Since 2002–2003, the number of students graduating annually from Nebraska high schools has increased 4.3%, from 21,972 to 22,912 in 2014–2015.

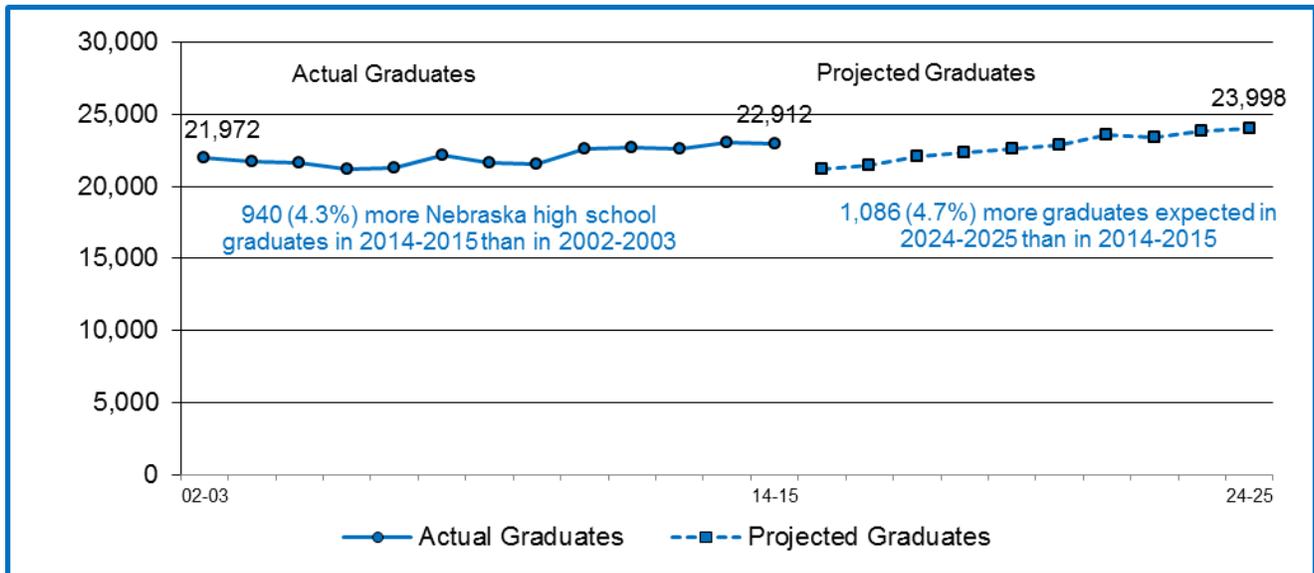
Based on the latest projections, Nebraska high schools will graduate about 1,086 more students in 2024–2025 than in 2014–2015, an increase of 4.7%.

Shifting high school demographics

The demographic profile of Nebraska’s high school graduates is forecast to continue to change over the next decade.

Even though Hispanic students graduate from high school at a lower *rate* than white non-Hispanics, they are projected to account for 18.1% of Nebraska’s public high school graduates by 2024–2025, compared to 14.9% in 2014–2015. Additionally, other minorities are projected to account for 12.2% of Nebraska’s public high school graduates by 2024–2025, compared to 12.0% in 2014–2015.

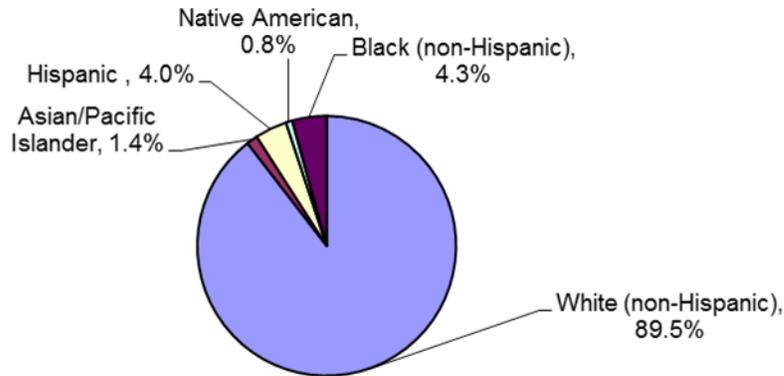
**Actual and Projected Number of Nebraska High School Graduates  
2002–2003 through 2024–2025**



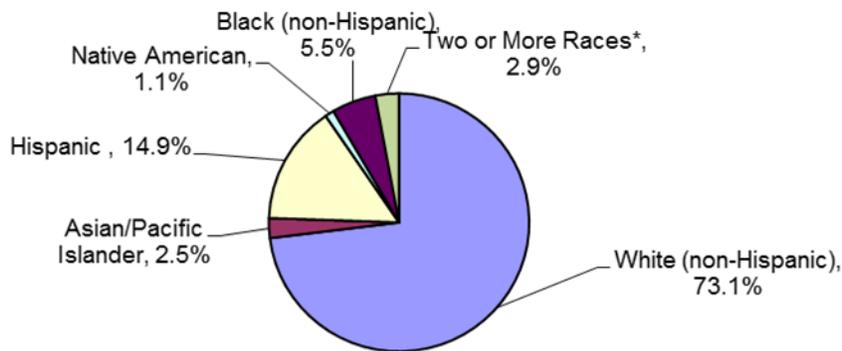
Note. See Figure 1.1.a.1 (page 23) and Figure 1.1.a.2 (page 25).

## Actual and Projected Percentages of Nebraska Public High School Graduates

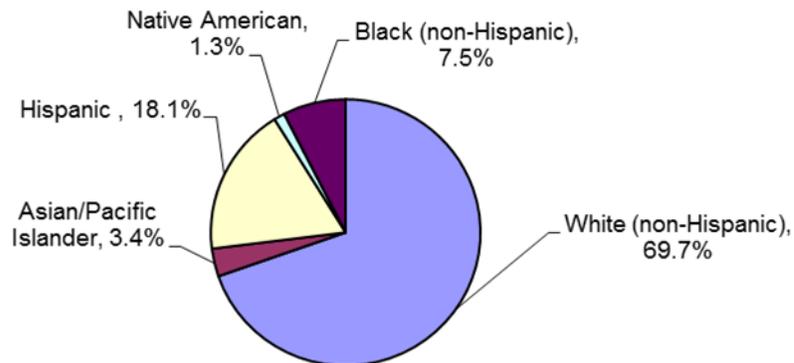
### Actual Percentages of Graduates: 2002–2003 Baseline



### Actual Percentages of Graduates: 2014–2015



### Projected Percentages of Graduates: 2024–2025



Note. See Figure 1.1.a.3 (page 26).

## High school graduation rates

The graduation rates at Nebraska’s public high schools improved for all of the major racial and ethnic groups between 2002–2003 and 2009–2010.

In 2010–2011, the cohort four-year graduation rate replaced the methodology used previously to calculate graduation rates and established a new baseline for future comparisons. Based on this new methodology, Nebraska’s public high school graduation rate was 89% in 2014–2015, up from 86% four years earlier in 2010–2011. In fact, in 2013–2014 (the latest year for which national data is available), Nebraska’s cohort four-year graduation rate was ranked second highest in the nation. (See Figure 1.1.a.5 on page 29.)

Using the new methodology, males continue to graduate at lower rates than females. In 2010–2011, the graduation rate for females was 89%, compared to 83% for males. By 2014–2015, the graduation rate for males increased to 86%, compared to 92% for their female classmates. (See Figure 1.1.a.6 on page 30.)

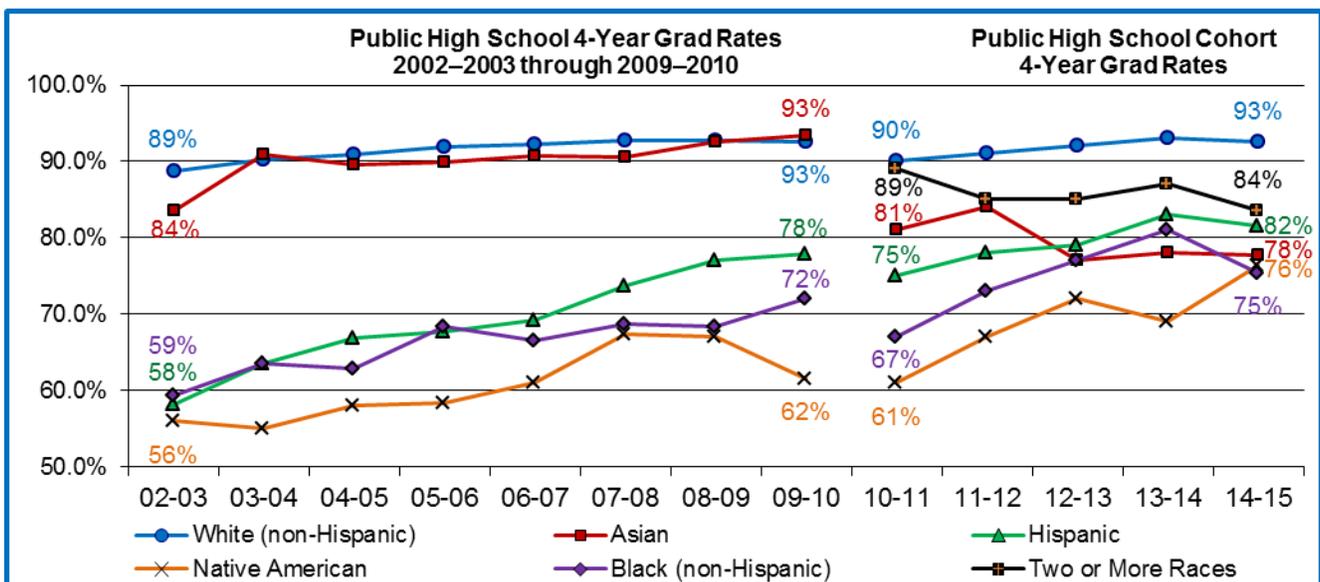
As shown below, between 2010–2011 and 2014–2015, cohort four-year graduation rates

decreased three percentage points for Asians and five percentage points for multi-racial individuals. During this same time, cohort four-year graduation rates increased for all other racial/ethnic groups, ranging from a three percentage point increase for white non-Hispanics to a 15 percentage point increase for Native Americans.

For some students, it takes longer than four years to graduate from high school. Extending cohort graduation rates out to six years increases the overall public high school graduation rates by about four percentage points. (See Figure 1.1.a.8 on page 34.)

While Nebraska’s overall public high school graduation rate has been increasing, analysis of the total membership and the total number of dropouts from the 7th through 12th grades reveals that compared to their white non-Hispanic classmates, all other racial/ethnic groups accounted for disproportionately higher percentages of the students who dropped out of school relative to the percentages of students included in fall membership counts in 2014–2015. (See Table 1.1.a.3 on page 36.) Consequently, Nebraska needs to continue to strengthen efforts to reduce and eliminate these disparities.

**Nebraska Public High School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity  
2002–2003 through 2014–2015**



Note. See Figure 1.1.a.7 (page 31).

## Preparation for college

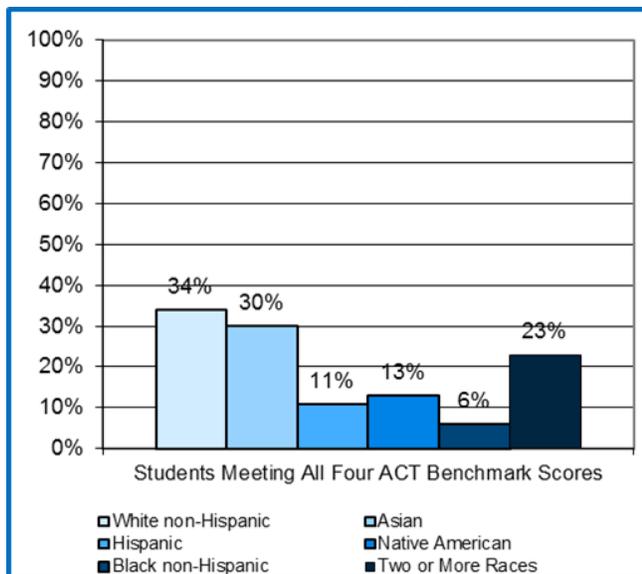
The average ACT® composite score for Nebraska high school students was 21.5 in 2015, compared to 21.7 in 2004 (the baseline for this report). Nebraska’s 2015 ACT composite score is higher than the 2015 national average of 21.0. (See Figure 1.1.b.3 on page 41.)

The state is currently considering statewide college admission testing (likely ACT or SAT) for students in the eleventh grade. Should that occur, scores will likely decrease in the short term.

Data from ACT, Inc. for the class of 2015 suggest that only 29% of Nebraska’s ACT-tested high school graduates are sufficiently prepared to succeed in all four common areas of entry-level college coursework: algebra, biology, English, and social science. (See Figure 1.1.b.5 on page 44.)

Furthermore, as shown below, compared to their white non-Hispanic and Asian classmates, even lower percentages of the state’s Hispanic, Native American, black non-Hispanic, and multiracial high school graduates are adequately prepared for entry-level college coursework.

**Percentages of 2015 ACT-Tested Nebraska High School Students Who Met or Exceeded ACT College Readiness Scores by Race/Ethnicity**



Note. Data for Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders is excluded from this figure due to the small number of individuals (28) who took the ACT Assessment. See Figure 1.1.b.7 (page 46).

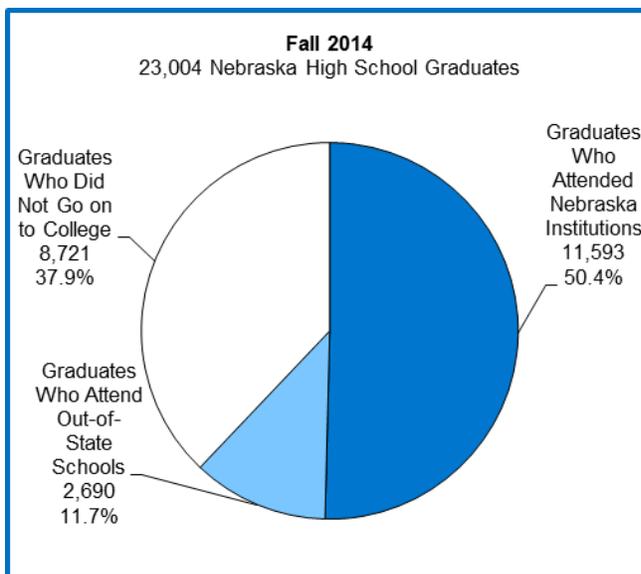
## College continuation rates: using IPEDS data

The most common approach to estimating college continuation rates uses data collected every two years through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The advantage of this approach is that, every other year, Nebraska’s college-going rate can be compared directly to the rates of other states.

For Nebraska, the latest available IPEDS data are for the high school graduation class of 2013–2014 who continued to college in fall 2014. Of the 23,004 students who graduated from high school in 2013–2015, 37.9% did not go on to college in fall 2014, while 50.4% went to college in Nebraska and 11.7% went out of state to further their education.

Based on the latest available IPEDS data, a total of 62.1% of Nebraska’s high school graduates from the class of 2013–2014 enrolled in college in fall 2014, a decrease of 1.4 percentage points from the 63.5% continuation rate in 2002.

**Percentages of 2013–2014 Nebraska High School Graduates by Whether and Where They Went to College in Fall 2014**



Note. See Figure 1.1.c.4 (page 59).

The latest available national college continuation rate data shows that Nebraska ranked 18th nationally in fall 2012 with a college continuation rate of 64.8% (compared to 61.6% nationally). (See Figure 1.1.c.3 on page 57.)

Enrollment of out-of-state and nonresident alien students

In addition to attracting a high percentage of the state’s college-going high school graduates, Nebraska colleges enrolled 4,055 out-of-state and nonresident alien first-time freshmen in fall 2014. (See Figure 1.3.1 on page 77.) Additionally, at degree-granting institutions, the state imported 803 more first-time freshmen than it exported. (See Figure 1.3.3 on pages 80-81.)

Public high school college continuation rates based on National Student Clearinghouse data

An alternative approach to calculating Nebraska’s college-going rate is to annually use data obtained from the National Student

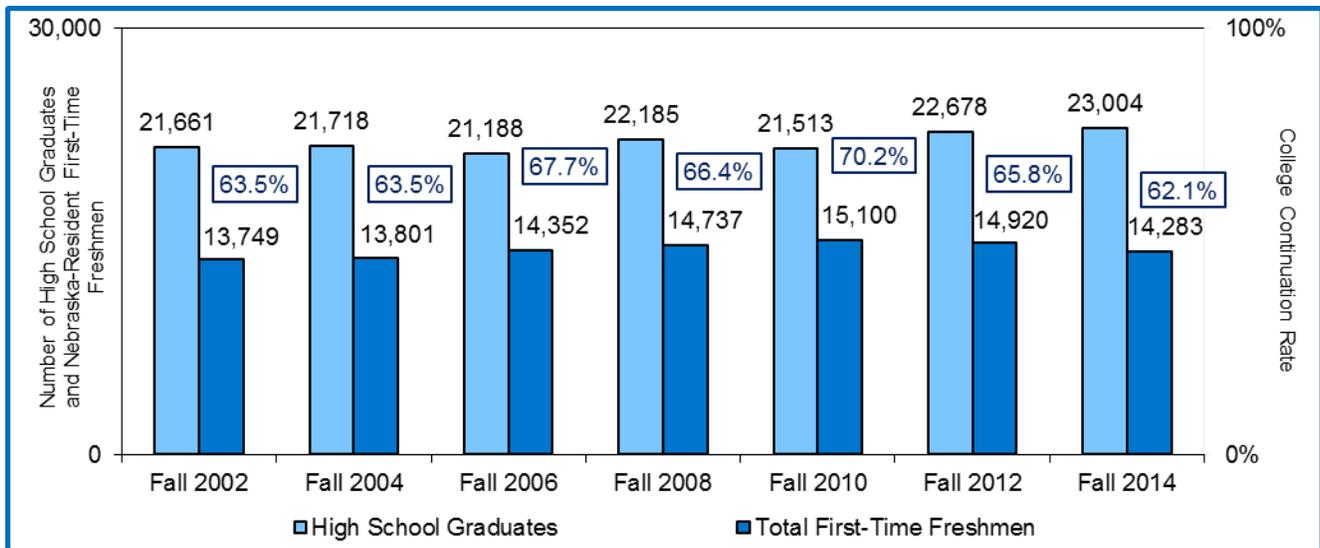
Clearinghouse (NSC) in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). An advantage of this approach is that college-going rates can be calculated every year and compared by student income level, gender, and race/ethnicity.<sup>1</sup>

Using NDE data matched with college enrollment files from the Clearinghouse, the Commission has conducted research to estimate the college-going rates of Nebraska’s public high school graduates from 2007–2008 through 2014–2015.<sup>2</sup>

Data from the NDE matched with the NSC show that overall, 71.5% of 2013–2014 Nebraska public high school graduates continued onto college. 76.0% of female graduates continued on to college, compared to 67.0% of their male classmates.

As the charts on the next page illustrate, the college continuation rates for low-income graduates of Nebraska’s public high schools are significantly lower than the comparable rate for

**Nebraska College Continuation Rates Based on IPEDS Data**



Note. See Figure 1.1.c.2 (page 56).

<sup>1</sup> Low-income students are defined as students who are approved to receive free or reduced-price school lunches. Non-low-income students are students who are not approved for free or reduced-price school lunches. This group may include some low-income students who do not sign up for free or reduced-price school lunches.

<sup>2</sup> College continuation rates based on NSC data files are not comparable to statewide rates based on IPEDS data for two reasons. First, available NDE data files do not include graduates of Nebraska’s private (non-public) high schools. Second, NSC data files include students who first enrolled in college in the winter or spring, as well as those who started college in the fall or the preceding summer. As a result, the college-going rates based on NDE and NSC data files will be higher than those calculated using IPEDS data, even though they do not include graduates of the state’s private high schools.

graduates from non-low income households, regardless of gender. However, female public high school graduates have consistently higher college-going rates than their male classmates, and the lowest college-going rates are for male public high school graduates from low-income households.

An important addition to the *2016 Progress Report* is the inclusion of college continuation rates by race/ethnicity. Segmenting college continuation rates by gender, student income status, and race/ethnicity results in college continuation rates for 24 subgroups.

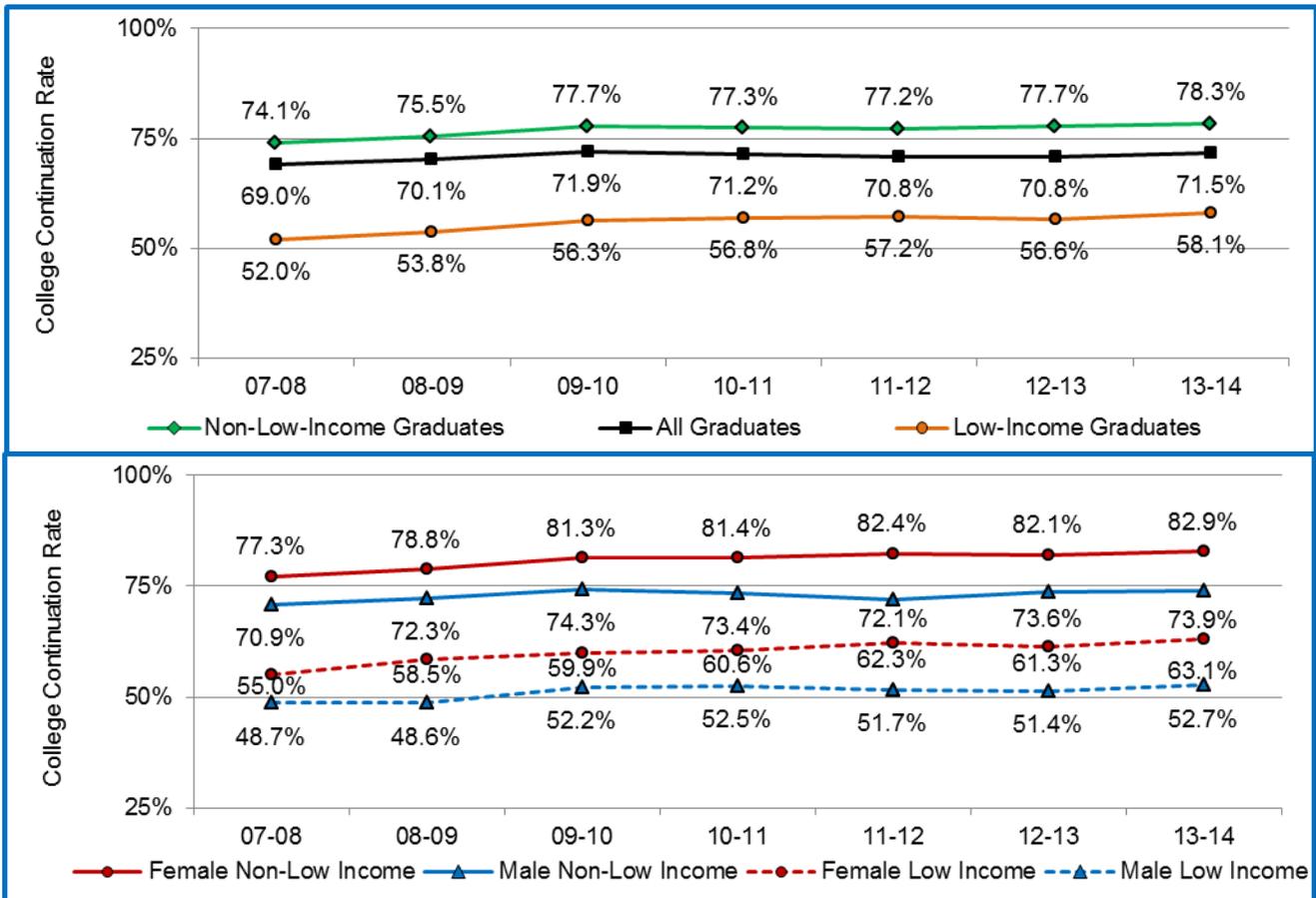
Among graduates in 2013–2014, the highest college continuation rate among these 24 subgroups was for non-low-income, black non-Hispanic, female graduates (84.3%), while the lowest college continuation rate was for low-

income, Native American, male graduates (38.7%). (See Figure 1.1.c.10 on page 66.)

National estimates of college continuation rates for high school graduates

Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates the national college continuation rate for January–October 2014 high school graduates to be 68.4%. Mirroring a similar gender gap as is seen in Nebraska, national estimates show that females are more likely than males to continue on to college—64.0% for males versus 72.7% for females. (See Figure 1.1.c.11 on page 68.)

**College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates  
Based on National Student Clearinghouse Data**



Note. See Figure 1.1.c.7 (page 63) and Figure 1.1.c.9 (page 65).

Trends in first-time freshmen enrollments

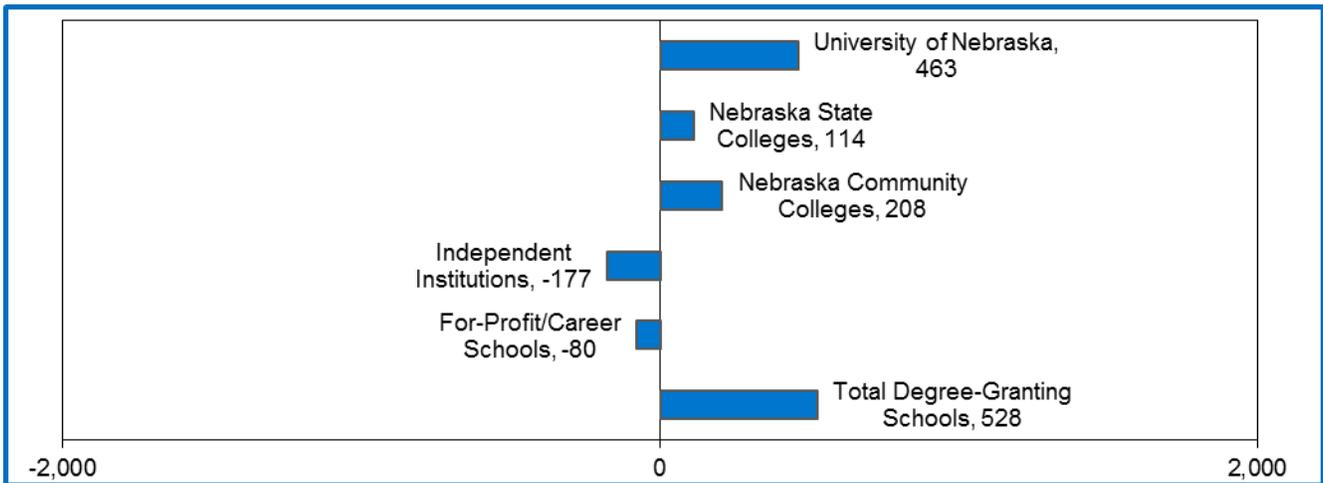
Using IPEDS data collected every other year, the Commission monitors the enrollment of first-time freshmen who are residents of Nebraska, classified by whether they start college within 12 months of high school graduation or wait to enroll in college more than 12 months after they graduate from high school.

The Commission’s latest analysis reveals that between fall 2002 and fall 2014, the number of first-time freshmen (FTF) who enrolled *within a year of high school graduation* increased at the

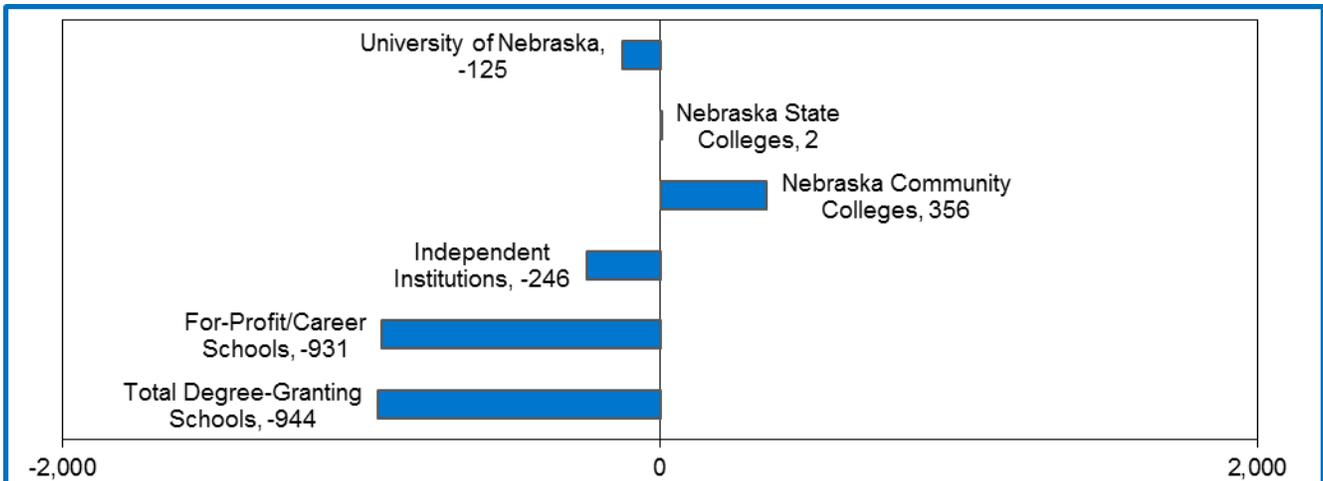
University of Nebraska (8.7%), the state colleges (13.0%), and the community colleges (7.1%). Meanwhile, the independent sector and for-profit/career schools reported decreases of 10.2% and 65.6%, respectively.

Analysis also reveals that the number of FTF who started college *more than a year after high school graduation* decreased between fall 2002 and fall 2014 within all sectors, except the Nebraska state colleges and the community colleges.

**Changes in the Numbers of Nebraska-Resident, First-Time Freshmen Enrolled at Nebraska Degree-Granting Institutions within 12 Months of High School Graduation Fall 2014 Compared to Fall 2002**



**Changes in the Numbers of Nebraska-Resident, First-Time Freshmen Enrolled at Nebraska Degree-Granting Institutions More than 12 Months After High School Graduation Fall 2014 Compared to Fall 2002**



Note. See Figure 1.2.2 (page 74) and Figure 1.2.4 (page 76).

**First-time freshmen enrollments by race/ethnicity**

Based on IPEDS data collected annually, higher numbers of Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and black non-Hispanics were enrolled at Nebraska institutions in fall 2014 than in fall 2003. Over the same period, there was a predictable decrease in the number of white first-time freshmen, given the decrease in the number of white non-Hispanics who graduated from Nebraska’s high schools in 2013–2014 compared to 2002–2003. (See Figure 1.4.1 and Figure 1.4.2 on page 84.)

As previously discussed, disproportionately lower percentages of Asians/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, Native Americans, black non-Hispanics, and multiracial students graduate from Nebraska high schools compared to white non-Hispanic students.

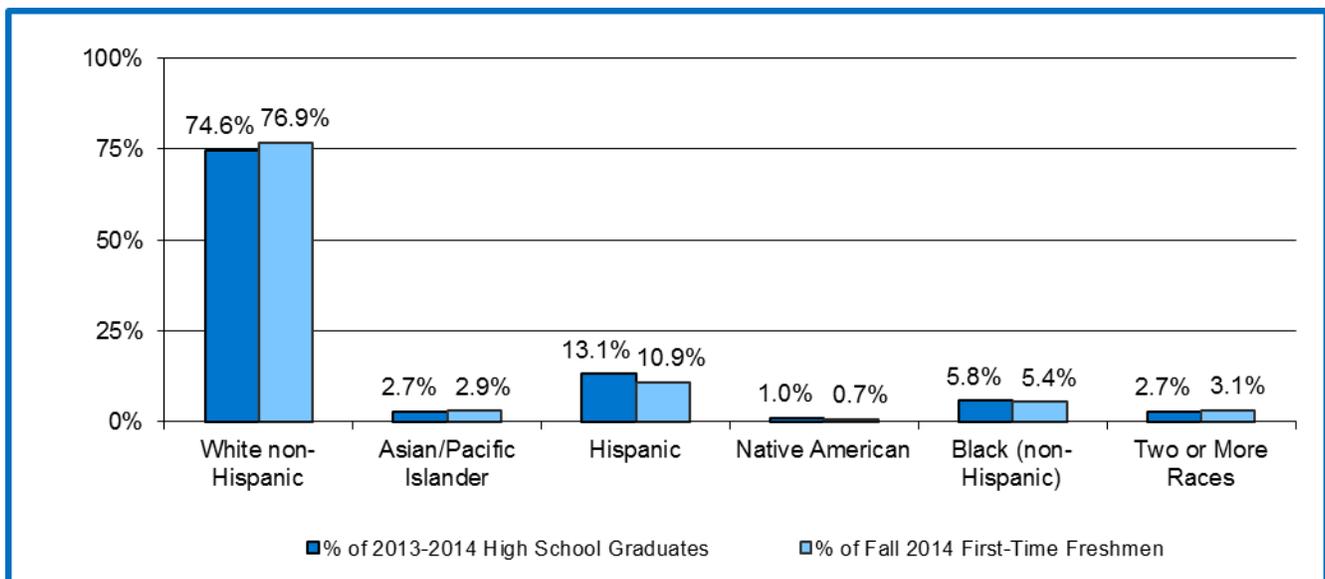
Furthermore, as evidenced in Section 1.1.c of this report, college continuation rates for

Hispanics, Native Americans, black non-Hispanics, and multiracial graduates are lower than college continuation rates for white non-Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander graduates.

As shown in the chart below, white non-Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and multiracial individuals were overrepresented among first-time freshmen in fall 2014, while Hispanics, Native Americans, and black non-Hispanics were underrepresented among first-time freshmen in fall 2014.

There were 2,088 more minority students attending Nebraska colleges as first-time freshmen in fall 2014 than in fall 2003, an increase of 104.1%. In comparison, there were 2,205 fewer white non-Hispanic first-time freshmen in fall 2014 than in fall 2003, a decrease of 14.0%.

**Percentages of 2013-2014 Nebraska High School Graduates and First-Time Freshmen Enrolled at Nebraska Colleges and Universities in Fall 2014 by Race/Ethnicity**



Note. See Figure 1.4.3 (page 85).

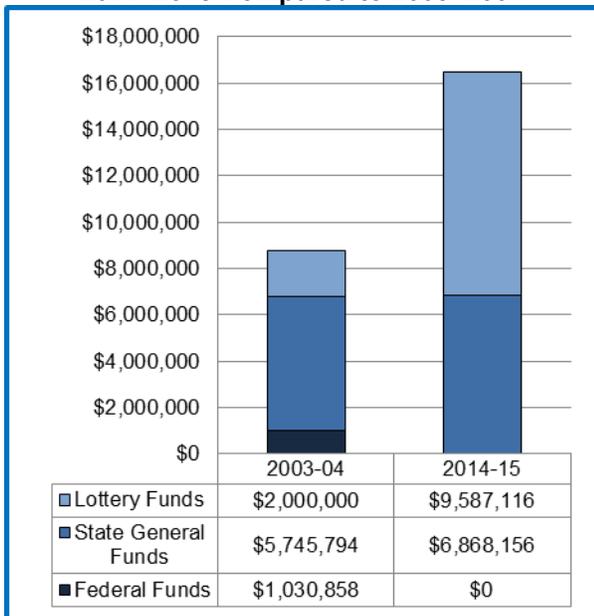
The importance of state-funded financial aid

Since 2003, Nebraska has made progress toward the goal of improving access to higher education by increasing the amount of state funds allocated for need-based financial aid. However, additional financial aid is needed to enable more of Nebraska’s low-income and moderately low-income students to go to college, stay enrolled and complete degrees.

Nebraska currently provides need-based financial aid to college students through the Nebraska Opportunity Grant Program, originally authorized as the Nebraska State Grant Program by the Nebraska Scholarship Act, which was passed by the Legislature in 2003.

Including state lottery and federal funds, total dollars available for the state grant program increased from \$8,776,652 in 2003–2004 to \$16,455,272 in 2014–2015.

**Available Funding for Nebraska’s State Grant Program 2014–2015 Compared to 2003–2004**



Note. See Figure 1.5.1 (page 92).

As a result of increased funding, the number of low-income students served by the state grant program increased 22.3%, from 13,031 in 2003–

2004 to 15,943 in 2014–2015, and the average award increased from \$670 to \$1,032. (See Figure 1.5.2 on page 93.)

The success of the ACE Scholarship Program

The state-funded Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program, which was initiated in 2007–2008, enables eligible low-income students to take college courses while they are still enrolled in high school.

Using state and federal funds, the amount awarded in ACE scholarships increased from \$114,856 in 2007–2008 to \$953,596 in 2014–2015. For 2015–2016, an estimated \$781,176 is available for ACE scholarships.

In 2007–2008, 294 Nebraska high school students took 1,698 credit hours of college coursework paid for by their ACE scholarships. With increased funding, 1,919 low-income Nebraska high school students were able to take 13,785 credit hours of college coursework in 2014–2015. (See Figure 1.5.6 on page 103.)

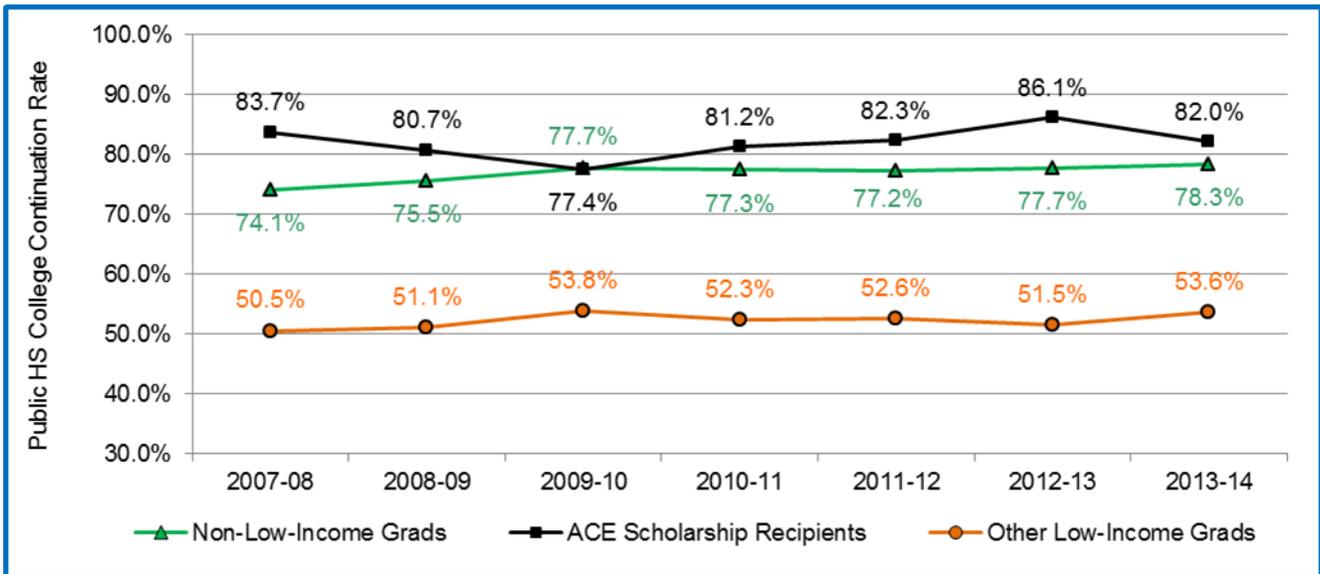
Research on the college continuation rates of ACE Scholarship recipients

The number of students who received ACE scholarships when they were seniors at Nebraska public high schools increased from 215 in 2007–2008 to 1,051 in 2014–2015.

As illustrated in the chart on the following page, the college continuation rates of ACE scholarship recipients are significantly higher than the college-going rates of other low-income public high school graduates.

Since inception, the college-going rates of ACE scholarship recipients also have been higher than, or about equal to, the college-going rates of non-low-income graduates of the state’s public high schools.

**College Continuation Rates for ACE Scholarship Recipients  
Compared to the College Continuation Rates of Other Public High School Graduates**



Note. See Figure 1.5.11 (page 107).

The ACE Plus Scholarship

The ACE Plus Scholarship Program was initiated in 2011–2012 to provide assistance to first- and second-year college students who were ACE scholarship recipients prior to graduating from high school. Initially funded with \$223,000 of a federal College Access Challenge Grant, ACE Plus scholarships were awarded to 317 eligible students in 2011–2012.

With \$242,500 in funding, 327 eligible students were awarded ACE Plus scholarships 2015–2016 to help them with their college expenses during their first or second year of college. (169 scholarships were awarded for the first year of

college while 158 were awarded for their second year of college.)

Of the 158 students who received ACE Plus scholarships for their second year of college, approximately 81% had 3.0 or higher grade-point averages (GPAs) after their first year of college, and about 59% had first-year GPAs of 3.5 or higher. (See Figure 1.5.14 and Figure 1.5.16 on pages 114 and 115.)

No funding is available for the ACE Plus program in 2016–2017.

## Priority 2

### Increase the percentage of students who enroll and successfully complete a degree

Success is measured not only by the number of freshmen who enroll in college, but by those who stay in college beyond their freshmen year and earn degrees or other awards.

Based on IPEDS data that are collected annually, freshmen retention rates and graduation rates are not improving across all sectors of higher education in Nebraska.<sup>3</sup> Analyses of IPEDS data also show that there are continuing racial/ethnic disparities in graduation rates.

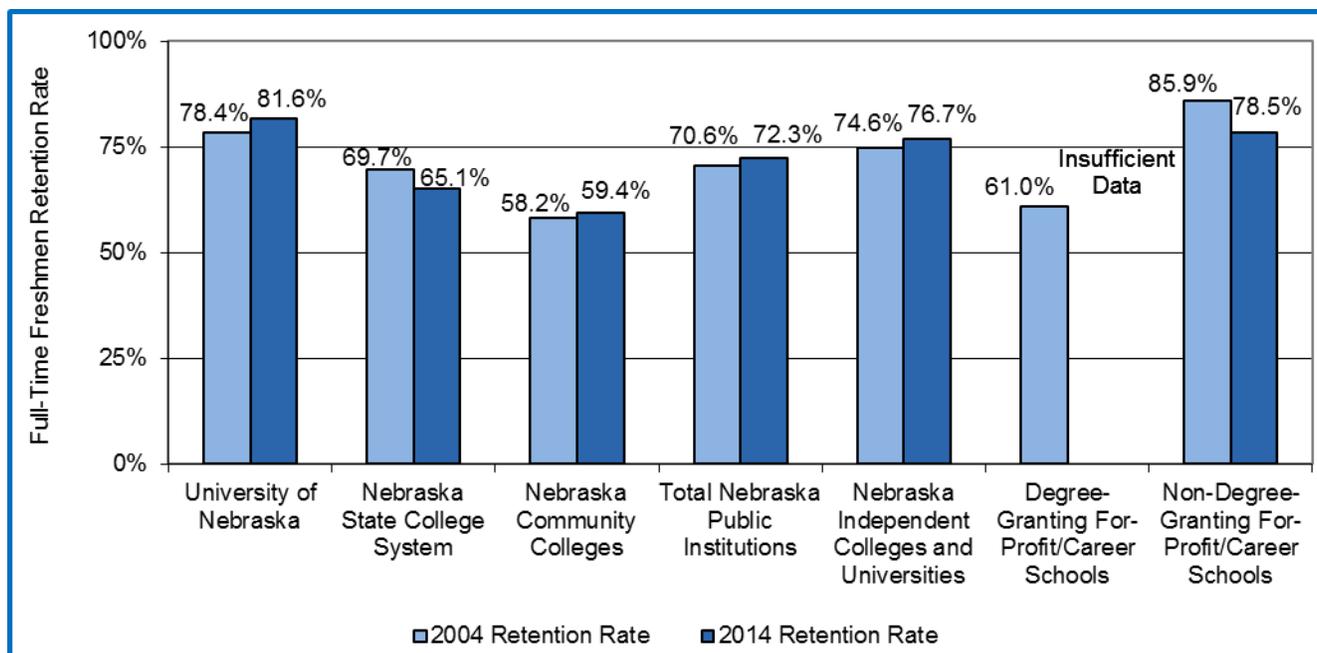
Analysis of records at the National Student Clearinghouse provides evidence that notable percentages of students who start college at Nebraska’s public and independent institutions

transfer to other schools where they persist in their studies and earn degrees or certificates. This study also reveals that students who attend college part time are far less likely to complete their degree or certificate program than students who attend college full time.

#### Freshmen retention rates

As shown in the chart below, full-time freshmen retention rates for the Nebraska State College System and the non-degree-granting career schools were lower in fall 2014 than they were in fall 2004. For the remaining sectors, full-time retention rates were higher in fall 2014 than they were in fall 2004 or data are not sufficient to

**Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector  
Fall 2014 Compared to Fall 2004 Baseline**



Note. See Figure 2.1.1 (page 121).

<sup>3</sup> The freshmen retention rate is the number of freshmen who are enrolled at the same college one year later. The IPEDS definition of a college graduation rate is the percentage of full-time, first-time freshmen who complete their degree programs at the same college within 150% of the time specified for the programs. For example, the specified time frame for four-year programs is six years, while the time frame for two-year programs is three years.

compute a sector retention rate for fall 2014.

Retention rates for full-time students in fall 2014 varied between the sectors, ranging from 59.4% at the community colleges to 81.6% at the University of Nebraska.

The non-degree granting career schools and the independent colleges and universities also had relatively high fall 2014 retention rates of 78.5% and 76.7%, respectively.

Full-time and part-time retention rates compared

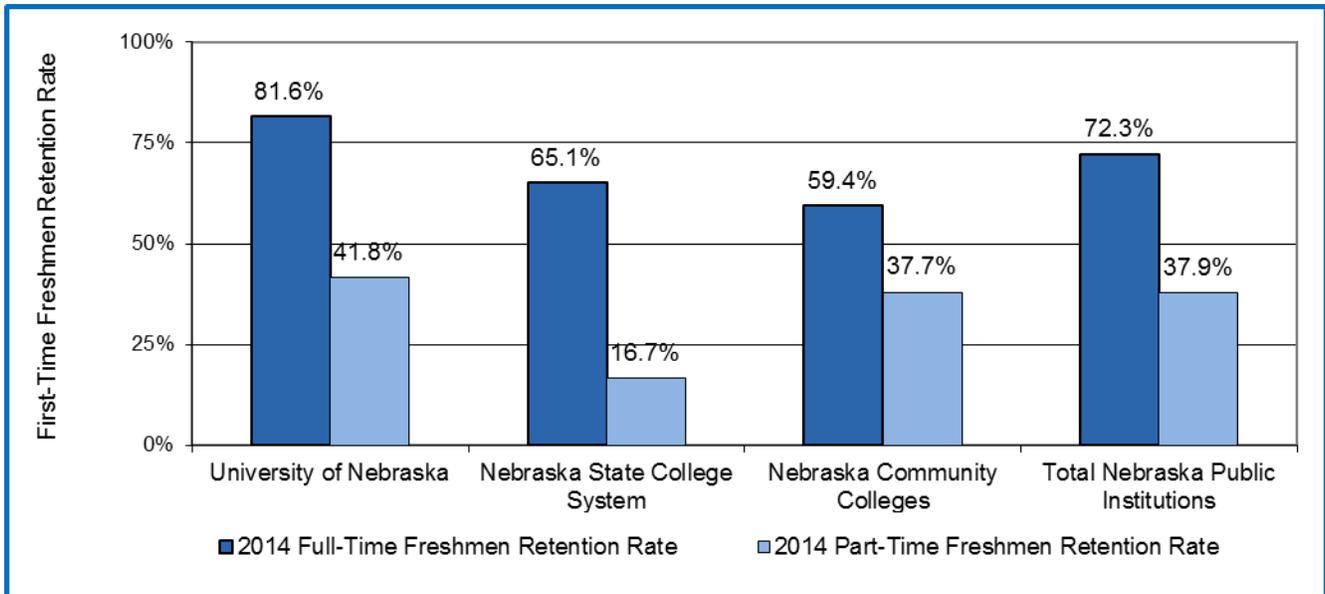
A statewide retention rate for part-time, first-time freshmen cannot be calculated due to insufficient data from some institutions. However, the freshmen retention rates for full-time and part-time students at the state’s public institutions can be compared as shown in the chart below. This comparison clearly indicates that students who start college full time are much more likely than

part-time students to continue going to college beyond their freshmen year. Conversely, freshmen who attend college only part time are less likely to continue their studies and, therefore, are less likely to earn degrees.

Nebraska freshmen retention rates compared to those of other states

Nebraska’s retention rates for 2014 are lower than corresponding national rates. For four-year public institutions, Nebraska’s full-time retention rate was 79.0% and its part-time retention rate was 39.7% (compared to 80.8% and 52.5% nationally). For two-year public institutions, Nebraska’s full-time retention rate was 59.7% and its part-time rate was 37.7% (compared to 60.3% and 43.3% nationally). (See Figure 2.1.3, Figure 2.1.4, Figure 2.1.7, and Figure 2.1.8 on pages 124, 125, 128, and 129.)

**Fall 2014 Full-Time and Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Students in Nebraska’s Public Colleges and Universities**



Note. See Figure 2.1.1 (page 121) and Figure 2.1.2 (page 122).

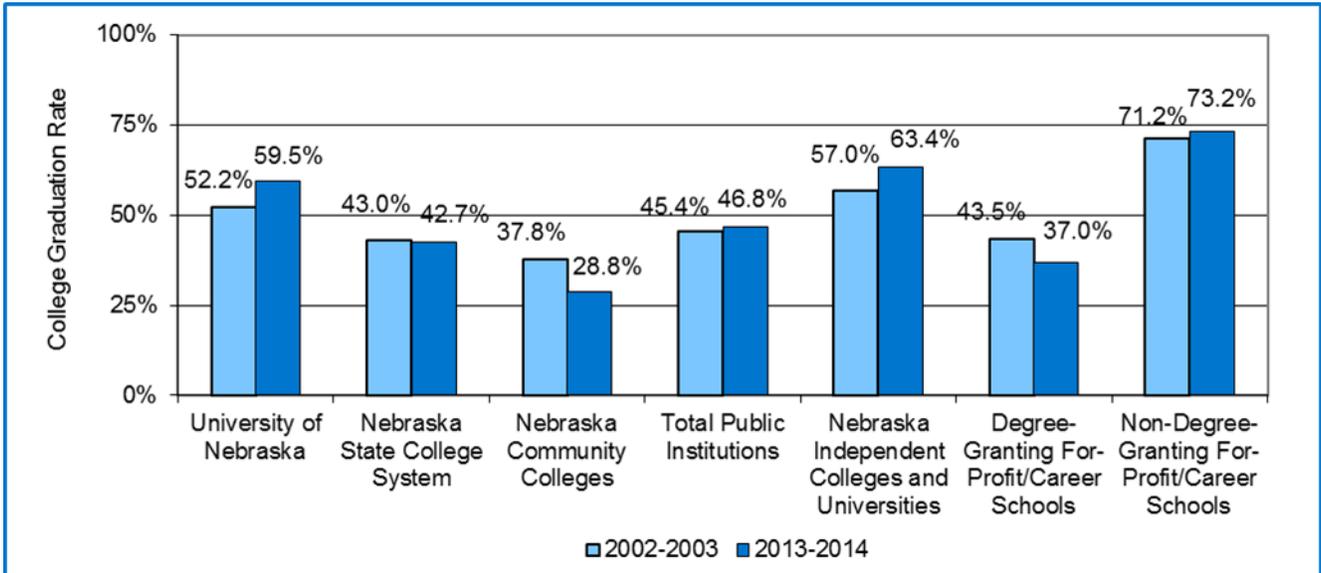
College graduation rates based on IPEDS data

Graduation rates based on IPEDS data can be calculated only for full-time students who graduate from the same college where they started as first-time freshmen. Because transfer students are not counted among the graduates of any reporting institution, IPEDS graduation rates underestimate the percentage of full-time, first-time freshmen who complete degree, certificate, or diploma programs. In addition, IPEDS graduation rates cannot be calculated for any students who initially attend college part time.

Based on IPEDS data, the statewide graduation rate for Nebraska institutions increased from 48.4% in 2002–2003 to 50.0% in 2013–2014, the latest year for which data are available. (See Figure 2.2.1 on page 131.)

In 2013–2014, the highest graduation rate among the six sectors of higher education in Nebraska was 73.2%, which was the rate for the non-degree-granting, for-profit schools. The next highest rates were 63.4% for the independent institutions and 59.5% for the University of Nebraska.

**Graduation Rates for Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector  
2013–2014 Compared to 2002–2003**



Note. See Figure 2.2.2 (page 132).

### Racial/ethnic disparities in graduation rates

As shown in the chart below, Hispanics, Native Americans, black non-Hispanics, and multiracial students have significantly lower college graduation rates than white non-Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Between 2002–2003 and 2013–2014, graduation rates for all racial/ethnic groups increased at the University of Nebraska. (See Figure 2.2.4 on page 135.)

Graduation rates for the Nebraska State College System increased for white non-Hispanics, Hispanics, and black non-Hispanics but decreased for Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. (See Figure 2.2.5 on page 136.)

Meanwhile, rates at the state’s community colleges decreased for all racial/ethnic groups except for Hispanics. This is possibly due, at least in part, to the increasing number of students who have enrolled in academic transfer programs and transfer before they graduate from the community colleges. (See Figure 2.2.6 on page 136.)

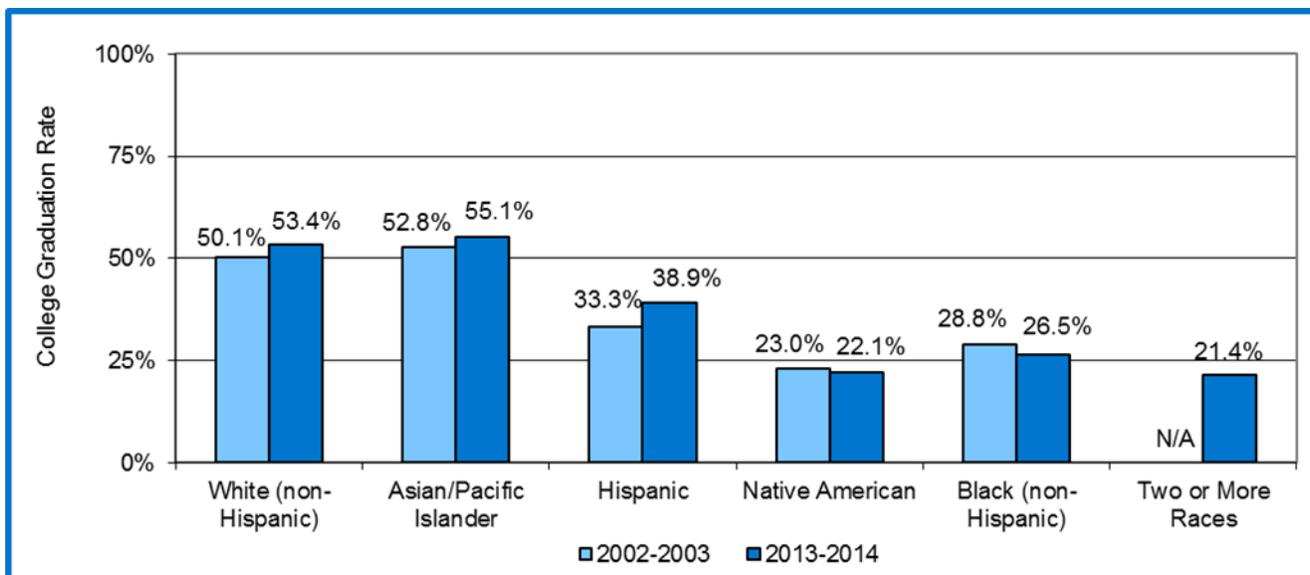
Graduation rates increased for white non-Hispanics and black non-Hispanics within the independent sector (see Figure 2.2.7 on page 137) and the sectors consisting of degree-granting. (See Figure 2.2.8 on page 135.)

At the degree-granting and non-degree-granting for-profit career schools, graduation rates increased for white non-Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics but decreased for black non-Hispanics. However, rates varied for Native Americans. (See Figure 2.2.8 and Figure 2.2.9 on page 136 and 137.)

### Nebraska graduation rates compared to those of other states

Nebraska’s 2013–2014 graduation rate for four-year institutions was 57.9%, compared to 54.4% nationally. For two-year institutions, Nebraska’s graduation rate was 29.3%, compared to 27.9% nationally. (See Figure 2.2.10 and Figure 2.2.11 on pages 139 and 1421)

**Graduation Rates for Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Race/Ethnicity  
2013–2014 Compared to 2002–2003**



Note. See Figure 2.2.2 (page 134).

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### Graduation and persistence rates based on National Student Clearinghouse data

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center recently conducted a study of six-year student outcomes based on a national cohort of degree-seeking, first-time freshmen who started college in fall 2008, analyzed by state as well as for the United States as a whole.

For the study, students were classified by the state of the institution where they first started college and by type of institution. Based on Clearinghouse enrollment and completion records, comparable six-year completion and persistence rates were calculated for the students who started college at (a) two-year public colleges, (b) four-year public colleges and universities, and (c) four-year private nonprofit institutions.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, completion and persistence rates were calculated for exclusively full-time students, exclusively part-time students, mixed enrollment students with combinations of full- and part-time enrollment, students who started college when they were 20 years of age or younger, students who started college when they were 21 to 24 years of age, and students who were 25 or older when they first enrolled in college.

The completion and persistence rates that the Clearinghouse calculated for Nebraska were sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the comparable national rates, depending on the type of institution and the student enrollment or age group that was analyzed.

More importantly, the findings of the study confirm that college completion and persistence rates vary significantly by student enrollment status and age group, as well as by the type of institution where students first enroll.

The findings of the Clearinghouse study are evidence that students who enroll initially at four-year institutions—public or private nonprofit—are more likely to earn degrees or certificates, or at least persist in their studies, than students who start college at two-year institutions, regardless of whether they enroll full or part time.

However, students who are able to attend college full time—exclusively or at least sometime during the course of their studies—are much more likely to earn degrees or certificates and less likely to drop out of college than students who go to college only part time.

The findings of the Clearinghouse study also are evidence that students who start college when they are age 20 or younger are more likely to persist in their studies and complete degree or certificate programs than students who don't start college until they are over the age of 20. This is not surprising since non-traditional students often have family and work responsibilities that may be equally or more important than finishing college.

The completion rates calculated by the Clearinghouse also confirm that a notable percentage of freshmen start college at one institution and then transfer to another where they complete a program of study. Specifically, 14% to 19% of the degree-seeking, first-time students at Nebraska's public and private nonprofit institutions in fall 2008 graduated from two-year or four-year schools to which they had transferred. (See Figure 2.3.3 on page 146.)

Another finding of interest is that 15.9% of the students who initially enrolled at Nebraska's two-year public colleges in fall 2008 graduated from four-year institutions over the course of the next six years. (See Table A12.2 on page 341.)

<sup>4</sup> Completion rates and graduation rates are synonymous terms. In general, a completion or graduation rate is the percentage of students in a specified cohort who earn degrees, certificates, or diplomas within a specified period of time. A persistence rate is the percentage of the students in a cohort who have not earned degrees or other academic awards but who are still enrolled in college at the end of a specified period of time.

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## Priority 3

### Reduce, eliminate, and then reverse the net out-migration of Nebraskans with high levels of educational attainment

Data from the 2000 U.S. Census revealed that Nebraska experienced a net out-migration of college-educated adults at all levels of education beyond high school between 1995 and 2000. During the same period, Nebraska attracted a significant net in-migration of adults with less than a high school education.

Beginning in 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau started collecting data annually through the American Community Survey (ACS) to estimate net migration by education level for each state. Since the resulting annual ACS estimates for Nebraska are based on very small samples of the people who move in or out of the state, these estimates vary dramatically from one year to the next. Because these estimates are based on very small sample sizes, they do not provide policy makers with a clear, complete picture of the migration patterns of adults who are moving to or from Nebraska.

Based on ACS data collected from 2005 and 2008 to 2011, Nebraska seems to attract more working-age adults with less than a high school diploma than have left the state. However, ACS data are inadequate to determine the exact magnitude of this important migration trend.

Based on ACS data collected from 2007 and 2009 to 2011, Nebraska also may have experienced a net in-migration of working-age adults with high school diplomas, some college but no degrees, associate's degrees, or bachelor's degrees, but the evidence is inconclusive, and the migration estimates are unstable from year to year.

Data from the 2012 ACS suggest that there was a net out-migration of working-age adults with less than a high school diploma.

Based on ACS data collected in 2013, there was a net out-migration of working-age adults with bachelor's degrees.

Data from the most recent ACS in 2014 indicate that there was a net in-migration of working-age adults with less than a high school diploma, high school graduates, and individuals with associate's degrees. (See Figure 3.2 on page 159.)

Although data currently available from the U.S. Census Bureau do not reveal a clear picture of Nebraska migration patterns, there is still reason to be concerned about the possible effects of migration on the size and quality of the state's labor force. Consequently, the Commission will continue to monitor the available estimates of net migration by education level in an effort to determine if a clear, overall picture of Nebraska's net migration pattern eventually emerges from the analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

# Conclusion

## Attainment Gap

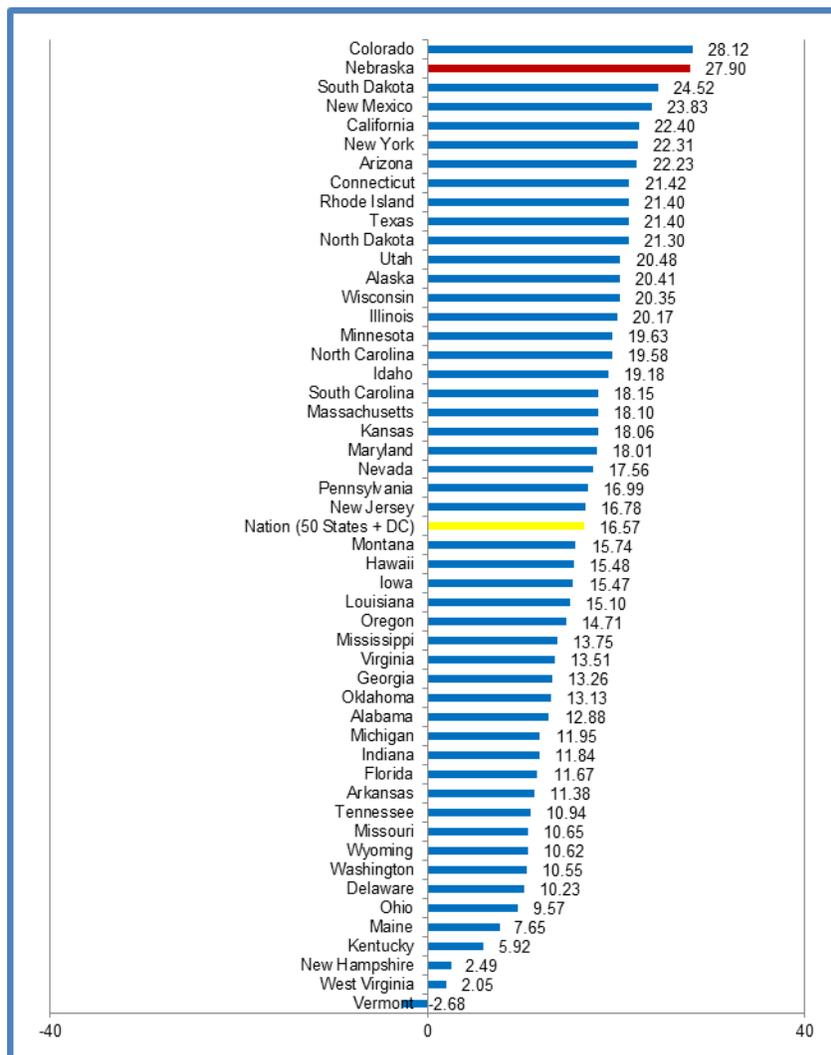
The consequence of the disparities in high school graduation rates, college continuation rates, and college graduation rates is that Nebraska's gap in educational attainment between whites and minorities (i.e., not white non-Hispanic) is the second largest in the nation.

In Nebraska, 54.11% of 25-to-44-year old, white non-Hispanics have completed an associate's degree or higher. In comparison, only 26.20% of

25-to-44-year old minorities have completed an associate's degree or higher. As shown below, the net difference is an attainment gap of 27.90.

Nationally, 45.85% of 25-to-44-year old, white non-Hispanics have completed an associate's degree or higher. In comparison, only 32.28% of 25-to-44-year old minorities have completed an associate's degree or higher.

**Estimated Difference in College Attainment Between Whites and Minorities  
Ages 25 to 44 by State  
Based on the 2012–2014 American Community Survey (ACS)**



Data source: Estimates based on the 2012, 2013, and 2014 American Community Surveys, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, obtained from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS).

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The findings evidenced in this report indicate that more work needs to be done in order for Nebraskans to enroll in college and successfully complete degrees.

**At the High School Level:**

- Increase the percentage of students who stay in school and earn diplomas. Nebraska’s 2014–2015 public high school graduation rate is one of the best in the nation (89.7%), but disparities continue to be seen. While 92% of females graduate, only 86% of males earn diplomas. Disparities are even more pronounced between racial/ethnic groups with only 75% (black non-Hispanic) to 84% (two or more races) of minorities earning diplomas.
  - Increase the percentage of students who are prepared academically for college. According to ACT, only 29% Nebraska’s ACT-tested high school graduates are sufficiently prepared to succeed in college.
  - Increase the number of students who take dual enrollment courses.
  - For males, minorities, and low-income students especially, more effort needs to be exerted to increase:
    - The percentage who are prepared for college academically
    - The number who take dual enrollment courses
    - High school graduation rates
    - College-going rates
  - Increase opportunities for students to connect to career pathways of interest to them that lead to employment and additional education.
- Increase awareness of the range of higher education opportunities and their associated career pathways, especially at the community colleges.
  - Reach out to adults with college credit but no earned certificates or degrees.
  - Increase efforts to improve retention and persistence rates. Full-time retention rates vary by sector, ranging from 59.4% at the community colleges to 81.6% at the University of Nebraska.
  - Increase efforts to improve graduation rates for all students across all sectors of higher education in Nebraska, especially at the community colleges and for minority students at all institutions. While graduation rates are generally increasing for minority students, they continue to lag behind their white non-Hispanic and Asian classmates.

**At the State Government Level:**

- Continue to support and increase funding for the Nebraska Opportunity Grant program and the ACE program. (Note - funding for ACE Plus has been discontinued for 2016–2017.)
- Continue to adequately fund public colleges and universities to maintain affordable tuition and fees.
- Develop and build support for clear completion targets for Nebraska’s public-funded colleges and universities.
- Initiate incentives for the state’s public-funded colleges and universities to improve graduation rates and increase the number of degrees and certificates awarded.
- Encourage the growth of high-wage, high-skill jobs that keep Nebraska graduates in Nebraska and inspire students to pursue postsecondary credentials.

**At the Postsecondary Level:**

- Increase the percentage of high school graduates who go on to college, encouraging as many as possible to enroll full-time and not delay enrollment. About 71.5% of Nebraska public high school graduates go on to college, but National Student Clearinghouse research shows that those who attend school full-time are much more likely to earn degrees than those who attend part-time.

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**Institutions Reporting to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)  
During the Period from 2003 to 2015**

**University of Nebraska (5)**

Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture  
University of Nebraska at Kearney  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
University of Nebraska Medical Center  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

**Nebraska State College System (3)**

Chadron State College  
Peru State College  
Wayne State College

**Nebraska Community Colleges (6)**

Central Community College  
Metropolitan Community College  
Mid-Plains Community College  
Northeast Community College  
Southeast Community College  
Western Nebraska Community College

**Independent College & Universities (20)**

Bellevue University  
Bryan College of Health Sciences  
Clarkson College  
College of Saint Mary  
Concordia University-Seward  
Creighton University  
Dana College (closed in 2010)  
Doane College-Crete  
Doane College-Lincoln  
Grace University  
Hastings College  
Little Priest Tribal College  
Midland University  
Nebraska Christian College  
Nebraska Indian Community College  
Nebraska Methodist College of Nursing & Allied Health  
Nebraska Wesleyan University  
Summit Christian College  
Union College  
York College

**Degree-Granting For-Profit/Career Schools (13)**

Alegent Health School of Radiologic Technology  
ITT Technical Institute-Omaha  
Kaplan University-Lincoln Campus  
Kaplan University-Omaha Campus  
Mary Lanning Memorial Hospital School  
of Radiologic Technology  
Myotherapy Institute  
National American University-Bellevue  
Omaha School of Massage and Healthcare  
of Herzing University  
The Creative Center  
Universal College of Healing Arts  
University of Phoenix-Omaha Campus (closed fall 2015)  
Vatterott College (closed fall 2005)  
Vatterott College-Spring Valley (in process of closing)

**Non-Degree Granting For-Profit/Career  
Schools (8)**

Capitol School of Hairstyling and Esthetics  
College of Hair Design  
College of Hair Design-East Campus  
Fullen School of Hair Design  
Joseph's College  
La'James International College  
Regional West Medical Center School  
of Radiologic Technology  
Xenon International Academy-Omaha