

1.1.c College Continuation Rates

Increase the proportion of Nebraska high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education.

One strategic approach to increasing the total number of students who enroll at Nebraska's postsecondary institutions is to increase the state's college continuation rate, or the percentage of Nebraska high school graduates who go to college. (Since a college-going rate is the same as a college continuation rate, the two terms are used interchangeably in this report.)

Introduction: Two Measures of Nebraska's College Continuation Rates

This section of the *Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report* provides estimates of the state's college continuation rate based on two different approaches to data collection and analysis. The first approach relies on data collected every two years through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education. The second approach is an annual study that is based on data obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Education.

College Continuation Rates Based on IPEDS Data

The Coordinating Commission estimates Nebraska's college continuation rates using IPEDS data that are collected every other year in the fall. The Nebraska Department of Education provides the total number of students who graduated from Nebraska public and nonpublic high schools during the school year preceding IPEDS data collection. Given the number of high school graduates, the Commission uses IPEDS data to estimate how many of these Nebraskans continued on to college at postsecondary institutions throughout the United States.

Using available data from IPEDS, college continuation rates are estimated only for first-time freshmen who start college in the fall term of the academic year following their graduation from high school. First-time freshmen enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term are also included. First-time freshmen who wait to start college until after the fall term are not included. College continuation rates do not account for these students because the NCES does not require institutions to report when each of the students in this category graduated from high school.

Another limitation of the college continuation rates based on IPEDS data is that they cannot be calculated for any subgroups based on sex, race/ethnicity, household income, or any other demographic or socioeconomic variable. Using IPEDS data, a college continuation rate can be estimated only for the total number of students who graduated from Nebraska high schools during a given school year.

An important advantage of using IPEDS data is that the National Center for Education Statistics has consistently collected these data for a number of years, allowing the Commission to calculate and publish statewide college continuation rates for postsecondary institutions for an extended period of time. In addition, IPEDS data are currently the only source that research organizations can use to calculate a national college continuation rate and make state-to-state comparisons of college-going rates.

The latest available IPEDS data were reported by institutions for first-time freshmen who started college in fall 2024, providing a basis for estimating the college continuation rate for

students who graduated from Nebraska high schools during the 2023-2024 school year. In this section, the estimated college continuation rates are analyzed for fall 2014 through fall 2024.

College Continuation Rates Based on National Clearinghouse Data

An approach to estimating college continuation rates that overcomes major limitations of using IPEDS data is to use data available from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). The NSC is a not-for-profit organization that serves as a central repository of postsecondary student enrollment, degree, and diploma data voluntarily submitted by nearly 3,600 colleges and universities. These institutions enroll an estimated 97.5% of the college students in the United States that attend Title IV, degree-granting institutions.¹⁰

Since the beginning of 2009, the Coordinating Commission has worked in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Education to obtain and analyze data from the NSC to estimate the college continuation rates for male and female low-income and non-low-income students who have graduated from Nebraska's public high schools. Additionally, college continuation rates are analyzed by race/ethnicity, sex, and student income status. Currently, students who have graduated from Nebraska's nonpublic (or private) high schools are not included in the analysis. However, this research has the important advantage of providing estimates and comparisons of college continuation rates by race/ethnicity, sex, and student income status. Another advantage is that this research is conducted in the spring of the year following high school graduation. As a result, students who do not start college in the summer or fall immediately following high school graduation but who instead wait to begin college until the winter or spring are included in the count of the state's public high school graduates who continued on to college.

The college continuation rates for students who graduated from Nebraska's public high schools during the 2013-2014 through 2023-2024 school years are summarized at the end of this section.

¹⁰ Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, [Enrollment Coverage 2017-2024 \(September 2025\)](#), retrieved December 30, 2025.

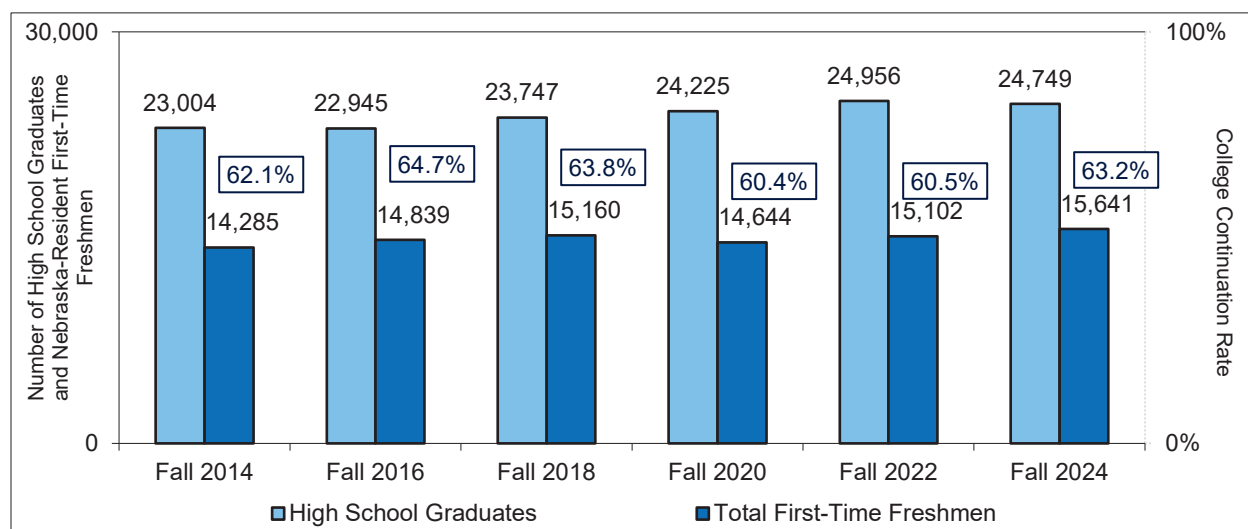
Nebraska Statewide College Continuation Rates Based on IPEDS Data

Using IPEDS data, the college continuation rate is the number of Nebraska-resident, first-time freshmen who enrolled in college in the fall term following their high school graduation, divided by the number of students who graduated from Nebraska high schools during the previous school year.

- As illustrated in [Figure 1.1.c.1](#), the estimated college continuation rate for Nebraska students who graduated in the high school class of 2024 and attended college in fall 2024 was 63.2%, an increase of 1.1 percentage points from the 62.1% continuation rate in fall 2014. Between fall 2022 and fall 2024, the college continuation rate increased 2.7 percentage points.

Figure 1.1.c.1

College Continuation Rate for Nebraska High School Graduates Who Attended Postsecondary Institutions in the Fall Term Following High School Graduation Fall 2014 through Fall 2024



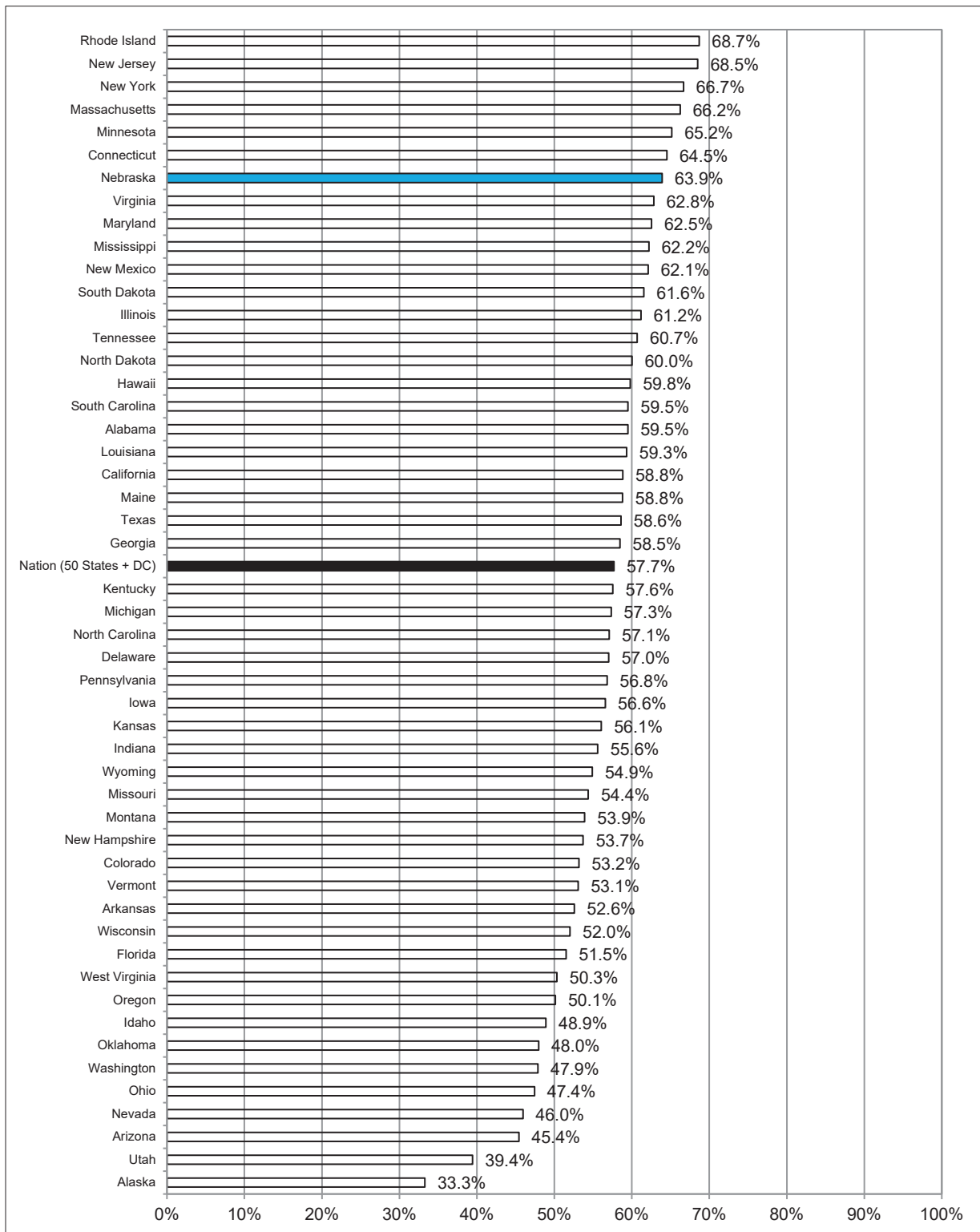
Note. Includes full-time and part-time students who attended a postsecondary institution that reports data to IPEDS. See [Table A5.1](#) in [Appendix 5](#) for supporting data. Nebraska’s Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education discovered an error with college continuation data for one out-of-state institution, Texas State Technical College (TSTC). TSTC reported 403 Nebraska first-time freshmen attended TSTC in fall 2022 within 12 months of high school graduation. Internal analysis of National Student Clearinghouse data reveals that no on-time Nebraska public high school graduates attended TSTC between June 1, 2022, and May 31, 2023. Furthermore, in the 10 years prior to 2022, TSTC did not report any Nebraska students attending within 12 months of high school graduation. Therefore, the Commission has overridden TSTC’s fall 2022 enrollments to zero Nebraska students. Data sources: Nebraska Department of Education, January 2015, December 2016, December 2018, December 2020, January 2023, and January 2025, and the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024 surveys.

State-by-State College Continuation Rates

The most recent national study of college continuation rates includes students who attended postsecondary institutions in the United States as first-time freshmen in the 2024 fall term after graduating from high school during the 2023-2024 school year. National high school graduation data for the 2023-2024 school year has not been released by the National Center for Education Statistics. In place of this information, projections of 2023-2024 high school graduates were used to calculate fall 2024 college continuation rates by state presented in [Figure 1.1.c.2](#). While the national college continuation rate data presented in this edition of the

Figure 1.1.c.2

College Continuation Rates for High School Graduates Who Attended Postsecondary Institutions in the United States in the Fall Term Following High School Graduation: Fall 2024



Note. Data includes only Title IV participating, degree-granting institutions. Data sources: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates, 2024*, and the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2024 survey. College continuation rates obtained from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), February 2026.

Progress Report is directly comparable to the data presented in the most recent editions of the *Progress Report*, it is not comparable to rates included in editions prior to 2019.

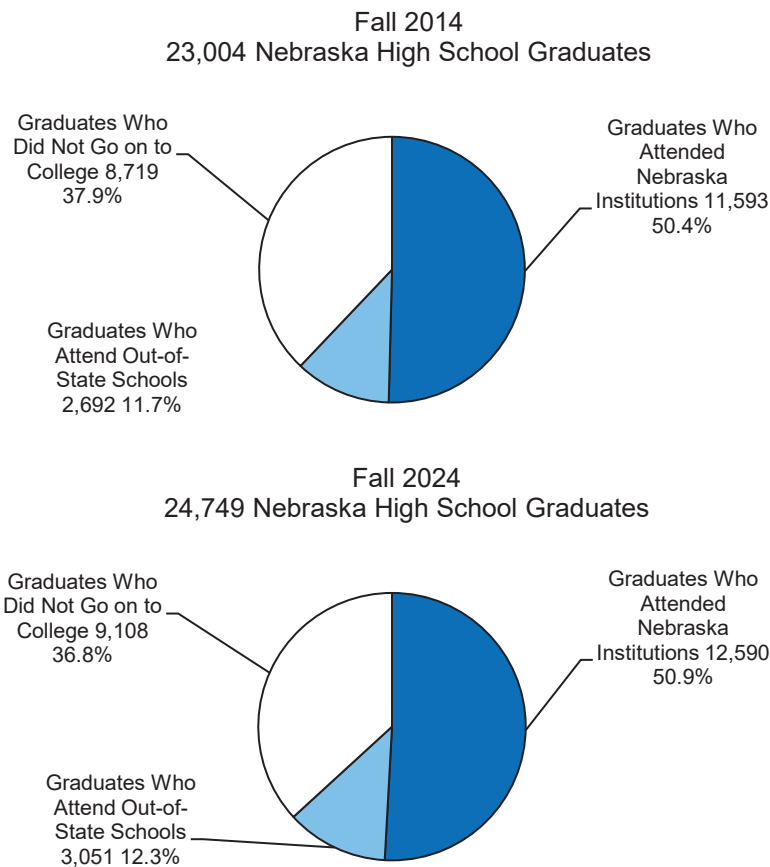
- As shown in [Figure 1.1.c.2](#), Nebraska's fall 2024 estimated college continuation rate of 63.9% was the 7th highest in the nation and 6.2 percentage points above the national rate.
- Between fall 2022 and fall 2024, the national college continuation rate increased from 55.5% to 57.7% while Nebraska's college continuation rate increased from 59.0% to 63.9%.
- The discrepancy between the college continuation rates in [Figure 1.1.c.1](#) and [Figure 1.1.c.2](#) is because they use slightly different methodologies. [Figure 1.1.c.1](#) uses *actual* high school graduation data directly from the Nebraska Department of Education and compares it to first-time freshmen counts from IPEDS. Because the National Center for Education Statistics has not released high school graduation counts by state, [Figure 1.1.c.2](#) uses *projections* of high school graduates and compares that data to first-time freshmen counts from IPEDS. Additionally, college continuation rates presented in [Figure 1.1.c.2](#) are restricted to Title IV participating, degree-granting institutions.

In-State and Out-of-State College Continuation Rates

- The statewide college continuation rate for Nebraska high school graduates can be partitioned into two rates:
 - In-state college continuation rate: the percentage of Nebraska high school graduates who attended postsecondary institutions in Nebraska in the fall term following high school graduation.
 - Out-of-state college continuation rate: the percentage of Nebraska high school graduates who continued on to college at out-of-state institutions in the fall term following high school graduation.
- As illustrated in [Figure 1.1.c.3](#), the Commission estimates Nebraska's in-state college continuation rate was 50.9% for the state's 2023-2024 high school graduates who attended college. This is an increase of 0.5 percentage points since fall 2014.
- Meanwhile, the out-of-state college continuation rate increased, from 11.7% of the high school graduating class of 2013-2014 to 12.3% of Nebraska high graduates in 2023-2024.

Figure 1.1.c.3

In-State and Out-of-State College Continuation Rates for Nebraska High School Graduates Who Attended Postsecondary Institutions and the Percentage Who Did Not Go on to College in the Fall Term Following High School Graduation Fall 2024 Compared to Fall 2014



Note. Includes full-time and part-time students who attended a postsecondary institution that reports data to IPEDS. Percentages do not always add to 100.0% due to rounding. See [Table A5.2](#) in [Appendix 5](#) for supporting data. Date sources: Nebraska Department of Education, January 2015, and January 2025, and the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 and 2024 surveys.

Percentages of Students Who Continue Their Education at Public and Private Institutions

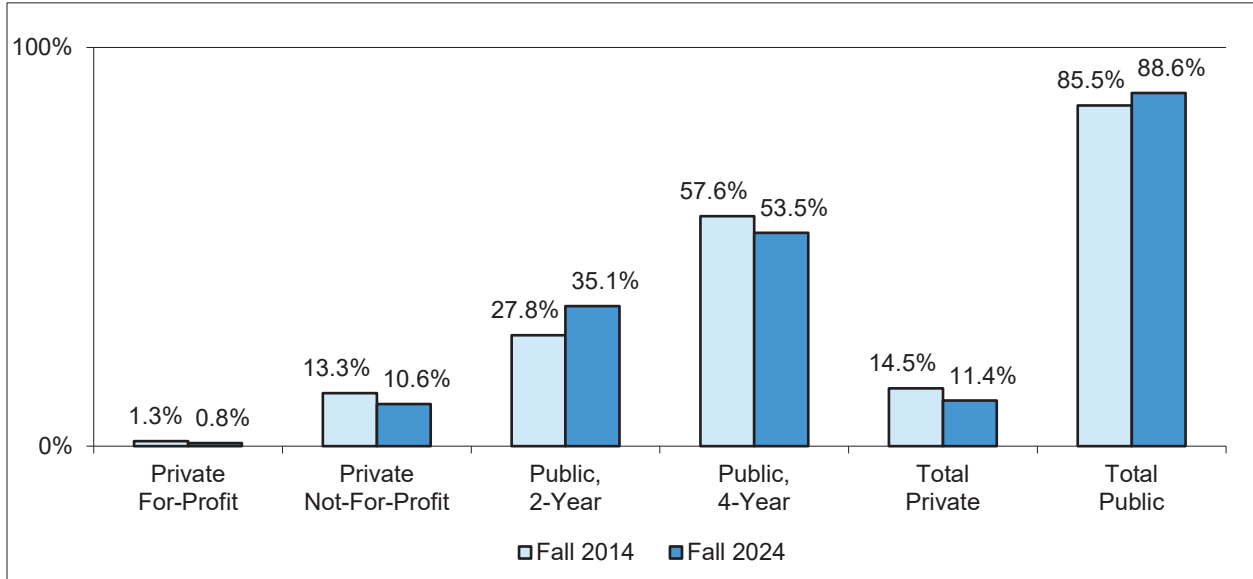
Of related interest are the types of postsecondary institutions attended by recent graduates of Nebraska’s high schools. As shown in [Part A](#) and [Part B](#) of [Figure 1.1.c.4](#), the pattern of attendance of Nebraska-resident, first-time freshmen who go to college in Nebraska in the fall term following high school graduation is different than the pattern of Nebraskans who go out of state to school their freshmen year.

- [Part A](#) of [Figure 1.1.c.4](#) shows that 88.6% of the fall 2024 first-time freshmen who stayed in state attended Nebraska’s public colleges or universities, compared to 11.4% who went to Nebraska’s private for-profit or not-for-profit institutions.
- In contrast, [Part B](#) of [Figure 1.1.c.4](#) reveals that 65.1% of the fall 2024 first-time freshmen who went out of state attended public institutions, while 34.9% went to private institutions.

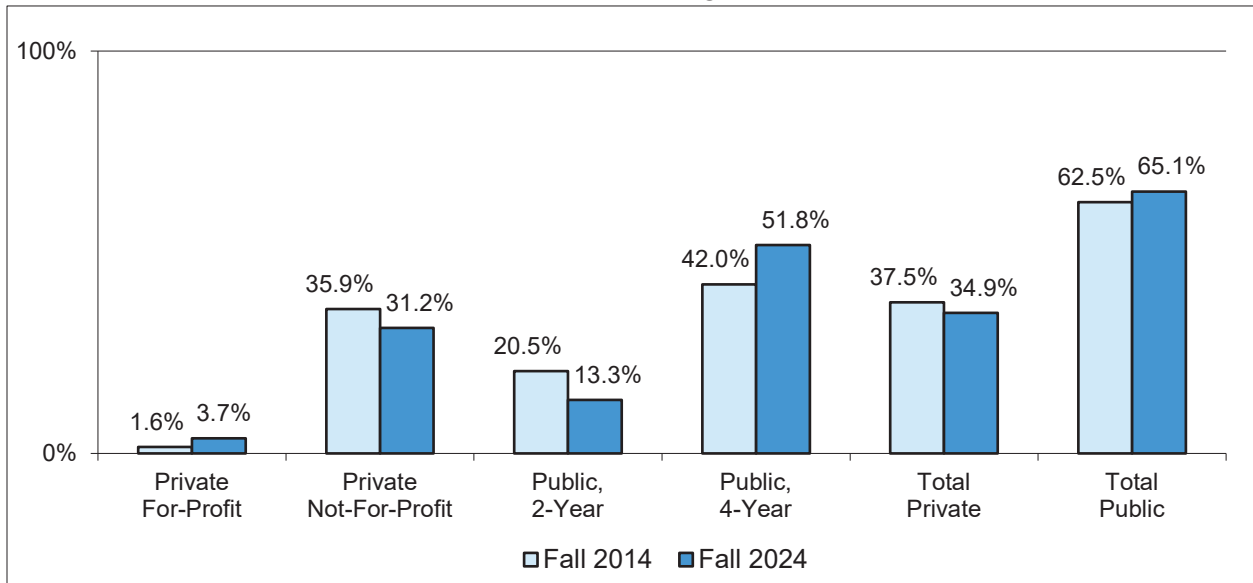
Figure 1.1.c.4

**Percentages of First-Time Freshmen with Nebraska Residency Who Attended Nebraska and Out-of-State Postsecondary Institutions in the Fall Term Following High School Graduation
Fall 2024 Compared to Fall 2014**

Part A: Nebraska-Resident Freshmen Who Attended Nebraska Institutions



Part B: Nebraska-Resident Freshmen Who Attended Out-of-State Institutions



Note. Includes full-time and part-time students who attended a postsecondary institution that reports data to IPEDS. See [Table A5.3](#) in [Appendix 5](#) for supporting data. Date source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 and 2024 surveys.

College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates by Sex, Student Income Status, and Race/Ethnicity, Based on National Student Clearinghouse Data

As discussed in the introduction to this section, the Coordinating Commission works with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to estimate the college continuation rates for students who graduated from Nebraska's public high schools.

- These estimates included only “on-time” graduates—students who graduated from high school in four years or less.
- In addition, students who graduated from Nebraska's nonpublic (private) high schools were not included in this research.

Using student records from the NDE, the Commission calculates the number of students in each graduating class that continue on to college within a year of high school graduation, based on enrollment records obtained from the Clearinghouse. Estimated college continuation rates are provided for public high school students who earned regular diplomas between 2013-2014 and 2023-2024.¹¹

Additionally, the Commission calculates college continuation rates by race/ethnicity, sex, and student income status, for all public high school students who earned regular diplomas.

Low-income students are defined as students who are approved to receive free or reduced-price school lunches (FRL).

- Effective with the 2021-2022 cohort, students are classified as low income if they are eligible for FRL *or* if they graduate from a school that participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Created by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the CEP is a meal service option for high-poverty schools that provides access to free school meals to all students. The Act was phased in for three years and became available nationwide in 2014-2015.
- In 2014-2015, less than 10 Nebraska students graduated from public high schools that participated in the CEP. By 2020-2021, 228 students graduated from schools that participated in the CEP. Participation increased dramatically for the 2021-2022 cohort, when a total of 2,964 students graduated from schools that participated in the CEP. (The overwhelming reason for this increase was the addition of Omaha's public high schools.) For the 2023-2024 cohort, a total of 3,099 students graduated from schools that participated in the CEP.¹²

Non-low-income students are students who are not approved for free or reduced-price school lunches.

The non-low-income students in this study include at least some students who lived in low-income households but who did not apply for free or reduced-price school lunches. Conversely, the low-income students in this study include at least some students who graduated from schools that participate in the CEP but were from non-low-income households.

¹¹ The Commission also estimates the college continuation rates for each of the public high schools in Nebraska that award regular high school diplomas. A data dashboard and downloadable Excel workbook are available on the Commission's website, ccpe.nebraska.gov/college-continuation-rates.

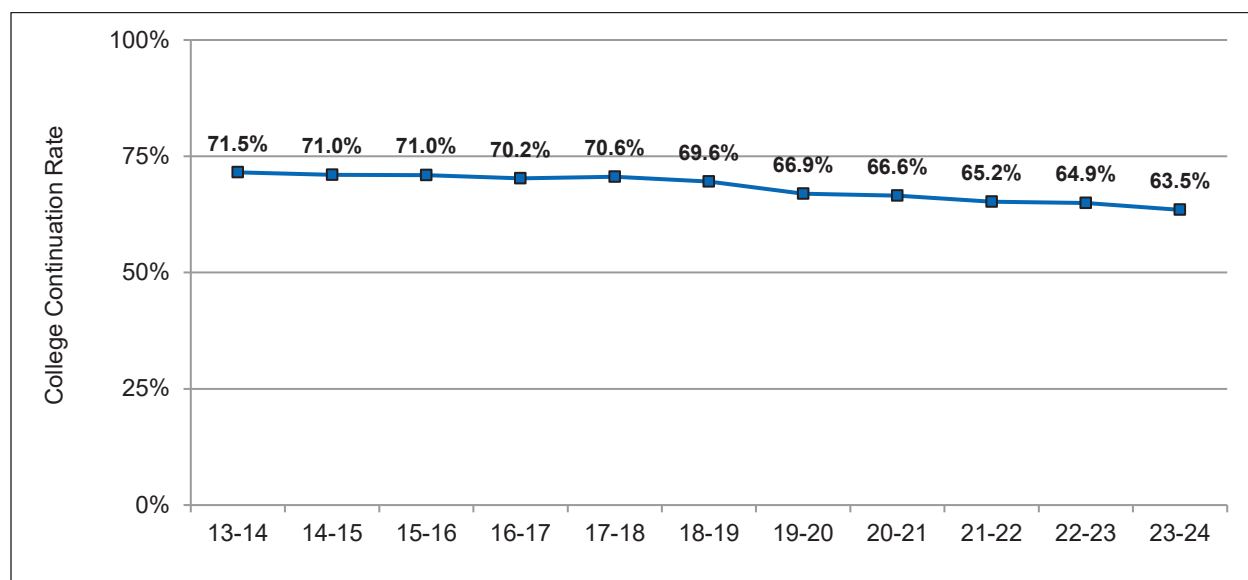
¹² For more information, visit the Nebraska Department of Education, Community Eligibility Provision website: <https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/forms-resources/national-school-lunch-program/community-eligibility-provision-cep/>

Since the Commission relies on college enrollment records from the Clearinghouse, students who continue on to college at non-NSC-reporting institutions are classified as not continuing on to college. **As a result, the college continuation rates reported in this section are underestimated to some degree.**

Statewide Public High School College Continuation Rate

- As shown in [Figure 1.1.c.5](#), the estimated statewide public high school college continuation rate was 63.5% for the graduating class of 2023-2024, down from 71.5% for the students who graduated in 2013-2014. Notably, the college continuation rate for 2023-2024 was the lowest of the reporting period. Problems with the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout, such as a significantly delayed launch and numerous technical issues, likely contributed to the low college continuation rate.
- The statewide rates reported in [Figure 1.1.c.5](#) are based on Clearinghouse data and are higher than the Nebraska statewide college continuation rates based on IPEDS data. This is primarily because students who enrolled in the spring, but not in the fall, are included in National Student Clearinghouse enrollment records.

Figure 1.1.c.5
College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates
2013-2014 through 2023-2024



Note. See [Table A5.4](#) in [Appendix 5](#) for supporting data. Data sources: National Student Clearinghouse (college continuation data); and Nebraska Department of Education (public high school graduate data).

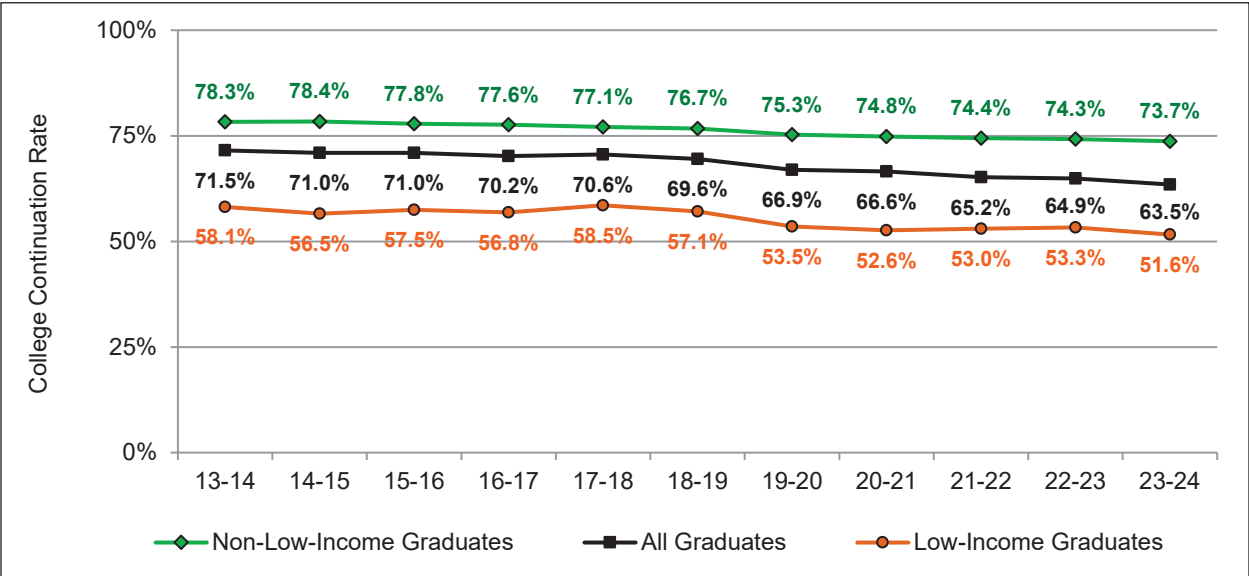
College Continuation Rates for Public High School Graduates by Income Status

- Students from low-income households accounted for 46.3% of the Nebraska public high school graduates in 2023-2024, up from 33.6% in 2013-2014.
- As shown in [Figure 1.1.c.6](#), the college continuation rate for low-income graduates was considerably lower than the college continuation rate for non-low-income graduates for the classes of 2013-2014 through 2023-2024.

- The college-going rate for low-income students decreased 6.5 percentage points, from 58.1% in 2013-2014 to 51.6% in 2023-2024. In comparison, the college continuation rate for students from non-low-income households decreased 4.6 percentage points, from 78.3% in 2013-2014 to 73.7% in 2023-2024.
- Over the last year, the college continuation rate decreased 1.7 percentage points for low-income students and 0.6 percentage points for non-low-income students.

Figure 1.1.c.6

College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates by Student Income Status: 2013-2014 through 2023-2024



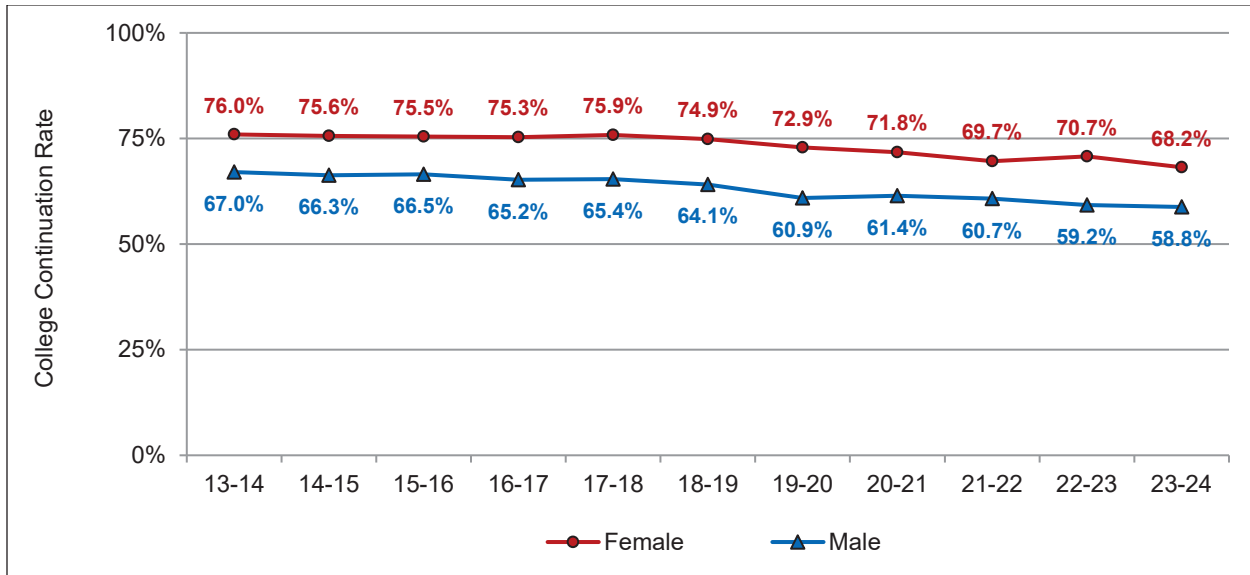
Note. See Table A5.4 in Appendix 5 for supporting data. Data sources: National Student Clearinghouse (college continuation data); and Nebraska Department of Education (public high school graduate data).

College Continuation Rates for Public High School Graduates by Sex

- Male and female students each accounted for about half of the graduates of Nebraska’s public high schools from 2013-2014 through 2023-2024.
- As shown in Figure 1.1.c.7, the college continuation rate for female students in each of these graduating classes was considerably higher than the college continuation rate for their male classmates.
- While the college-going rate for females decreased from 76.0% in 2013-2014 to 68.2% in 2023-2024 (7.8 percentage points), the college-going rate for males decreased from 67.0% in 2013-2014 to 58.8% in 2023-2024 (8.2 percentage points).
- Over the last year, the college-going rate for females decreased 2.5 percentage points while the rate for males decreased 0.4 percentage points.
- The difference between the college-going rates of male and female graduates increased from 9.0 percentage points in 2013-2014 to 9.4 percentage points in 2023-2024.

Figure 1.1.c.7

College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates
by Sex: 2013-2014 through 2023-2024



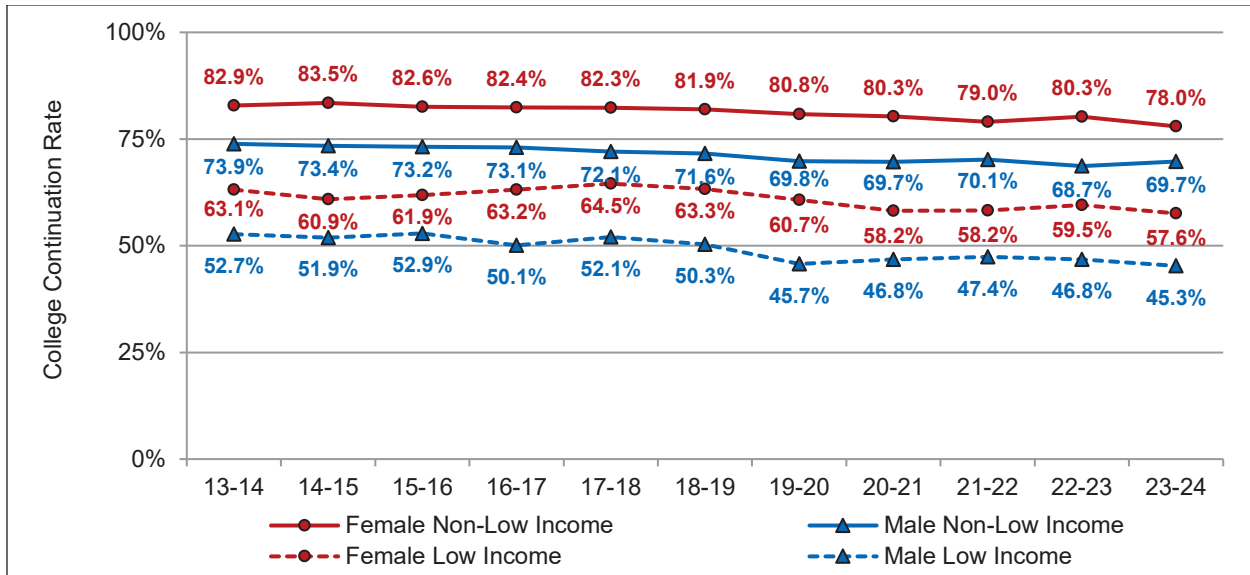
Note. See Table A5.4 in Appendix 5 for supporting data. Data sources: National Student Clearinghouse (college continuation data); and Nebraska Department of Education (public high school graduate data).

College Continuation Rates for Public High School Graduates by Sex and Income Status

- As shown in [Figure 1.1.c.8](#), the college continuation rate for female graduates was higher than the rate for male graduates among both the low-income and non-low-income students who graduated between 2013-2014 and 2023-2024.
 - Among low-income graduates in 2013-2014, 63.1% of females continued on to college, compared to 52.7% of males. Among low-income graduates in 2023-2024, 57.6% of females continued on to college, compared to only 45.3% of males.
 - Among non-low-income graduates in 2013-2014, 82.9% of females went to college, compared to 73.9% of males. Among non-low-income graduates in 2023-2024, 78.0% of females continued on to college, compared to 69.7% of males.
- Over the last year, college-going rates increased for non-low-income males but decreased for the other three subgroups.
- Directly comparing the students in the two income categories in [Figure 1.1.c.8](#) clearly shows the college continuation rates for low-income students have been considerably lower than the comparable rates for graduates from non-low-income households, regardless of sex.
- However, the lowest college continuation rates revealed by this research were for male high school graduates from low-income households.

Figure 1.1.c.8

College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates by Sex and Student Income Status: 2013-2014 through 2023-2024



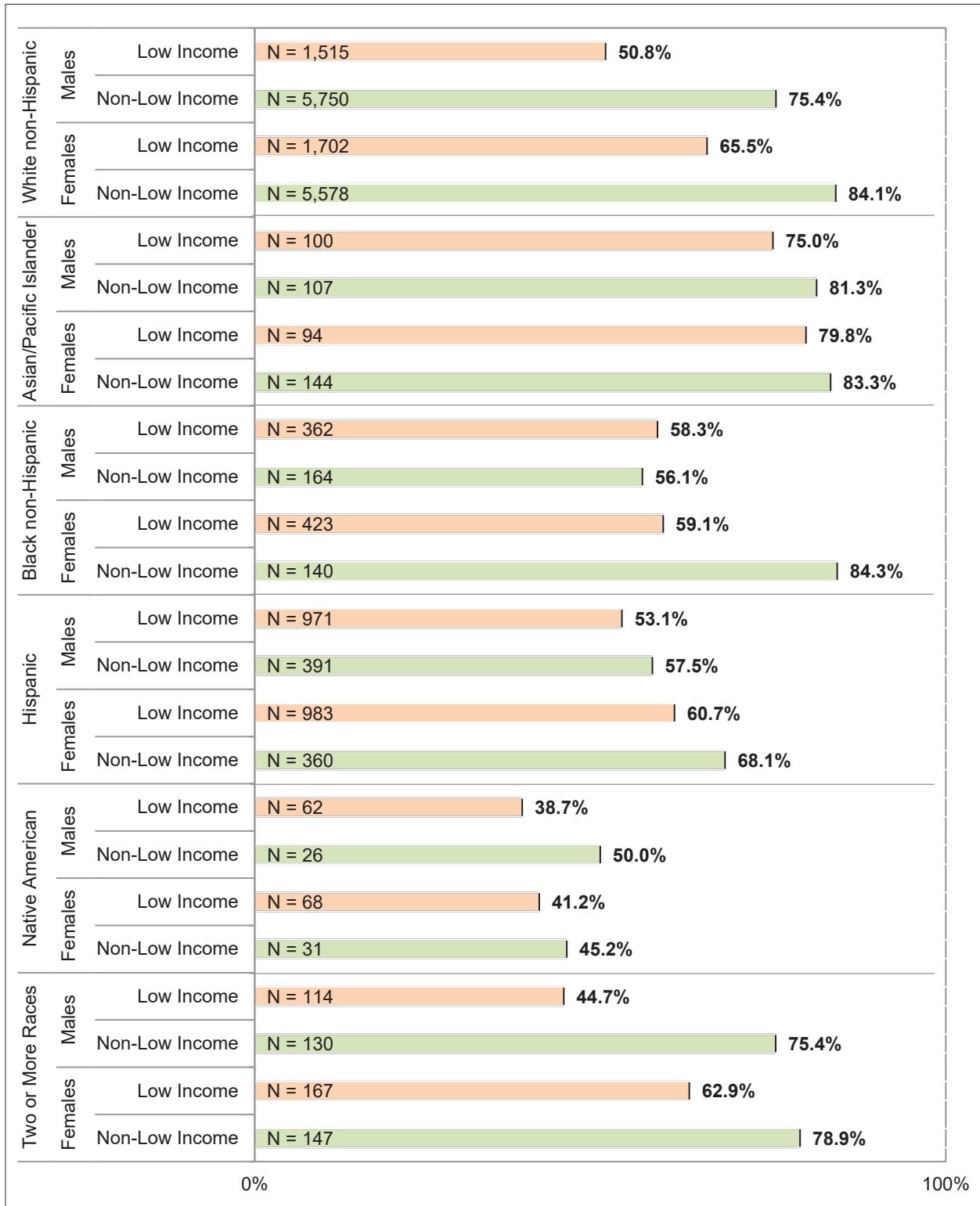
Note. See Table A5.4 in Appendix 5 for supporting data. Data sources: National Student Clearinghouse (college continuation data); and Nebraska Department of Education (public high school graduate data).

College Continuation Rates for Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, Sex, and Income Status

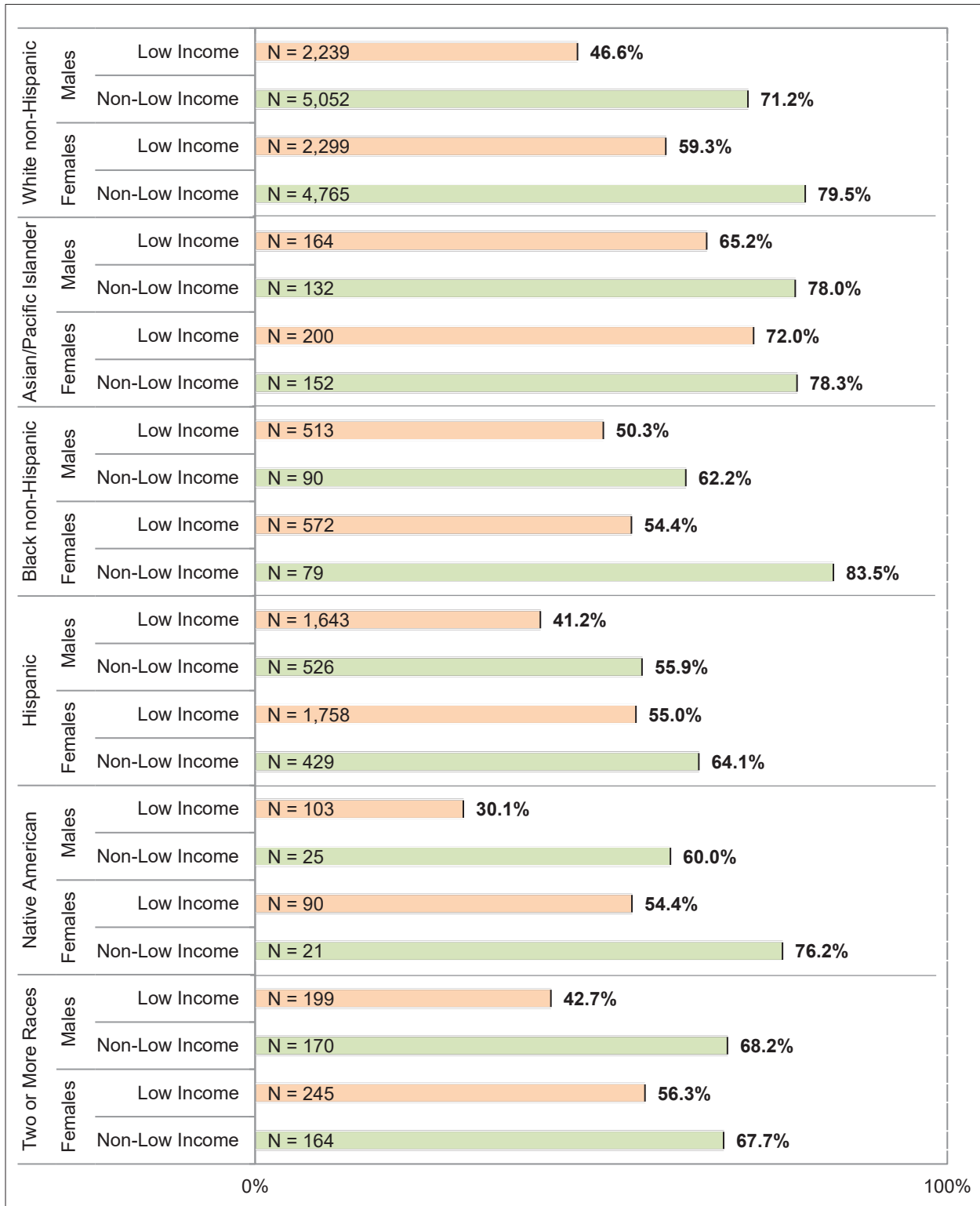
- As shown in [Figure 1.1.c.9](#), segmenting college continuation rates by race/ethnicity, sex, and student income status results in college continuation rates for 24 subgroups.
- Among graduates in 2013-2014, the highest college continuation rate among these 24 subgroups was for non-low-income, Black non-Hispanic, female graduates (84.3%). Meanwhile, the lowest college continuation rate among these 24 subgroups was for low-income, Native American, male graduates (38.7%).
- Among graduates in 2023-2024, the highest college continuation rate among these 24 subgroups was for non-low-income, Black non-Hispanic, female graduates (83.5%). Meanwhile, the lowest college continuation rate among these 24 subgroups was for low-income, Native American, male graduates (30.1%).
- In 2013-2014, college continuation rates by race/ethnicity ranged from 42.2% for Native Americans to 80.2% for Asian/Pacific Islanders. Similarly, in 2023-2024, rates ranged from 46.4% for Native Americans to 73.0% for Asian/Pacific Islanders. (See [Table A5.4](#) in [Appendix 5](#) for supporting data.)
- Between 2013-2014 and 2023-2024, the number of White non-Hispanic high school graduates decreased 1.3% while the number of minority high school graduates increased 46.0%.
- College continuation rates by sex, student income status, and race/ethnicity can be found in [Table A5.4](#) in [Appendix 5](#).

Figure 1.1.c.9
College Continuation Rates for Nebraska Public High School Graduates
by Race/Ethnicity, Sex, and Student Income Status:
2023-2024 Compared to 2013-2014

Part A: 2013-2014 Cohort



Part B: 2023-2024 Cohort



Note. N = the number of public high school graduates. See Table A5.4 in Appendix 5 for supporting data. Data sources: National Student Clearinghouse (college continuation data); and Nebraska Department of Education (public high school graduate data).