

Key Takeaways – 2026 Progress Report

In 2006, the Nebraska Legislature identified education as key to the state’s economic future: “Increasing the number of Nebraskans with high levels of educational attainment is essential to support economic expansion and diversification.” (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 85-1428) In 2022, the Nebraska Legislature set a goal that 70% of Nebraskans aged 25 to 34 will have a degree, certificate, or credential with value in the workplace by 2030. This report provides detailed analysis of Nebraska’s progress toward increasing its educational attainment. The *Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education*, produced by the Coordinating Commission, includes many of these same metrics within its “Measuring Accomplishments” section.

87.9

Nebraska’s 2024-2025 public high school graduation rate. (See Figure 1.1.a.4, page 24.) However, ACT reports that only 18% of Nebraska’s ACT-tested high school graduates are sufficiently prepared to succeed in all four common areas of entry-level college coursework in algebra, biology, English, and social sciences. (See Figure 1.1.b.3 on page 36.)

63.5

The college continuation rate for the 2023-2024 Nebraska public high school graduating class, which has declined from 71.5% in 2013-2014. (See Figure 1.1.c.5, page 55.)

81.6

The percentage of ACE Scholarship recipients from public high schools who have gone on to college. The comparable college continuation rates were 47.9% for low-income public high school graduates who did not receive ACE and 73.7% for non-low-income public high school graduates. (See Figure 1.5.9, page 87.)

46.4

70.6

The six-year completion rates for Nebraska public two-year institutions (46.4%) and four-year public institutions (70.6%), compared to national rates of 43.9% and 70.9%, respectively. (Fall 2019 cohort.) (See Figure 2.3.1, page 115.)

94.3

For every 10,000 working-age (22 to 64) Nebraskans with a bachelor’s degree or higher, there was an average annual net *out*-migration of 94.3 people from 2020 to 2024. Put another way, Nebraska experienced a net loss of 28,750 people with a bachelors degree or higher to other states over the past decade. (See page 129.)

36.5

The percentage of Nebraskans ages 22 to 64 who have a bachelor’s degree or higher for the period 2020-2024, according to the American Community Survey. This is up from 33.7% for the period 2015-2019. The percentage of Nebraskans ages 22 to 64 who have some college or an associate’s degree is 33.4%, down from 35.1%. (See Figure 3.3, page 126.)

55.9

The percentage of 25- to-34-year-old Nebraskans with a credential with value in the workplace or higher as of 2024. (See Figure 3.1, page 125.)

Key Recommendations – 2026 Progress Report

Among the Commission's statutory duties are to "Encourage initiatives and collaboration between public institutions, public state and local entities, and private state and local entities to increase the contribution of postsecondary education in advancing Nebraska's economy." Among the initiatives and collaboration that may address the shortcomings identified in the *2026 Progress Report* are the following key recommendations.

At the High School Level:

- Increase high school graduation rates. Nebraska's 2024-2025 data reveal that while 90.2% of females graduate in four years, only 85.8% of males do. Disparities are even more pronounced between racial/ethnic groups, with only 74.1% (Native American) to 85.4% (multiracial) of minorities earning diplomas in four years compared to 93.6% of White non-Hispanics.
- Increase the number of students who take dual credit and concurrent enrollment courses to reach the Nebraska Department of Education's (NDE) goal that 50% of students will engage in dual enrollment by 2030 (from 33% in 2022-23). Faculty availability and financial aid resources must ensure that students are not denied the opportunity to participate as a result of financial resources.
- Increase opportunities for high school students to connect to career pathways of interest to them that lead to employment and additional education, such as through the continuing development of career academies, academic pathways, and internship programs.
- Increase counseling resources to a.) address mental health issues that may slow or prevent high school completion, b.) improve students' awareness of careers, the range of higher education opportunities, and their career pathways, and c.) help students understand financial aid opportunities and plan the most direct pathway to their educational goals.

At the Postsecondary Level:

- Increase the percentage of high school graduates who go on to college. If all 2024 on-time public high school graduates continued on to college at the same rate as 2014 graduates, over 1,700 additional students would enroll in college by the spring following high school graduation.
- Support and expand efforts, such as Transfer Nebraska and 2+2 agreements, to improve students' knowledge of how credits will transfer among Nebraska colleges and universities, allowing them to plan their path to a degree in the most efficient manner.
- Identify and reach out to adults who started college but did not complete a credential. Completion initiatives include stackable microcredentials and badges that are recognized by employers. Identify resources to achieve success (e.g., intensive coaching, high speed internet access, rolling course start dates, childcare, and emergency grants or loans) and pool existing or request new resources to help students complete credentials.

At the State Government Level:

- Increase funding for the Nebraska Opportunity Grant program so that more eligible students receive aid. Nebraska must reduce the gap in college enrollment and graduation rates between low-income and non-low-income high school graduates to meet its workforce needs and ensure equity.
- Adequately fund public colleges and universities to maintain affordable tuition and fees, provide adequate student support services and timely course offerings, and ensure a full range of high quality programs connected to Nebraska's statewide and regional economic needs is available.
- Key state agencies and postsecondary institutions should continue development of a credential registry, talent marketplace, and electronic learner and employment records that will allow institutions, students, employees, and employers to benefit from the skills-based economy.