

2.3 Graduation and Persistence Rates (Based on Clearinghouse Data)

Research by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center provides important information about the completion and persistence rates of students who start college at Nebraska’s postsecondary institutions.

This section of the *Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report* summarizes the findings of a recent study of the six-year completion and persistence rates of degree-seeking, first-time freshmen who started college in Nebraska in fall 2019. The study was conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center and published in the report *Yearly Progress and Completion*. A similar report was first available in February 2013 (*Completing College*). The NSC report presents the findings of their annual study of six-year student outcomes based on a national cohort analyzed by state as well as for the United States as a whole. The report is important because it presents comparable six-year completion and persistence rates for students who started college at (a) two-year public colleges, (b) four-year public colleges and universities, and (c) four-year private nonprofit institutions.³⁴

Introduction to the National Student Clearinghouse Study

The completion and persistence rates reported in this section are based on the enrollment and completion records maintained by the NSC. An analysis of these records resulted in a national cohort of approximately 2.3 million college students who could be classified as degree-seeking, first-time freshmen in fall 2019. The enrollment and completion records of these students were then analyzed through the six-year period ending June 30, 2025.

Each student was classified by the state of the institution where the student first entered college, not by the student’s residential home state. First-time enrollment status was established by confirming that a student (1) did not have a previous enrollment record in NSC data prior to the first day of enrollment in fall 2019 (not counting enrollments before the student turned 18 years old, qualified as former dual enrollment students), and (2) did not receive any credential from any postsecondary institution prior to fall 2019, according to Clearinghouse data, unless the award date was before the student turned 18 years old. The study was not limited to recent high school graduates.

The percentage of Nebraska’s two-year and four-year institutions with Clearinghouse records varied by type of institution. The data coverage rate, based on student enrollments, for Nebraska’s four-year public institutions was 100.0%, and Nebraska’s four-year private nonprofit institutions coverage rate was 99.9%. Meanwhile, the data coverage rate for Nebraska’s two-year public colleges was 100.0%. (The Nebraska institutions included in the study are listed in Table A12.1 in Appendix 12 of this report.) The Nebraska cohort included 16,073 degree-seeking, first-time freshmen—5,233 started college at two-year public institutions, 8,083 started college at four-year public institutions, and 2,757 started at four-year private nonprofit institutions.

Degree-seeking status was defined differently for students at two-year and four-year schools. For students who started at four-year institutions, Clearinghouse records had to show that they were enrolled at least one term with an intensity of half-time or higher. For students who started at two-year institutions, they had to either be enrolled for at least one term full-time, be enrolled for at least one term three-quarter-time, or be enrolled for any two terms at least half-time before December 31, 2020.

³⁴ Students who began at multistate four-year nonprofit institutions were excluded from the results summarized in this section.

Students in the study were classified as full-time or part-time students, depending only on their starting enrollment.

The report also includes outcomes analyzed by whether or not the student took dual enrollment in high school. Dual enrollment students are defined as those students who enrolled in college courses while still in high school prior to fall 2019. Students were classified as dual enrollment if they had an enrollment or credential record prior to the fall semester before they turned 18 years old.

Additionally, student outcomes were analyzed by sex as well as age group. For age, students were divided into three groups based on the age of the students when they first entered college (20 or younger, 21 to 24, and 25 or older).

Reported Student Outcomes

The six-year student outcomes calculated and compared in the National Student Clearinghouse study are as follows:

Total completion rate: The percentage of the cohort who received a credential from any institution in the United States by the end of the defined six-year period.

Starting institution completion rate: The percentage of the cohort who received degrees or certificates from the same institution where they enrolled as first-time freshmen.

Transferred and graduated from other institution completion rates: The percentage of the cohort who received degrees or certificates from institutions anywhere in the United States to which they had transferred.

Persistence rate: The percentage of students in a cohort who did not earn a degree or other academic award but were still enrolled in college at any institution during the last year of the study period.

Percentage of students not enrolled: The percentage of the cohort who had not completed degrees or certificate programs and were not enrolled at any institution during the last year of the study period.³⁵

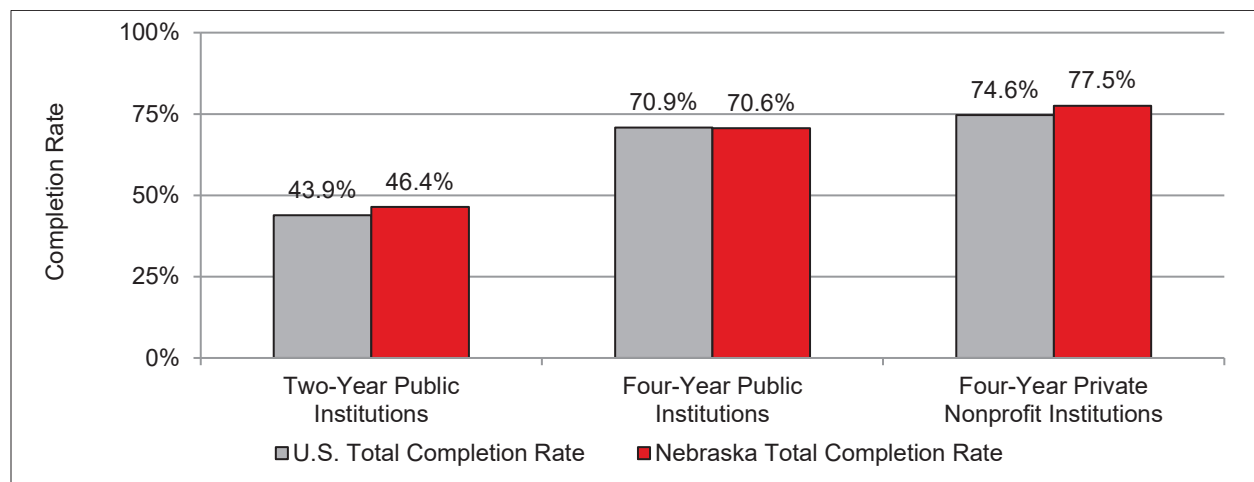
³⁵ For more information about the NSC's report, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, see <https://nscresearchcenter.org/yearly-progress-and-completion/>.

Nebraska Completion and Persistence Rates Compared to National Rates

- Figure 2.3.1 shows how the total completion rates for Nebraska institutions compared to the national rates for two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions.
- Total completion rates for degree-seeking, first-time freshmen at Nebraska’s two-year public institutions and four-year private nonprofit institutions were both higher than the comparable national rates.
- The total completion rate for Nebraska’s four-year public institutions was slightly lower than the national rate for similar institutions.

Figure 2.3.1

Six-Year Total Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)

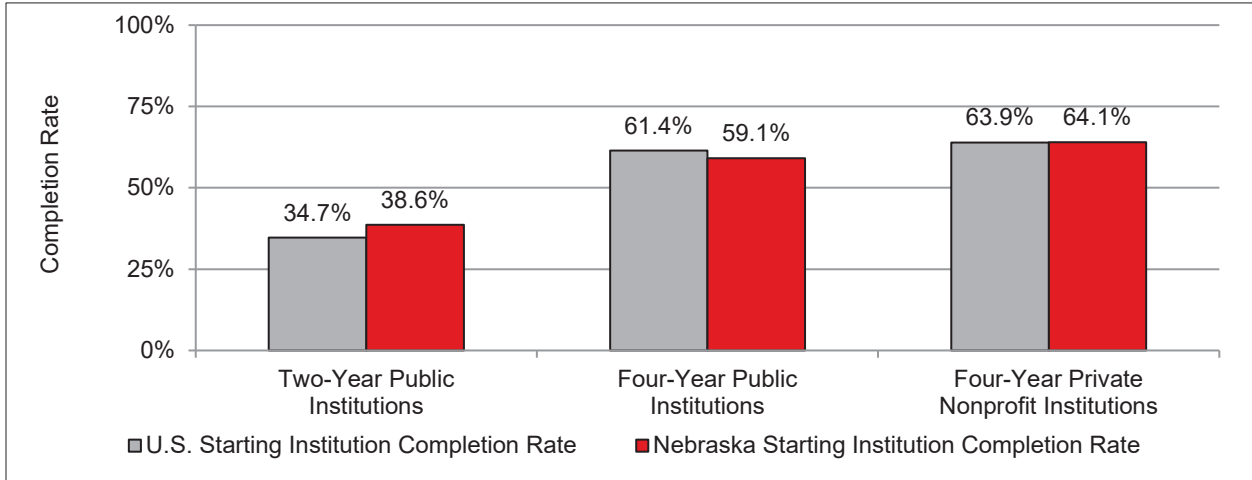


Note. See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

- Figure 2.3.2 compares the U.S. and Nebraska completion rates for students who received degrees or certificates from the same institutions where they initially enrolled as first-time freshmen.
- The completion rates for Nebraska’s two-year public institutions and four-year private nonprofit institutions were higher than the comparable national rates. Nebraska’s completion rate for four-year public institutions was lower than the corresponding national rates.

Figure 2.3.2

Six-Year Starting Institution Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)

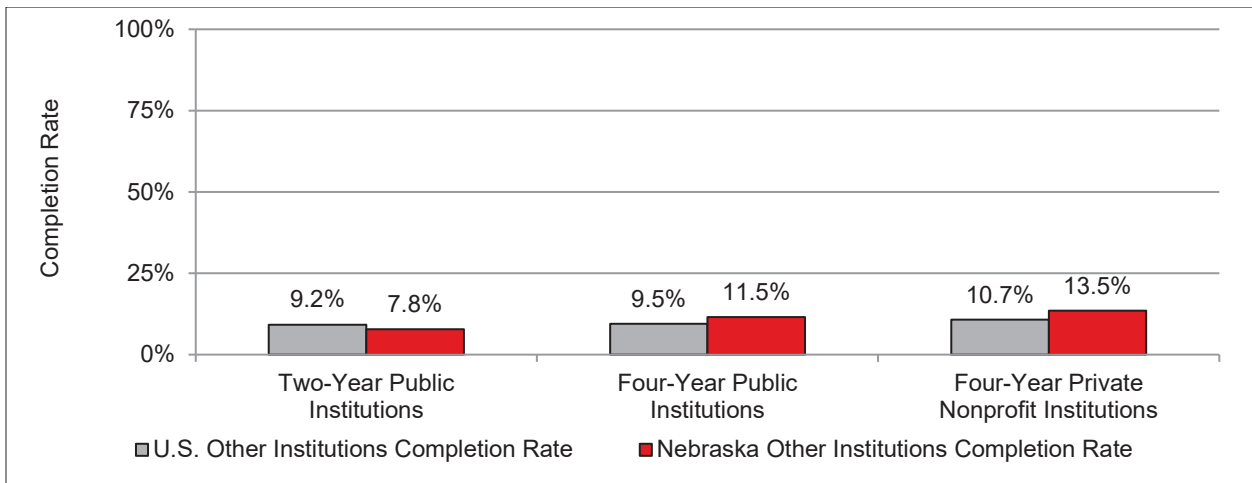


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

- As shown in Figure 2.3.3, a notable percentage of freshmen started college at one institution and then transferred to another school where they completed a program of study.
- Approximately 8% to 14% of the first-time students at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions graduated from two-year or four-year schools to which they had transferred.
- Nebraska’s completion rates were higher than the comparable national rates for four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions.

Figure 2.3.3

Six-Year “Other Institutions” Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)

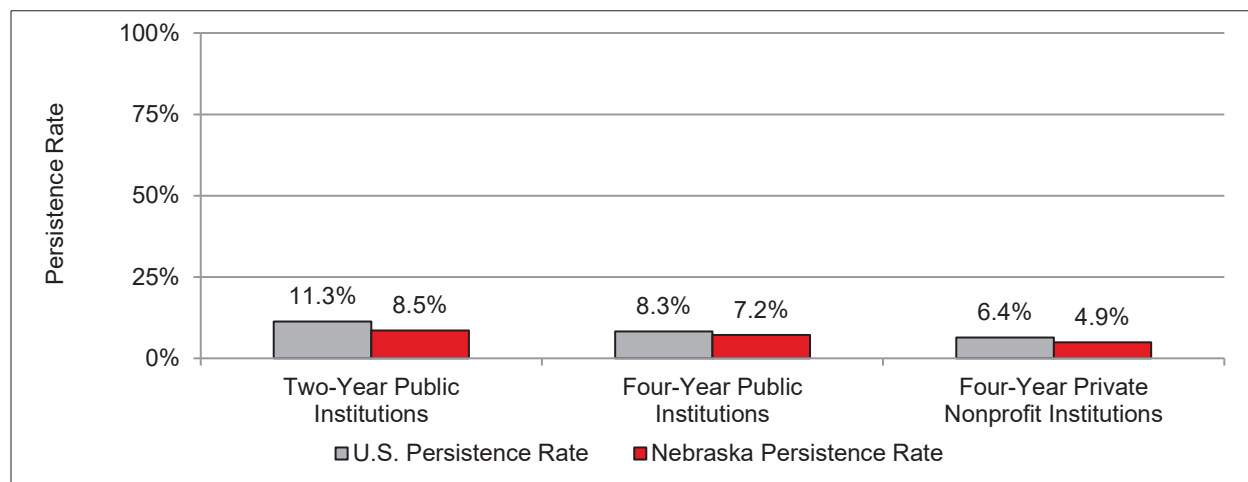


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.4](#), 5% to 9% of the students who started college at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions had not completed a degree or certificate program and were still enrolled at these or other institutions during the last year of the study period.
- Nebraska’s persistence rates for two-year and four-year public institutions and four-year private nonprofit institutions were lower than the national persistence rate for similar institutions.

Figure 2.3.4

Six-Year Persistence Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)



Note. See [Table A12.2](#) in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Enrollment Status

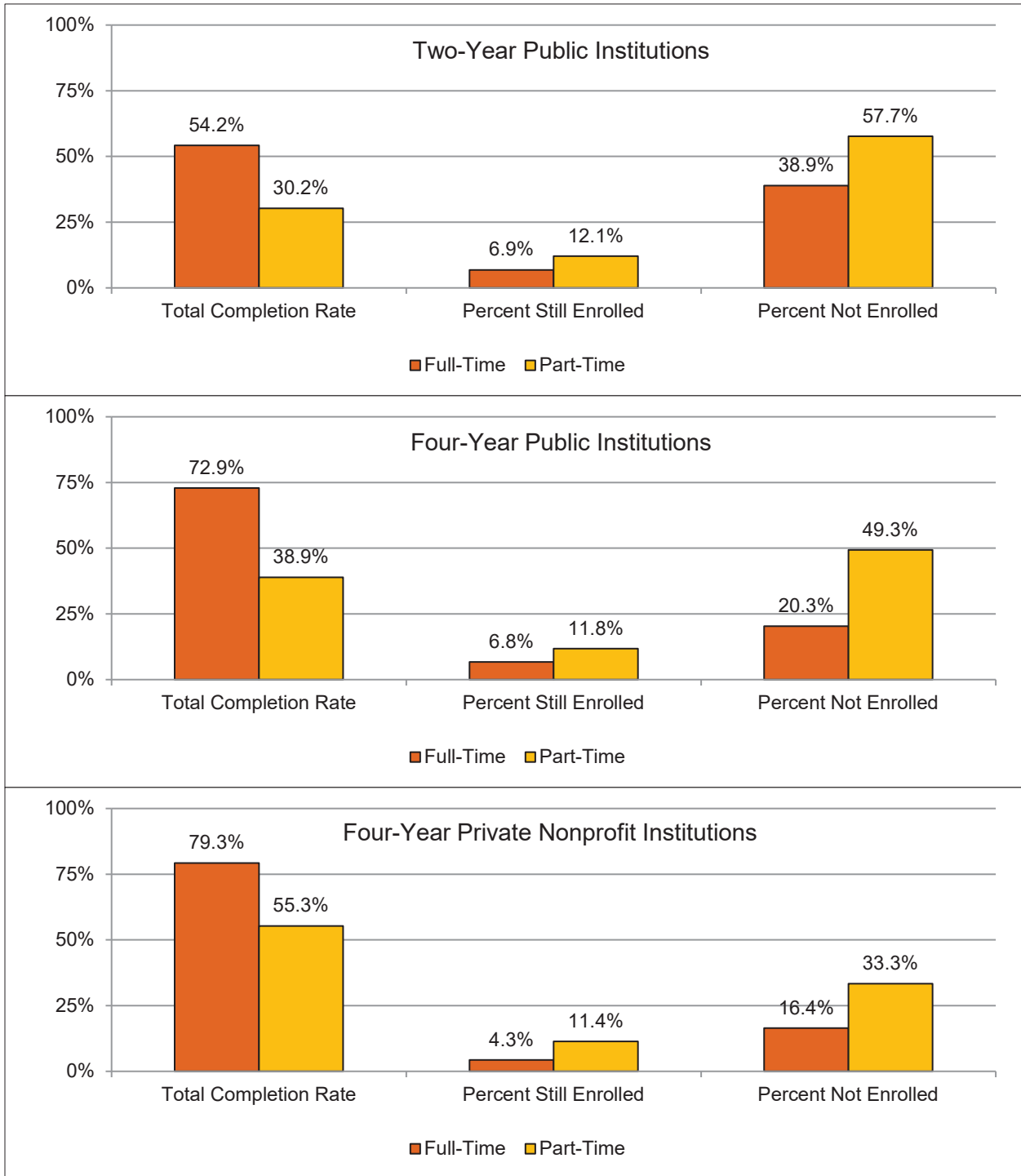
The findings of the National Student Clearinghouse study confirm that the completion rates for students who start college full-time are significantly higher than the students who start college part-time. In addition, this study confirms that part-time students are less likely to persist in their studies and more likely to drop out of college than full-time students.

Student Outcomes Compared Within Each Sector

- [Figure 2.3.5](#) shows that students who started part-time had total completion rates that were significantly lower than the completion rates for students who started full-time. For example, at the two-year public institutions, 54.2% of students who started full-time graduated within six years compared to 30.2% of students who started part-time.
- The six-year persistence rates (i.e., the percentage of students who had not completed a degree or certificate program but were still enrolled) for students who started full-time were lower than the persistence rates for students who started part-time. At the four-year public institutions, 6.8% of students who started full-time were still enrolled at six years compared to 11.8% of students who started part-time.
- The percentage of students who were not enrolled six years after they started college was significantly higher for students that started part-time compared to students that started full-time. At the four-year private nonprofit institutions, 33.3% of students who started part-time were no longer enrolled at six years compared to 16.4% of students who started full-time.

Figure 2.3.5

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Student Enrollment Status for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)



Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Dual Enrollment

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.6](#), students who took dual enrollment in high school were more likely to complete degrees or certificate programs than students who did not take dual enrollment in high school.
- While persistence rates were slightly higher for students who did not take dual enrollment, those students were much less likely to still be enrolled in college at the end of the six-year period.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Sex

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.7](#), males who started at two-year public institutions were slightly more likely than females to have completed degrees or certificate programs. However, females who started at four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions were more likely than males to have graduated within six years.
- Across all sectors, the percentages of female students who left college before degree completion were lower than the percentages of male students who dropped out of college. However, at the four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions, the persistence rates of students who did not earn a degree or certificate within six years were similar for males and females.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Age Group

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.8](#), students who started college at two-year public institutions when they were age 20 or younger were more likely to complete degrees or certificate programs than students who didn't start college until they were over the age of 20.

Conclusion

All of the six-year student outcomes for the United States as a whole and for Nebraska's public and private nonprofit institutions are presented in [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#). When the national percentages are compared to Nebraska's percentages, Nebraska's outcomes are higher, lower, or about the same as the comparable national rates, depending on the type of institution and the specific student enrollment or age group that was analyzed.

This study clearly shows that students who took dual enrollment while in high school, start college earlier, and start college full-time are much more likely to earn degrees and certificates. While this study is not without limitations, it does provide reasonable estimates of the six-year completion and persistence rates for Nebraska's two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions, compared to national rates.

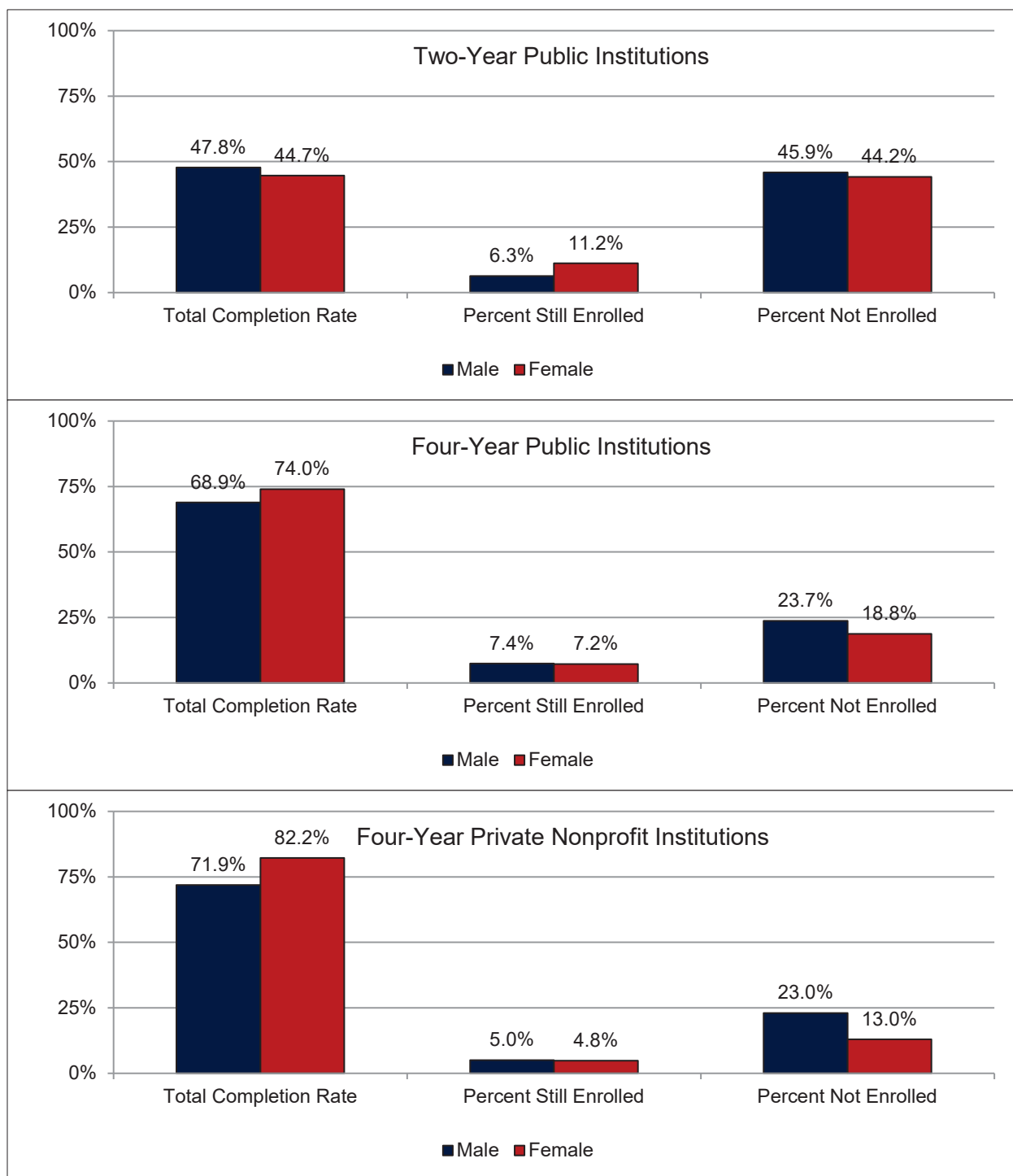
Figure 2.3.6
Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Dual Enrollment
for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)



Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

Figure 2.3.7

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Sex for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)



Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.

Figure 2.3.8
Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Age Group
for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2019)



Note. Data is masked if cell counts are 10 or fewer or when fewer than three institutions in a state had first-time starters. See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Yearly Progress and Completion*, published December 2025.